

# EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

## Impact of Youth Volunteering in Ecuador

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# 1 Overview of Volunteering in Ecuador

## *History of volunteering in Ecuador*

The long tradition of volunteering in Ecuador can be traced to the pre-Columbian times. The community has had a great importance in the Andean area and it has been characterized by reciprocity and solidarity. This cooperation is still seen in the “minga”, a type of volunteer work based on reciprocity with the neighbors in the community. This is seen especially in the rural areas and also in certain urban groups in the Ecuadorian Andean region. In general the *minga* has been a tool for development the community by building irrigation canals, doing fieldwork, and helping in construction.<sup>1</sup> The idea of charity changed when Catholicism was introduced in Ecuador, becoming unidirectional and with religious motives. In the end of the 18.century and beginning of the 19.century a new type of volunteering was born that was more institutionalized and formal, required administration and financial planning, was based on philanthropy and included charitable organizations. The first organizations of this type in Ecuador were “The Charity Committee of Guayaquil” (“La Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil”) and “The Firefighters of Guayaquil” (“El Cuerpo de Bomberos de Guayaquil”). Due to this new model, the third sector and NGOs were born in Ecuador and can be considered as one component of modern volunteering. Although some older voluntary service organizations maintain the ideology of charity and benevolence, we can say that from the year 2000 the nature of volunteering has changed to a new form, especially in the Mountain region, and is now considered as a tool for development.<sup>2</sup> The interesting part is that the development ideas are given more emphasis in the south and central Andes of Ecuador, in the area that the *minga* has been important.<sup>3</sup> Also with international cooperation, Ecuador has been able to move from the traditional “donor – receptor model” to a more collaborative approach where there is mutual responsibility between the partners.<sup>4</sup>

## *Private Sector, State, and Civil Society Relationships*

Civil society and international cooperation have been the main sources of volunteering in Ecuador. The state has had a small influence on volunteering concentrating mainly on the social area, for example, in the National Institute for Children and Families and in the Civil Defense.

The private sector has had a small influence on volunteering. In the companies such as General Motors, LAN and CitiGroup the idea of volunteering is newly emerging and has to do with Corporate Social Responsibility. That means that the corporation is not only interested in gaining profits but also to giving back to communities.

The civil society is the greatest source of the volunteer work in Ecuador and sometimes it gets international help from: 1. Bilateral cooperation (European, Asian and North American countries<sup>5</sup>), 2. Multilateral cooperations (United Nations, European Commission) and 3. International nongovernmental organizations. To mention some organizations that work in major part with the international volunteers are: The Japan International Cooperation Agency, The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), The Scout Association in Ecuador, Children International, Cooperazione Internazionale (COOPI), The Ecuadorian Red Cross, The Peace Corps, The United Nations Volunteers, German Development Service (DED).<sup>6</sup> Moreover, Geovana Collaguazo, Volunteerism Roundtable Coordinator, adds Círculo Franco- Ecuatoriano, Fundación Finding Species, Servicio Ignaciano de Voluntariado (SIGVOL), Junior Chamber International Ecuador, and Fundación Jatun Sacha to the list of important organizations.<sup>7</sup>

## *Volunteering organizations in Ecuador*

Territorially there are more volunteering organizations in big cities such as Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca and also on the coast and less in small rural provinces and Amazon.

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<sup>1</sup>Julio Cesar Benítez. 2008 El Voluntariado en el Ecuador y su Inserción en las Políticas Públicas. Quito: p.15.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70-71.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 70-71.

<sup>5</sup>[http://justf.org/Program?program=Development\\_Assistance](http://justf.org/Program?program=Development_Assistance).

<sup>6</sup>Julio Cesar Benítez. 2008 El Voluntariado en el Ecuador y su Inserción en las Políticas Públicas. p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Geovana Collaguazo, Volunteerism Roundtable Coordinator, 17.08.2011.

In Ecuador, most of the volunteering projects are concentrated on health (21%), combination of education, health and community development (34%), and only 1% dedicates its work to environmental issues and 1% to the human rights and housing.<sup>8</sup> Voluntary service has a strong focus on humanitarian aid rather than a technical or instrumental (in contradiction to the European and North American volunteering).<sup>9</sup> Still, over 40% of the organizations recorded a deficit of volunteers.

Fundacion **VASE/ICYE** Ecuador is an important new actor in the international volunteering sector. Fundacion VASE started in 2008 as a non-governmental, non-profit organization aimed at promoting cultural exchange and social support through international volunteering. Fundacion VASE (Voluntariado para la Ayuda Social del Ecuador) is a member of the federation ICYE (International Cultural Youth Exchange). VASE offers volunteering programs between 2 weeks and 12 months for international volunteers in Ecuador and for Ecuadorians abroad. Through the ICYE members, VASE cooperates with the ICYE, Weltwärts, German Civil Service and European Voluntary Service programs. VASE is the only organization in Ecuador that offers long-term volunteers for Ecuadorians in Europe.

