



International Aid Serving Kids

“A Change of Perspective”

By Lisa Palmer, RN

I lived in Brazil for a year and had thought that my experience would have prepared me for our ten day humanitarian trip to the Dominican Republic. Sure, I expected the impoverished living conditions to dishearten me—and they did—but it was the sight of rotted-out teeth and hungry, malnourished children sifting through trash that broke my heart.



As the first day of clinic came to a close, I had two three-year old cousins in my supply room with me. As I turned around I saw them picking through my garbage. Obviously they were hungry. My heart shattered for the first of many times on this trip. It was especially sad considering just ten minutes earlier I had given each of them a ball to play with, and the cousins had looked at the balls as though they were foreign objects and set them on the floor to be ignored. So even age three garbage is more valuable than toys. We gave them two granola bars and then gave their father vitamins and clothing for the boys. We also gathered information so further help could be provided.

As the third day was winding down many of the people who had been in line for five to six hours were finally seen by the doctor. As one elderly gentleman and his granddaughter talked with the triage nurse, she thanked him for his patience. He said it was nothing, considering what Jesus had suffered for our sins. I thought of this very grateful man sitting in the heat and on metal chairs, with nothing to eat for hours on end, and his perspective was sobering. Leave me for 20-30 minutes in an air-conditioned doctor's office and I'm already frustrated. This man's statement changed my perspective on patience and service. I hope the change is permanent.

Later that night I was journaling my experiences and wondered if what I was doing was making a difference. It's as if there is so much need yet only so much you can give. After all, what I was doing would equal a drop of water in the ocean of the worlds' needs. One drop of water. What's the use? Then it hit me: it matters to this man. As the Starfish poem says, what's a cup of water compared to the vastness of the ocean? But a cup of water to a parched and withering person is life saving; it's quenching; it's life giving.

Although I knew very little Spanish, I would attempt to talk with each child. Most of the time they couldn't understand me because of my funny accent. Anytime I said their name a huge smile would appear on their face, once again due to my accent. That was the one word they always understood, their own name.

Yes, we can each make a difference! I have no doubt now. Teaching, healing, loving, giving...how can we not make a difference? And if only one life rests easier because of God working through me, then that is enough, because that one life affects so many other lives that the ripple effect is long lasting. That is the beauty of serving with love.

My perspective will forever be changed, my heart forever softened, and my love forever deeper thanks to IASK, my fellow team members, and of course the wonderful people of Dominican Republic.