

Community Involvement: Charlottesville to Barrackpore, Trinidad

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When I got to U.Va., I had no idea what I wanted to be involved in. Like most first years, I went to the Student Activities Fair and put my name on about ten different lists. Unfortunately, I didn't really love anything I signed up for. Then, by chance, I met up with a friend from high school who told me about Alternative Spring Break (ASB)—an organization that sent students around the country and world to do service over spring break. I was intrigued, and decided to apply.

My first ASB trip to Barrackpore, Trinidad. It took some convincing for my parents to let me get on a plane with twenty-one other students and spend a week in a foreign country they knew very little about. But eventually, they gave in, and I spent

my first college spring break in Trinidad. We stayed in a traditional Trinidadian home, ate local food, and spent the

days teaching in schools and playing with children in orphanages. We spent several days at the Lady Hochoy School, a school for children with disabilities. This was a rare occurrence in Trinidad, as most children with disabilities were hidden from the world because their families were ashamed. I came back from this trip knowing that working with others and helping those in need was something I was very passionate about.

The spring of my second year, I went to the Dominican Republic. My group lived at an orphanage in the town of Jaibon that was home to twenty-five boys ranging in age from four to eighteen. The Dominican Republic is known to have the worst education system of all Spanish-speaking countries. Children are only required to attend school for a few hours each day, and teachers have very



Teaching a second grade class in the Dominican Republic

reading books, to helping them build kites (my personal favorite activity).

Through my trip to Trinidad, I found Alpha Phi Omega (APO), a co-ed service fraternity on Grounds. As a brotherhood, we spend thousands of hours each semester serving the University and the Charlottesville community. We have a project every Saturday morning from 8:30

am to noon. Our projects vary from week to week, but include building, cleaning, painting, and helping at a local food bank. In addition to these projects, we have smaller projects throughout the week called midweeks. They are usually more people-focused, and include bingo with the elderly, playing with kids in after school programs, and picking up food from grocery stores and coffee shops to deliver to the Salvation Army. This semester I am leading my favorite midweek: Barrett Early Learning Center. Every Thursday we go to the preschool and play with the kids outside (or inside if it's rainy), and give the teachers a much needed break from the craziness that comes with spending the entire day with three and four year olds.

Edmund Burke once said, "Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." I would not say that I am changing the world with the service I do. Rather, I am making small changes in the lives of those in my community and, sometimes, those I am lucky enough to visit.



On the playground with school children in Trinidad

few resources. During the day, we were bused to a local school to teach English. In the morning, I taught a class of 5th graders, and in the afternoon a class of 2nd graders. In the evenings, and during our lunch breaks between teaching sessions, we played with the boys at the orphanage. While I speak very little Spanish, we always found a way to communicate. Our activities with them ranged from playing sports, to