There are also other organizations that are developing and coordinating volunteering like **Ecuadorian Foundation for Voluntary Work (Fundacion Ecuatoriana de Trabajo Voluntario- FETV)**. FETV serves to gather statistics of local, regional, national and international volunteering. It provides material for consultation and training for volunteering service and takes part in national and international events. The FETV is formed by the provincial coordination, which in turn, is formed by other volunteering organizations. The FETV is a member of the International Association for Volunteer Effort (la Asociaci3n Internacional de Esfuerzos Voluntarios, IAVE) and it periodically takes part in the World Council of Volunteers.<sup>10</sup>

The United Nation's Volunteers program created the National Roundtable on Volunteerism, (*Mesa de Voluntariado de Ecuador*, MVE). MVE is formed by 25 national, international, public and private volunteering organizations. The idea is to network, share experiences, increase volunteering visibility, and create and promote events. With more organizations involved they can work towards common goals, have an action plan to reach the objectives, have indicators and have more influential power.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Julio Cesar Benítez. 2008 El Voluntariado en el Ecuador y su Inserci3n en las Polític3s Públcas. Quito: p. 72.

<sup>9</sup>Julio Cesar Benítez 2008 El Voluntariado en el Ecuador y su Inserci3n en las Polític3s Públcas. p.. 71.

<sup>10</sup> Julio Cesar Benítez. 2008 El Voluntariado en el Ecuador y su Inserci3n en las Polític3s Públcas. pp. 19-20.

<sup>11</sup> The organizations that take part in the MVE are: Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Asociaci3n Coordinadora del Voluntariado del Guayas ACORVOL, International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), Ecuador Scouts Association, Red Cross Ecuador (Cruz Roja Ecuatoriana), Federaci3n Ecuatoriana de Trabajo Voluntario FETV, Fundaci3n Casa Victoria, Fundaci3n Cecilia Rivadeneira, Fundaci3n E-ducate, Fundaci3n Jatun Sacha, Fundaci3n Operaci3n Sonrisa, Idealistas.org, Junior Chamber International Ecuador - Quito Metropolitano, United Nations Volunteers Programme (UNV), Radio Play Internacional, Secretarí3a Nacional de Gestion de Riesgos, Secretariado General de Servicio Voluntario, Servicio Ignaciano de Voluntariado SIGVOL, Universidad Tecnol3gica Equinoccial, Fundacion Finding Species, Camara Franco ecuatoriana, Fundacion Mariana de Jesus, Insittuto de la Niñ3a y la Familia INFA, TATA Consultancy Services, Escuela Superior Politecnica del Litoral ESPOL

