

# USU STUDENTS HEAD TO MEXICO AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

**O**rphaned children with disabilities in Manaedero, Mexico, got a new chance to play and learn, and Utah State University students who went to the orphanage in May 2008 to help got a new perspective.

The staff at the Gabriel House orphanage received training to help them work with the

children, and the orphanage itself got a new septic system.

The Mexico trip has become an annual tradition over the past four years for students in the Department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, and Department Head Beth Foley has seen the same story repeat itself. When students arrive, they are “shell shocked” to see the needs at the orphanage and the severity of the children’s disabilities; but when it’s time to

head back to the U.S., the students don’t want to go.



In 2008, more than 90 students from three different USU departments contributed work to the orphanage. About 20 of them made the trip to Manaedero with several faculty members. Gabriel House is an orphanage for children who have disabilities or who are HIV positive. The orphanage houses about 40 children.

Sonia Manuel-Dupont, a professor in English, communicative disorders and civil engineering, has worked with Gabriel House for two years. She has involved students from all three of her disciplines in projects for the orphanage.

Her English students created teaching units with books in Spanish. Students in the Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education Department made toys and communication systems as part of an assistive technology course. They added tactile symbols

USU students traveled to Manaedero, Mexico, to help make improvements to an orphanage for children with disabilities.



Jordan Meek, a junior from Sandy majoring in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, built an indoor jungle gym for the orphanage.

to books in Spanish for children with visual impairment and adapted books to stimulate language development.

Representatives from the USU chapter of Engineers Without Borders also designed a new septic system for the orphanage since the old one was overwhelmed by its massive laundry demands. They installed the system in May during their joint visit with other USU students.

Jordan Meek, a junior from Sandy majoring in Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education, built an indoor jungle gym that included a detachable swing. Swinging is good for a child's development, said Stan Clelland, the Assistive Technology Lab coordinator at the USU Center for Persons with Disabilities. Meek's play equipment was built as an

independent study project, and it was among the most ambitious works that made the trip to Manaedero.

"I'm pretty pleased with the way it turned out," he said. Like many other student contributions, the jungle gym was assembled in the lab, which specializes in adapting, repairing and building assistive technology for people with disabilities.

Foley, one of the professors who teaches the assistive technology class, began going to the orphanage five years ago. The next year and each year after, she began bringing students with her.

In addition to bringing assistive technology and toys with them, the students and faculty members help train the Gabriel House staff on ways to work with children who have conditions including autism, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy and Down syndrome. Many of the children are unable to communicate using speech.

The students stay a week, but more than once Foley has watched as the children at the orphanage stand in front of the gate, trying to keep their visitors from leaving. By then, the students don't want to leave, either.

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November 2008*