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During the summer of 2010, I was fortunate enough to travel to Ecuador and visit various parts of the country, including Quito, the Galapagos Islands, and the Amazon Rainforest region. While I was visiting in the Amazon region, I stayed in a very rural and impoverished village that shocked me after I had just came from the capital, Quito. Despite my brief time at the village, I easily understood the widespread, extreme poverty that faced this area. I was amazed and stunned by the disparities of wealth within the country and deeply moved with the condition of the village. During my time at the village, I participated in a brief service activity with the children and made deep connections with the kids that I still remember constantly. I learned of their lack of educational opportunities and other such issues facing the village. As soon as I came home from that trip, I knew I wanted to help these children and this community, but I didn’t know how.

After realizing my strong desire to work on this type of project, I sought a program that could teach me methods of how to go about this type of a project. I was looking for a program that could teach me such methods, but luckily I was introduced to the Brown Leadership Institute and was taught so much more than I ever wished for and imagined. At Brown, I was taught exactly how to plan and develop a social action plan, and I could never have achieved the success that I have achieved without everything I learned and every experience I had at Brown.

In the Global Development class at Summer at Brown, I learned about the issues that affect this village and other developing regions in further depth and debated various ways to address such problems. When I was developing my action plan at Brown, my initial plan was to financially support an organization that aims to help this village in Ecuador and raise awareness locally about issues that affect the village. I planned on simply running fundraisers and thought it would be easy to spread awareness by creating a club at my school and engaging my classmates and friends in such topics. I anticipated my main problems to be how I was going to send materials to Ecuador and how to fundraise, but I could not have been more wrong.

My action plan hit speed bumps at every stage, even stages I did not know I would be facing. In terms of raising awareness through a club at my school, that idea quickly dissolved when the club was not approved at school because the administration did not believe enough kids would be interested. I anticipated my classmates at school and friends, with whom I first traveled to Ecuador, would help me with this project, but only one of them has made time in their schedules to attempt to help me. My main struggle, however, has been with the village itself in Ecuador. My initial contact in Ecuador gave me various other sources to try and connect to, but those sources proved to be a struggle. I would go weeks without hearing back from these sources due to lack of internet, and each time I would receive an e-mail back, further information about the village I had not previously known was presented. There were many more factors I had not even considered when first developing my action plan, and I was focused to readapt and change my fundraising plans almost every time I heard from Ecuador. I was stuck in initial planning stages for months simply because of my lack of information.

Luckily, because of everything I have learned at Brown, I was able to finally breakthrough of that stage just recently. I decided to go back to my initial contact in Ecuador, despite the fact she had moved out of the region. Once I was in regular contact with her again, I was able to truly understand all of the conditions of the village and how best to help them. Because for months I did not know how exactly I would be supporting the program in Ecuador (whether in the form of money or other capacities, such as collecting books through drives), I
took a job approximately thirteen hours a week so I would be able to use that money to help my cause in whatever way I would end up needing it. To date, I have made over ____ dollars and I plan on using that money to buy much-needed supplies to benefit the “One to One” program. The One to One program is a program run by an organization in Ecuador that helps provide education to the community through a sustainable development project. With the help of this program, the community plants balsa seeds, a fast-growing plant that helps to reforest the Amazon and absorb carbon dioxide emissions, and then can sell them to help finance increasing education.

In terms of raising awareness, instead of using a club to inform my classmates at school, I have written essays throughout the year for our school newspaper about such issues that affect the village. Additionally, I have began speaking to the program with which I travel to Ecuador, and I am working on convincing them to make learning about issues that face the village a prerequisite for any kids across the United States wishing to travel to Ecuador with this program in the future.

Now, because I know exactly what needs to be done for the village, I am planning on going to Ecuador again sometime this summer. While in Ecuador, I will help set up the community with all the new equipment and help plant balsa trees with the One to One program for a few days. Looking forward, because I am traveling down to Ecuador, I have decided in the coming months to run drives for other such aid I can bring down with me, such as backpacks and paper that will directly help the children’s education, which will only increase the motivation to continue with the One to One program.

I have never benefited so much for any type of project in my life. My family and friends, who have helped me plan and work through my action plan, have also benefited from this project. I have learned how to overcome challenges and keep positive when things do not look like they are going to work out. I will admit it was extremely frustrating for months facing what felt like defeat after defeat, but I persevered with the skills I gained during my time at Brown and eventually found success. My critical thinking skills have greatly increased due to the constant adjustments and changes necessary to my action plan as I was going and the analysis required to try and create a plan when I had little information from which to work. The entire Brown Leadership Institute benefited me, because I learned much more than the skills to develop an action plan and development issues, such as how to grow and develop my “North” leadership style. The Symposium was especially beneficial to me because I was feeling particularly defeated at that point, but the Symposium gave me new hope, inspiration, and methods to attack my problems.

I came back from Ecuador with a desire and motivation to help a community, and I was able to do fulfill that dream because of the Brown Leadership Institute. I have raised awareness in my school and am now working on raising awareness on a more national level. I raised money that will buy supplies to support the One to One program, a program that increases primary school education opportunities by planting and selling balsa trees that reforest the Amazon and absorb carbon dioxide emissions.