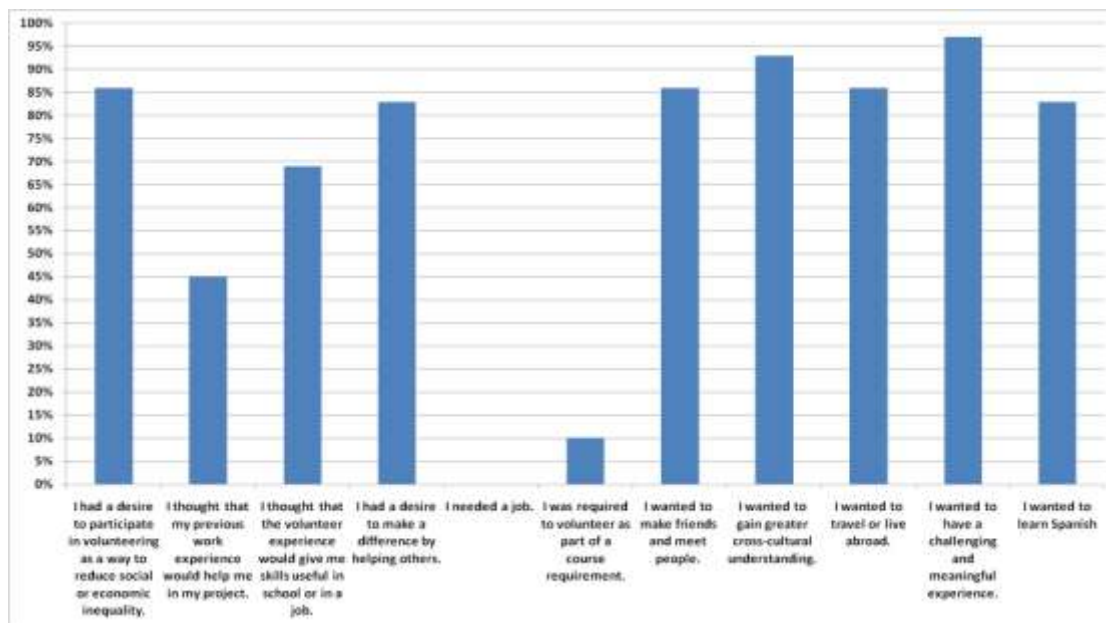
## 2 Action Research

### 2.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS' INPUTS

To measure the impact that the volunteer exchange has on volunteers, 29 international volunteers from Fundación VASE/ICYE Ecuador answered to a questionnaire at the end of their service. From the volunteers, 16 (55,2%) are male and 13 (44,8%) are female. The age range of the volunteers is between 19-26 years old, but the majority is between 20-21 years old [20 volunteers (44,8%) are 20 years old and 7 (24,1%) are 21 years old]. Six (20,7%) of the volunteers have finished the 6 month exchange and 23 (79,3%) their 12 month exchange. 26 (89,7 %) of the volunteers did not have previous international volunteering experience, while 2 (6,9%) did and 1 (3,4%) did not answer. The 2 people who had previously volunteered abroad did it for 4 and 10 weeks. The majority of the volunteers - 24 (82,8%)- lived in host families and 5 (17,2%) in their projects. The volunteers work in the social projects that are mainly based in Quito (17; 58,6%), in Tabacundo (3; 10,3%), Tumbaco (3; 10,3%), Collaqui (3; 10,3%), Ambato (2, 6,9%), Cumbaya (1, 3,4%). The main area of the work is education, but some projects also work with disabled people, administration, sports, agriculture and environment, human rights and gender issues. Volunteers' tasks are generally teaching and taking care of children. The other tasks reported include playing with children (including sports) and cleaning. Volunteers felt competent to conduct these activities since 16 (55,2 %) reported that they definitely feel capable of doing their activities and 13 (44,8%) reported that they have had some challenges but have learned to do the activities during their voluntary service.

#### 2.1.1 Motivation

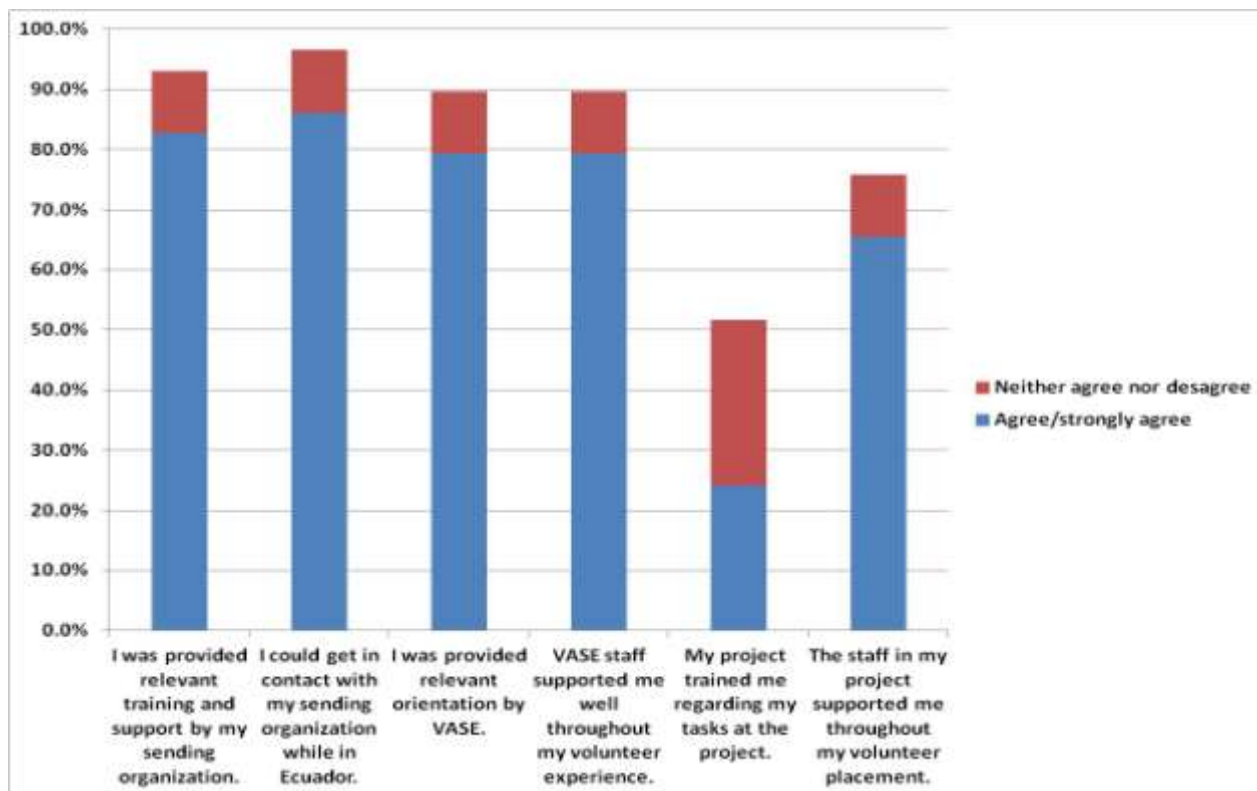
The volunteers' main sources of motivation to participate in international volunteering is the desire to have a challenging and meaningful experience (28; 96,6% of the volunteers agreed or strongly agreed), a desire to gain greater cross-cultural understanding (27; 93,1%), to live abroad (25; 86,2%), wanted to make friends and meet people (25; 86,2%), and to reduce social or economic inequality (25; 86,2 %). The need for a job or to do volunteering as part of the course requirements were least considered as the source of motivation for participating in volunteering as 0% and 10,3% respectively agreed or strongly agreed it to be their reason for their volunteering. Other reasons mentioned in an open-ended question were a break after high school, time to think about the future and to do civil service. The chart below shows the sources of the motivation - the percentage is counted on basis of *agree* and *strongly agree* answers to the statements.



