



# The SSP Report



## Lessons from Latin America

By Laureen Jenson, former youth participant & staff member

## Fall 2011

**D**uring June of this year, I took part in SSP's inaugural Study-and-Serve program in Guatemala. It was a journey to grow in faith through our good works and trust in each other, and true to the name of the program, I learned a lot along the way.



I practiced Spanish with people who were always patient and helpful, which made me reflect on how those struggling with English in the US are treated.

---

**"I am grateful for all that I learned with my team, and for the chance to grow in faith with my new Central American brothers and sisters in Christ."**

---

I washed my clothes by hand in a pila (great big concrete sink). I learned the difference between fair trade and free trade, and that local actions can sometimes have global consequences.

I worked for local foremen who, despite speaking a foreign language, were clearer and more caring than some English speakers I have worked with.

I learned that from 1960-1996, a civil war raged in Guatemala. A country in my hemisphere was at war during the first decade of my life and I had no idea. In Fatima and Santa Anita, my group and I came face to face with the reality of history as we met people who fought in the war, and people who were driven from their homes by the escalating violence.

I was shown the meaning of true generosity when a woman named Giorgina invited Patrick and me into her home. It was the size of my apartment, and a good amount of space was taken up by a loom she used to weave cortes, traditional Mayan skirts. Taped to the cinder-block wall were the prayer of Saint Francis and

pictures of her sister in Los Angeles. In that humble place, she served us rich vegetable soup and an abundance of fresh tortillas.

We learned the difference between heritage and home when we met Gio. Though born in Guatemala, he had lived as an undocumented immigrant in the US since childhood. He was deported in his early 20s to Guatemala City, a place he'd never been, with only the clothes on his back. He made the best of his situation and now teaches music and poetry in Xela, encouraging kids to achieve their dreams while staying in Guatemala.

I learned a lot about myself and the world around me. But perhaps most importantly, I learned that SSP isn't just for high school youth. My experience of becoming a volunteer again in this exciting new opportunity made it a rewarding experience. Though it was a challenge to overcome the trepidation I felt in taking such a big step outside my comfort zone, I am grateful for all that I learned with my team, and for the chance to grow in faith with my new Central American brothers and sisters in Christ.



▲ The entire Study-and-Serve group with Lake Atitlán in the background. Laureen is second from the right in the first row.

## Another Successful Year

By Rick Eaton, Executive Director

SSP has completed another successful year of service on Indian Reservations, in South Los Angeles, in Central American and – with our newest Weekend of Service Program – in Sacramento. As I look back on the year, I have many blessings to be thankful for! This year, well over 2,000 individuals took part in our programs. During the summer, we completed 138 repair projects and built six houses in Honduras.

There are lots of things that come together to make this possible – our committed Board of Directors, donors, adult volunteers, and local church leaders. But honestly, the most important ingredient is the energy, optimism and faith of SSP's youth and young adults. It is our volunteers and summer staff – alive with God's spirit, working and praying together, solving problems, creating relationships, completing the work projects – that have made SSP the powerful force that it is in the lives of so many. And for that, I know that we are all very thankful.

## Endowment News: Investing in Youth, Young Adults and the Future

The Sierra Service Project Endowment is a long-term, strategic initiative to create a permanent \$1 million fund. SSP has been around for nearly 40 years, and the endowment is a commitment to being around for another 40! We are currently in the "lead donor" phase of our funding campaign. Despite the poor economy, the initial response has been extremely positive. Please contact Rick Eaton if you are interested in learning more about the SSP Endowment.



▲ A youth installs a bolt on the Table Bluff Reservation in Northern California.

▲ ▲ Youth pour concrete for new stairs at the Teec Nos Pos Chapter House in Northeast Arizona.

## 2012 Project Sites



Coarsegold and McDermitt are the Junior High sites this upcoming summer.

## Register Now for the 2012 Summer

Download registration materials on our website:

[www.sierraserviceproject.org](http://www.sierraserviceproject.org)



▲ Youth install a new hardwood floor at the Aspire Alexander Twilight College Preparatory Academy in Sacramento.

## Weekend of Service

SSP successfully piloted a new Weekend of Service program in Sacramento, California in early 2011. SSP will host six weekend sessions this fall and winter in Sacramento. Last winter 100 youth and adult counselors from all over California participated in the pilot project, learning and serving in the historic Oak Park neighborhood. Junior and Senior High youth painted, repaired floors and walls, installed a drainage system and built raised edible garden beds at local nonprofits and schools. SSP is excited to pilot a similar Weekend of Service program in Portland, Oregon this fall.



▲ A Senior High work team with framework for a new bathroom on the Yurok Reservation in Northern California.

▶ A Junior High youth drills a post that will be part of a porch in Susanville, California.

▼ Junior High work team with an almost-completed set of stairs on the Chukchansi Rancheria in Coarsegold, California.



▼ A Senior High work team in Fort Hall, Idaho with a completed wood shed.

▼ ▼ Senior High youth in Fort Hall, Idaho measure twice.

▼ ▼ ▼ A family with their new stairs on the Yurok Reservation in Northern California.



▲ A youth installs a gate on the Table Bluff Rancheria in Northern California.

