

MEGAN LANEY of Westport, CT, visited Education and Hope during the summer between high school and college. These are her reflections from August 2009.

Two weeks ago, Father Dave, his niece Keelyn, Gene and Kathy Coyne, Barbara Holdridge, and I traveled down to Guatemala to visit Julie Coyne and see Education and Hope in action. And I think I can speak for all of us when I say that it was a truly amazing experience.

The poverty we witnessed on the bus ride from Guatemala City to Xela was astounding. We saw little children walking for miles with immensely heavy loads on their backs, houses that looked uninhabitable, and people with tired faces full of suffering. And then we reached Education and Hope. It was like a breath of fresh air, the light at the end of the tunnel.

The two buildings Julie uses — the kitchen/ lunchroom and the school— are like a sanctuary for the kids. The buildings are spacious, airy, and have all the amenities these kids could wish for. Not only do they have access to a computer lab filled with Macs, but they also get a great lunch and snack everyday.

As for the kids themselves, they were absolute angels. They were extremely respectful and welcomed us with open arms and open hearts. And, I never saw a single kid cry the entire time I was down there. As a matter of fact, even though they have nothing, these were some of the happiest kids I have ever seen. They made their own fun, whether it was turning a particularly steep rock into a makeshift slide, or using a priest as a target in dodgeball. It was definitely an eye-opener for me, being someone who has everything in the world, yet often complains of boredom or asks for more.

Overall, if there was one thing I got out of this trip, it was that Julie is working miracles down there. Through all her dedicated work with these kids, she has given them something they never would have had otherwise—a future, a chance at a better life. If you ever get the chance to go down there, do, because it truly is a life-changing experience.