### 2.1.2 Training and Institutional Support

Volunteers perceived the training and institutional support they received from sending and receiving organizations before and during the volunteering service in positive terms. The majority (24; 82,8%) rated the training and support by the sending organization as relevant. The volunteers also state that they are able to be in contact with their sending organizations since 25 (86,2 %) of the volunteers agree or strongly agree on the possibility of contact. Moreover the receiving organization's (VASE) orientation and support is seen positively by most of the volunteers since 23 (79,3%) volunteers agreed or strongly agreed to both the relevance of the orientation and the support while doing the service.

The training from the project was seen less sufficient since 7 (24,1%) informed having received training for their tasks at the project. Even though the training for the work did not take place in many cases, the support of the project staff was more present since 19 (65,5%) volunteers reported having support. The chart shows the percent of *agree* and *strongly agree* and neither agree or disagree answers to the statements concerning training and institutional support.



### 2.1.3 General Impact

From the questionnaires we can conclude that the volunteers perceived that **town members, children, parents and the volunteers valued their work** as 24 (82,8%) volunteers agreed or strongly agreed on the subject. 24 (82,8 %) volunteers felt welcome by the family or the residential project. Also, 22 (75,9%) reported feeling integrated into their family or the residential project, meanwhile five (17,2 %) did not and 2 (6,9%) were neutral. 23 (79,3%) volunteers felt that their skills in general are useful for the project, while 6 (20,7%) saw that the skills were neither useful nor not useful. We can conclude from the questionnaires that majority - 23 (79,3%) volunteers - had a good relationship with their coworkers and 20 (69%) saw that the project staff valued their work. Still, 4 (13,8%) did not feel the appreciation of the project staff. 19 (65,5%) volunteers considered that their work was valuable for the projects while 5 (17,2%) did not see it that important and 5 (17,2%) remained neutral.

18 (62,1%) volunteers saw that they **did the same work as the paid employees in their project** while 4 (13,8%) did not, and 4 (13,8%) did not agree nor disagree and 3 (10%) did not answer. Because of a lack of resources, most of the projects cannot hire local staff to help in the areas of the volunteers, and most often this means that the subject would not be offered or there would not be as much individual attention. Due to the lack of resources in most projects there is not enough local staff, which means that the volunteer needs to take on some duties of a paid staff member. In other words 20 (69,0%) volunteers saw that if they had not volunteered, there would not be a local staff replacing them. 6 (20,7%) volunteers saw that there would be people replacing them and 3 (10,3%) did not agree nor disagree. More than half (55,2%), which is 16 volunteers, did not see that their services would have been better if they would have been offered by a full time staff member, 6 (20,7%) saw that the volunteer would have been better and 6 (20,7%) remained neutral. The reason could be that 13 (44,8%) volunteers reported having a specific skill that is needed by the project (for example ability to teach English, computing or music). Finally, we can see that 17 (58,6%) volunteers shared goals with the project staff members but 4 (13,8%) did not agree, 7 (24,1%) were neutral and 1 (3,4%) did not answer.



18 (62,1%) volunteers saw that **their activities matched to local needs**, meanwhile 3 (10,3%) did not agree and 8 (27,6 %) did neither agree nor disagree on their importance to the local needs. Of the volunteers, 10 (34,5%) saw that they made a lasting contribution with their volunteering (in the project), while 7 (24,1 %) did not see a long lasting contribution, 10 (34,5%) were neutral and 2 (6,9%) did not answer.

The volunteers saw that **their impact is more important on the project level** than the community or national level. Of the volunteers, 12 (41,4%) thought that their volunteering made a positive impact on the development of the community, meanwhile 4 (13,8%) did not agree on the matter and 12 (41,4%) remained neutral. Many volunteers did not see that their volunteering really can impact positively on the development of Ecuador, since only 4 (13,8%) agreed on its favorable influence. 10 (34,5%) volunteers did not see that it had a positive impact on a national level, and the majority, 14 (48,3%) volunteers chose the neutral viewpoint.

Most of the volunteers 14 (48,3%) **did not provide money or other physical resources** to the project or community. Still 9 (31,0%) did agree that they have provided and 6 (20,7%) did nether agree or disagree. In all, 13 of the 29 volunteers clarified what type of resources of financial aid they provided. The most common were materials for the schools, money for the project, things for the children such as little presents, books, pens, food, or clothing accessories and trip or another activities.

The volunteers were asked to list the **benefits that the project gains** from their volunteering. The most important mentioned were free work force or extra help that also brings financial stability, intercultural diversity and cultural knowledge, new ideas, and education with special skills that they could offer such as computation, English and musical skills. Moreover their presence gives the children a role model and a friend.

