

MEDLIFE Service Learning Trip to Tena, Ecuador: A week in the Amazon filled with shadowing, volunteering, new friends and monkeys

Ever since traveling to Cusco, Peru with MEDLIFE in 2022 with a group of 6 wonderful friends, I have dreamed of leading a bigger group of students on another Service-Learning Trip (SLT) with MEDLIFE. I became President of MEDLIFE in August of 2022 and spent hours each week recruiting, planning, and talking about MEDLIFE to any student who might be interested. Flash forward to June 2023 when I found myself surrounded by a wonderful group of 16 CSU students in Tena! Due to the hard work of the MEDLIFE at CSU officers and the excitement of 16 students to volunteer, we gave over 300 people free healthcare and helped fix up a rural school in the middle of the Amazon Jungle.

MEDLIFE at CSU is a club that works with MEDLIFE, an international nonprofit headquartered in Lima, Peru. This nonprofit works to bring free healthcare to rural communities throughout South America and Africa, working with the communities so they are empowered to make a difference. As a club at CSU, we spent our year fundraising for MEDLIFE and planning our summer SLT. MEDLIFE begins each SLT with a reality tour to help students gain a deeper understanding of what it is like to live in rural communities in the jungle of Ecuador. We met a family living on a farm in the jungle with rainwater as their only source of clean water. We visited the school that we would return to later in the week to help repaint and learned that they only had one teacher who taught a class of kids ranging from 5 to 12 years of age. Additionally, we visited an indigenous community and learned about the important aspects of their culture that they are trying to preserve.

The next three days we worked in mobile clinics alongside local healthcare professionals. We rotated between different stations including triage, OBGYN, dental, hygiene, and primary care, giving each student the opportunity to learn about the different medications and procedures we were able to give to patients. One of my favorite stations was shadowing the doctors- it was a great opportunity use my Spanish minor and learn about the common diseases affecting the community. The days were long and hot, but it was incredible getting to the end of the day and hearing the total count of all the patients we gave free healthcare to.



The last day of volunteering we worked alongside the community to repaint their school.

MEDLIFE values empowering communities and one way they do this is by ensuring all

development projects are completed 50% by the community and 50% by MEDLIFE. This ensures that the project is sustainable because the community has the knowledge and resources to fix up the project over time. After we finished the first coat of paint on the school, we left the painting supplies with the parents and teacher of the school so they



could finish the project and continue to repaint as needed. Through working with MEDLIFE, I have learned that creating a sustainable future is one of the most important values a nonprofit can instill.

I am so grateful I got the opportunity to travel to Ecuador with this group of CSU students—I made incredible new friends, gained an incredible new perspective about life in Tena, Ecuador, and learned valuable lessons about creating partnerships and empowering communities through international volunteering.