

For 10 days during Spring Break, a group of 19 students from Mark R. Isfeld traveled to Nicaragua to try out their Spanish skills, develop their cultural awareness, and be involved in community service activities.

Based in Jiquilillo, a small fishing community on the pacific north coast, each day saw students involved in local projects. After an early morning ecological conservation lesson, we released turtles in Padre Ramos estuary, one of the largest mangrove estuaries of Central America. We further explored this unique site in early morning kayak trips, and supported its preservation through a beach clean up.

On a number of occasions Isfeld students assisted the teacher at two local English Institutes where young Nicaraguan students, and sometimes their parents, attend additional language lessons after school. Physical labour was also appreciated; one morning was spent digging garden beds and building pathways at a farm linked to an orphanage where we also shared lunch and played games with the ten young girls.

A very powerful experience was the visit to the community of El Limonal. What was to be a temporary shelter after Hurrigan Mitch has become a permanent settlement of about 1100 people. Here families, including mothers and young children, work full time collecting recycleable objects from the dump. The Isfeld students sponsored a lunch which they prepared, cooked and served to 300 children.

At each site they visited, students played with kids who were delighted at the variety of games, activities and toys the students shared. Along with personal interaction, the Isfeld students raised nearly \$5,000 to contribute to projects, the most significant being the partial sponsorship of a house in a newly developed community.

It was an eye-opening experience on many levels; the heat, the simple good food, the harsh poverty and the joyful welcome we received at every site all made an impact. As one student said, "Everything we do here is changing us a little."