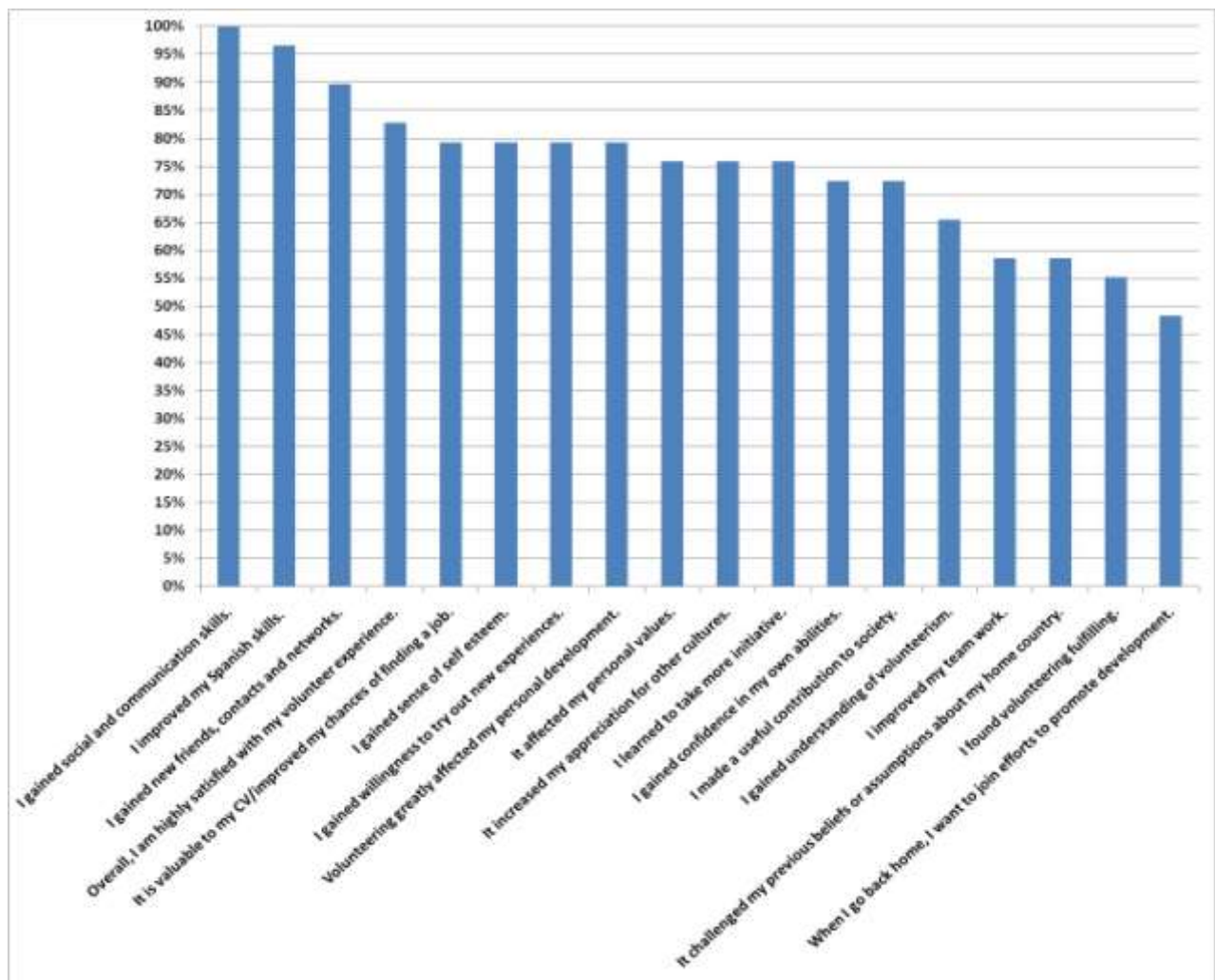
26 volunteers listed **benefits that the host family or the residential projects** get from their presence. The most important impact is the intercultural interaction and cultural knowledge, sharing ideas, experiences, good moments and new point of views, and having a new friend or a family member. Also financial support, extra help, and a pride for the family to have a foreigner in the house were mentioned.

**Benefits that the volunteers listed for the wider community** (students, parents, town members) are intercultural interaction and cultural knowledge, new ideas, friendship, role model, time, care and education for the children, help, income or money, networks, and pride.