▼ A group in Teec Nos Pos participate in 'Just Move It', a national campaign to promote physical activity for American Indians, in Arizona.

▼ ▼ Youth from Fort Hall, Idaho lead SSP youth and counselors in drumming.



## Snapshots of 2011

See more photos on our website or the Sierra Service Project facebook group.

▼ A Senior High youth hammers joists to the frame of a new porch on the Table Bluff Rancheria in Northern California.





▲ A Junior and Senior High group from the Southwest United Church of Christ Conference, on the left, helped build a hay barn at Compton Junior Posse (CJP) during a Winter Break session in South Los Angeles.

CJP partners youth with horses to provide positive alternatives and teaches them discipline and responsibility. SSP also built six tack sheds at CJP in the past year.

## South Los Angeles

494 volunteers participated in LA with SSP this year.



▲ Each week during the summer SSP visited the Los Angeles River which served as a metaphor for the "River of Life".



▲ A youth cleans up a sidewalk with the South Los Angeles Beautification Team.

▲ ▲ Tien Dang, a young adult from the Newman Center at the University of California, Davis, repairs a floor at MYCLUB, an afterschool center, during an Alternative Winter Break Session.



▲ For the first time, SSP took on painting a house that had lead paint.

## Alternative Winter and Spring Break Sessions

This year SSP had a record number of Alternative Winter and Spring Break participants ranging from Junior High to college students. Two winter break and four spring break sessions took place with 216 volunteers in total.

## Repair Work in South Los Angeles

The work this year included building two wheelchair ramps, building an awning and raised garden beds at Vermont Square Community Garden, painting Pico Rivera United Methodist Church, painting a mural at the St. Peter Claver Center, repairing flooring, and building a freestanding shed.

## SSP Builds Six Houses in Honduras

Honduras is a country where the majority of people live in dire poverty, without steady income, adequate housing, or a secure source of food. Since 2003, SSP has sent teams of youth and young adults to work and live among Honduras' poor, getting a glimpse into the reality of their lives and working with them to improve their living conditions. The houses that SSP builds are modest by US standards – cinder block, tin roof, concrete floor, three small rooms and a mere 600 square feet of living space. Incredibly, it costs us only \$5,000 to build one of these houses. But when a house like this replaces a one-room wooden shack or allows a family to move out of a tiny house they shared with another family, the impact on children's health and well-being can be enormous. Thanks to the work of our young volunteers, local Honduran volunteers and generous donors, the conditions of nearly 40 families in Honduras have been dramatically improved since 2003.



▲ A youth cuts rebar in Honduras.

▲ ▲ Youth build walls in Honduras.

▲ ▲ ▲ Lizeth Hernandez, with one of the families that will live in a home that was built in Honduras in 2011.

## Central American Programs

### Study-And-Serve in Guatemala

This year SSP will again send a small team of mature youth and young adults to learn and serve in Guatemala. Last year's team had a powerful experience learning, serving and traveling in this fascinating country.

Visit our website for our 2012 Central American program dates and registration information.

[www.sierraserviceproject.org](http://www.sierraserviceproject.org)

## How You Can Support SSP

### Support SSP financially:

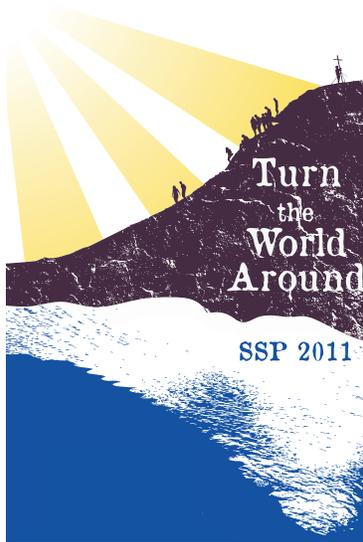
- Donate online on our website.
- Donate with the enclosed envelope by mail.
- Ask your employer to match your donation or to donate products.

### In addition to your financial support, there are other ways that you can assist Sierra Service Project:

- Donate a vehicle. If you have a good-quality used vehicle that you no longer need, please consider donating it to SSP. We will put it to work in our fleet, saving us the cost of renting vehicles each summer.
- Donate tools. SSP always needs replacement power and hand tools.
- Assist in raising money or obtaining in-kind donations.
- Contact other churches on behalf of SSP.
- Volunteer in our Sacramento office.

## Thank you

We wish to offer a huge thank you to all of the young people, adult counselors, youth leaders, parents, and supporters who made the summer of 2011 possible.



▲ Work team in Teec Nos Pos, Arizona with the completed outhouse they helped build.

## The SSP Report

A publication by Sierra Service Project  
PO Box 992 | Carmichael, CA 95609  
Phone: (916) 488-6441 | Fax: (916) 484-0917

For more information email:  
[info@sierraserviceproject.org](mailto:info@sierraserviceproject.org) or visit:  
[www.sierraserviceproject.org](http://www.sierraserviceproject.org)

**Repairing Homes, Building Faith, Serving Others.**

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Carmichael, CA  
Permit No. 99

Sierra Service Project  
PO Box 992  
Carmichael, CA 95609  
Address Service Requested

