

Service Trip to Mexico Impacts Lives of Students and Local Families

Santa Barbara High MAD Academy builds houses for people in Valle Redondo



Language differences no barrier to forming of friendships between MAD Academy students and families in Mexico. (Elise Power, freshman student at MAD)

By Hayden Randolph and Lola Crane-Flores for MAD Academy | June 15, 2018 | 9:00 a.m.

The Multimedia Arts and Design Academy (MAD) from Santa Barbara High School made its 11th annual community service trip to Valle Redondo, Mexico, in April.

MAD students, staff and parents spent five days building seven houses in only three building days and permanently impacting the lives of several families.

This trip was an eye-opening experience in many ways. Participating students gained an

appreciation for basic things like clean water, a shower, a flushing toilet and, most importantly, a roof to live under. It was amazing to see how happy the families were despite having so little.

Many of the families in Valle Redondo live on about \$80 a week and only have time to focus on surviving.

"I realized how happy people can be with having so little. This trip also allowed me to bond with people that I never would've known without going on this trip," said Paige Doughty a freshman MAD student.

Each day the students, teachers, and parent volunteers took the factory buses to seven different worksites and spent nine hours building the house.

Students learned how to hand-mix and pour the cement slab, construct walls, tar the roof, and stucco the sides of the house. They also were able to connect with the families who would live in the houses and see the sacrifices they made on a daily basis.

Some students who speak Spanish were able to communicate with the families and get to know the children. Non-Spanish speakers still were able to work around the language barrier and connect with the kids and families in other ways.

Coming back from the worksite, students were able to clean off using bucket showers and then had time to bond with one another.

Every night everyone would gather around the campfire and say something or someone group members were grateful for or gave a shout-out to someone they were particularly proud of that day.

Dan Williams and Pablo Sweeney, the MAD Academy staff, helped make the trip possible by ensuring everything ran smoothly and worked on building the houses themselves.

Williams and Sweeney also constantly reminded everyone to look at things in a new perspective and realize the impact the group was making on these families lives.

"It was an eye opening experience that let me see how valuable life is," said Eddie Hernandez, a MAD sophomore.

Breakfast, lunch and dinner were all provided by local families. AMOR, a nonprofit that specializes in arranging service trips around the world to build houses for underprivileged and less fortunate families, organized the building projects and guided the groups through the process of building the house by supplying the materials and tools needed to construct the seven houses.

Each day was a challenge, but handing the house keys to the family and getting to see the end result was rewarding for each individual.

The families of Valle Redondo were not the only ones who benefited and were impacted from this experience. This experience gave a new perspective of the MAD students and their daily lives.

The Multimedia Arts and Design Academy is a distinctive educational community within Santa

Barbara High School. They prepare our students for college and the workplace by providing both traditional and interdisciplinary project-based learning in the evolving field of media arts and technology.

MAD's collaborative environment emphasizes critical thinking, creativity, meaningful community service and the development of leadership skills. Academic excellence is pursued in smaller classes with state of the art equipment.

We value integrity, teamwork and a passion for learning that prepares our diverse student body to succeed in the global community.

"Going to Mexico every year makes me realize the privileges I have back home, causing me to take advantage of them and work harder at everything I do," Oliver Montgomery, a junior in the MAD Academy.

— *Hayden Randolph for MAD Academy.*

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