### 2.1.4 Personal Impact

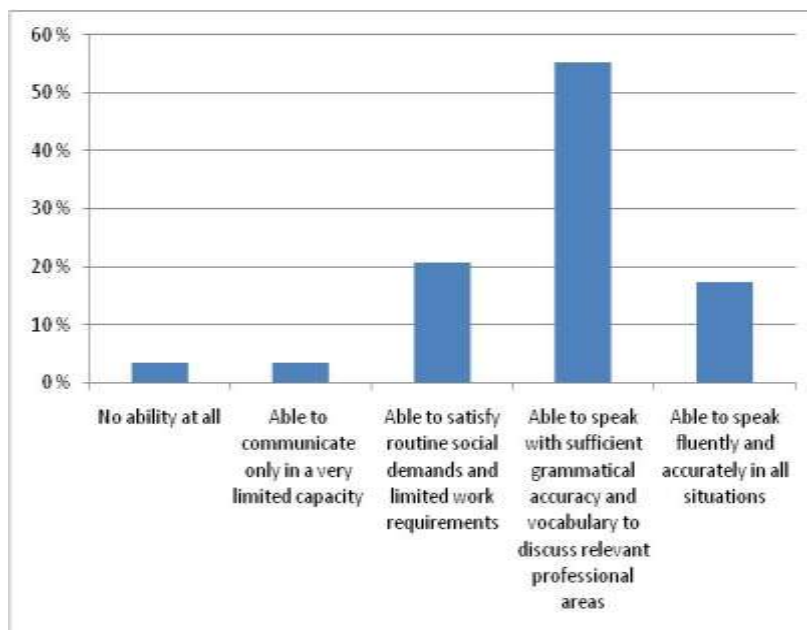
From the questionnaire we can conclude that the most important personal impact of volunteering on the volunteers was gaining social and communication skills (100% agreed or strongly agreed), improving Spanish skills (96,6 %), making new friends, contacts and networks (89,7%), getting a satisfying experience (82,8 %), having a valuable experience for future job search (79,3%), increasing self esteem (79,3%), willingness to try new experiences (79,3%), developing personally (79,3%), changing personal values (75,9%), appreciating other cultures (75,9%) and taking more initiative (75,9%).



Other impacts that were mentioned in an open question by 10 volunteers is patience, independence and clearer future plans, open-mindedness, knowing a new and different culture and family, sharing love and interaction, appreciation for the things of the volunteer's owns culture such as security and learning to clean, plan and organize.

#### **Spanish Level**

Most of the volunteers reported that they were able to communicate satisfactorily in Spanish (most referred to after the completion of their voluntary service — just a few referred to the beginning of the voluntary service).



13 volunteers thought that interaction at the beginning of the exchange was difficult because of the lack of language skills but that it got easier as they learned more Spanish. Moreover, 11 volunteers commented that good Spanish skills are important to integrate, work and interact better. Two volunteers pointed out that not many people speak English which makes it necessary to learn Spanish. Two volunteers said that the language skills did not matter since they were working with small children who could not talk, and two reported not having any problems.

### 2.1.5 Problems and Challenges

While all volunteers mentioned the positive impact of volunteering, the experience did not come without some negative aspects. The possible problems and challenges due to the presence of volunteers in the community or project were described by 6 of the volunteers. The problems had to do with personal and cultural differences or other problems of interaction and doing tasks that are not the “responsibility” of a volunteer. One commented that the only problem as a volunteer from Europe, having experienced a different school system, is she gives her classes as she experienced them in her schooling, which differs from the way they teach in Ecuador.

Although the volunteers saw that they had not caused problems for the community or project, many did encounter problems or challenges in the project and/or community. 19 of the volunteers experienced **problems in the project** [feeling useless or not needed in the project (8), feeling of not being able to influence things (4), change project (2)]. The second biggest group has to do with **cultural problems** mentioned by 12 volunteers [that have to do with cultural differences (5 references), racism or discrimination (3), language (2), and food (2)]. The third biggest group was **safety problems** experienced by 7 volunteers [such as getting robbed or assaulted (5) or other feelings of insecurity (2)]. Seven volunteers were also having **health problems** [such as sicknesses (6) and lack of sleep (1)] and seven volunteers as well **problems with the family/living conditions**. Six volunteers also mentioned **motivational problems** [that have to do with the lack of motivation (4) and not having enough things to do (2)]. The fewest cases mentioned by two volunteers were the **problems with the receiving organization** due to unequal treatment and difficulties in changing a project, and finally **problems with other volunteers** were mentioned as well by two volunteers because of feelings of exclusion due to the physical distance to others or language barriers.

Bad aspects of the volunteering experience													
Cultural problems				Safety Problems		Health problems		Problems in the project					Problems with the interaction with other volunteers
Food	Language	Racism and discrimination	Cultural differences	Getting robbed or assaulted	Insecurity	Sicknesses	Lack of sleep	Problems with the family/ living conditions	Not feeling useful or appreciated in the project	Not able to influence/change on many things	Need to change project	Other	Problems with receiving organization
Exclusion	Physical distance to other volunteers	Lack of motivation	Not enough to do										
2	2	3	5	5	2	6	1	7	8	4	2	5	2
1	1	4	2										
12				7		7		7	19			2	2
													6

19 volunteers described how they have tried to solve their problems. The most common way mentioned (11) is to try to deal with the problem by “presenting ideas”, explaining “motivations and ways to work”, and “traditions”, “learning to express better him/herself in Spanish”, and by “discussing” the problems. Four volunteers have also ignored the problem by “not working with a problematic coworker” and “ignoring gossip”. Moreover, four reported that they have accepted some difficult issues, and one volunteer answered: fitting into a different culture can be hard, especially if you see people interacting in a way you don’t agree with. So you have to learn accept new things and find things you agree with.

Overall 24 (82,8%) of the volunteers **agreed or strongly agreed to being highly satisfied with their volunteer experience**, meanwhile 2 (6,9 %) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 3 (10,3%) did neither agree nor disagree. But still 16 (55,2 %) found the volunteering fulfilling and 12 (41,4%) had a neutral opinion about it. One volunteer (3.4%) did not find the volunteering fulfilling at all.

The volunteers were asked to specify if their work was needed and/or valued. 20 volunteers saw that that the work was appreciated because of the free work force, the better education the projects could offer with their aid, specific skills, initiative and effort that the volunteers had. They commented, for example, that with teaching English the children receive better education which affects their further lives, and financially my school is not able to hire an English teacher • having it done by a volunteer is thus the only chance for the pupils to get English classes.

Six volunteers did not feel that the work was needed or valued because the work was taken for granted or as it was described “like it was my duty to do voluntary service” or not valued by the project staff because the tasks given were not perceived as useful or meaningful because the volunteer “could not use the skills”. Two of the volunteers thought that the work was useful and needed for the project but still the volunteers’ work was not valued and it was commented that “the work was needed but I didn’t feel it was valued much by my boss”.

A volunteer from January 2008 to January 2009 returned to Ecuador in August 2011 to do an internship at the same hospital where he volunteered 3 years before. Since all the answers came from volunteers during their last month of voluntary service, it was interesting to measure the long-term affects of international volunteering. First of all, he has remained in contact with some of the social network that he had then developed, such as his host family, Ecuadorian friends and some other volunteers by Internet, phone, and visits. Secondly, volunteering affected his career plans — when he arrived in Ecuador in 2008 he thought he would study engineering, however changed to study medicine after volunteering in a health project. Thirdly, he also notes that his perceptions about other cultures changed once he finished his service and returned to Germany. Finally, we can see that volunteer exchange instills core values and becomes a cyclical process, as he has continued volunteering in Germany for 1–2 hours a week with refugees and the medical system.

### 2.1.6 Long-Term Benefits

In spite of the difficulties that the volunteers faced, it is very important to highlight that all the volunteers answering the questionnaires recommend international volunteering to other people because the experience is seen as valuable or because as a volunteer you can gain self-development, learn a new culture, get social contacts and help others. They commented:

*-Life affecting experience.*

*-It's a great change to learn about yourself, society and culture.*

*-It's a great way to get to know a new culture and language and meet interesting people while helping others.*

Even though 4 volunteers saw that volunteering is a challenging or difficult experience they thought that it was worth it.

*-Good experience, nice to meet new people from all over the world and get to know a new country and culture. But it is hard.*

*-It is a valuable experience and more difficult than people in general think it is.*

*-Great opportunity to have unique experiences. Even the negative ones will help you a lot in your life. To open your eyes to poverty and different cultures and living situations.*

## **2.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS**

Fundacion VASE/ICYE Ecuador has been working with 30 social projects since 2008 and these projects have hosted nearly 200 volunteers. Employees of seven projects, which have hosted both long and short-term international volunteers from VASE, were interviewed to see what impact volunteering has for them. From those interviewed, four people work as directors, two as coordinators and one as a teacher. The projects started to receive international volunteers between 1983-2009, who have come from several foundations, as missionaries, or independently.

### **2.2.1 Project Work Area**

Five of the projects concentrate on education, one with disabled people, one with agro-ecology, and one with human rights and gender issues. According to the staff, the volunteers choose to come to those particular projects because they like children, to study culture and language, for their interest in the environment, to get in contact with the social reality and to better their techniques and practices.

### **2.2.2 Motivation and recruitment**

The projects have decided to receive international volunteers because of their special skills (like capacity to teach English), and for the intercultural interaction to "share cultures". The volunteers can provide valuable help for the projects with few resources, which limits their ability to hire more staff. The volunteers may also give more structure to the work since one interviewed stated that volunteers are responsible and committed to the work, which makes it possible to plan activities.

### **2.2.3 Volunteer Impact**

Long-term volunteering is perceived as more useful than the short-term volunteering. Four of the project personnel said that volunteers should stay at least 9-10 months because it is a length of a school year. Two of the interviewees stated that at least 6 months is suitable and one said that 1-month is fine. Long-term volunteering is seen well especially for the "continuation" of the teaching because "there won't be a change of teacher all the time" and for the "adaptation of the volunteer and the children". Still, even if long-term volunteering was preferred, the short term was appreciated because it was seen "helpful" and then "there are more staff and they can do more activities".

The volunteers are not there to replace the permanent staff in the projects. Five of the project staff interviewed think that volunteers should not do the same job as a paid worker because the volunteer does it "optionally, not for the salary and therefore there should not be any obligations". It was emphasized that, "volunteers are there to help". Still, two respondents thought that the personal qualities and time should be considered because it "depends on their commitment and responsibility".

In the projects there may be some prior requirements for the volunteers. The most important that was mentioned by five projects is the motivation to work in the field that the project is dedicated to, for example to have an interest in nature and agriculture or to be suitable to work with children. Others that were mentioned include some knowledge of Spanish, at least the basic level, previous experience

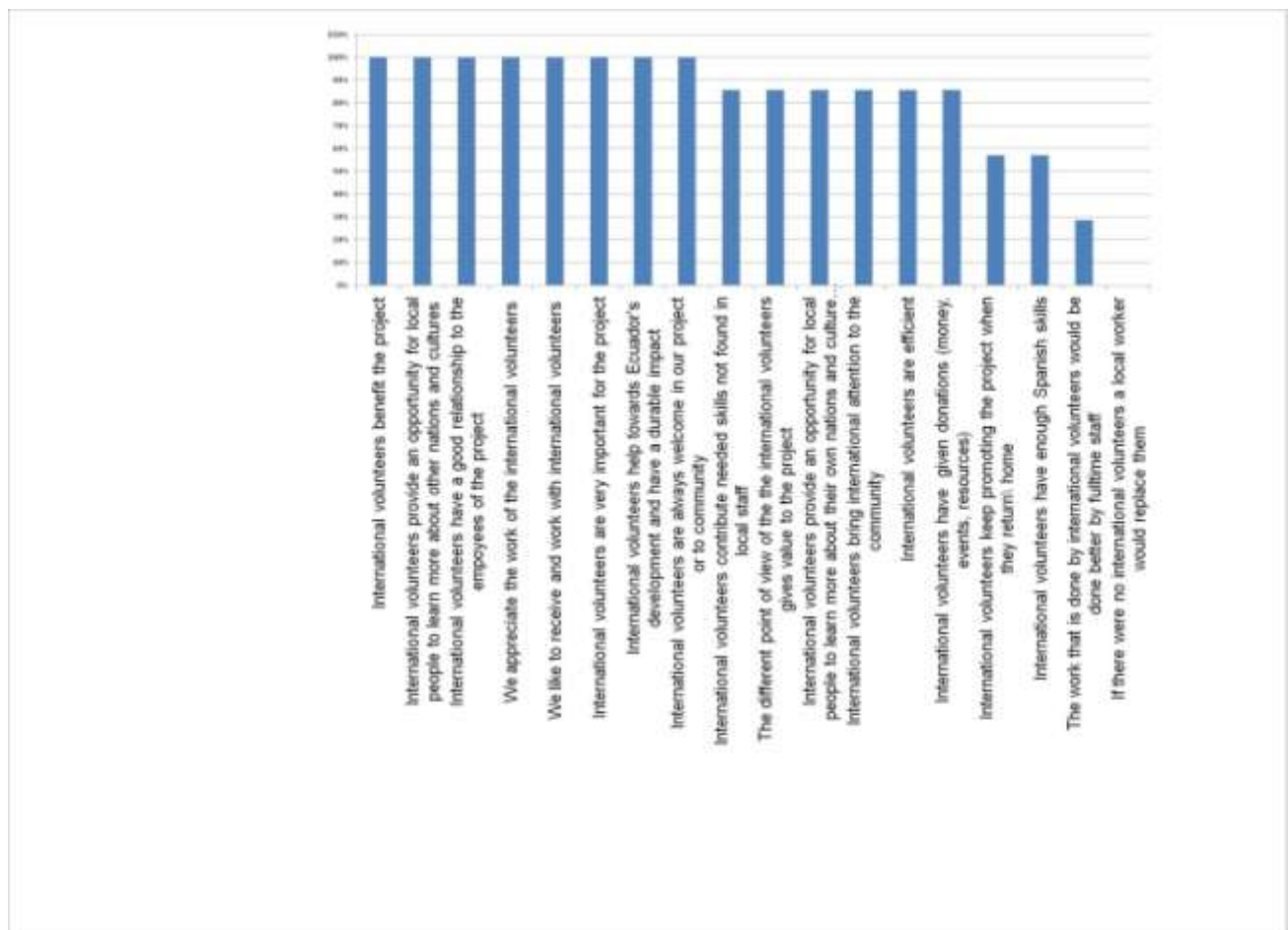
or orientation toward social work. Moreover, some personal characteristics were pointed out such as patience, ability to cooperate, flexibility, ability to adapt, and to have responsibility and commitment. On the other hand, the requirements are very flexible and there is no obligation because they learn [at the project].

The project staff was asked to list how the project or the community benefits from international volunteers. The most important responses were intercultural interaction, new ideas, education, solidarity, and physical, material and economical help they can offer. Others brought up pride to have a volunteer, the continuation of the project and the positive working atmosphere because “they are people who make a mixed group fresher and impact positively on the working environment”. The volunteers have also provided new ideas to the projects. The most important mentioned were new viewpoints and didactical, cultural, nutritional, business, and environmental ideas. For example, one idea brought to the project is to integrate children more into the projects because if “the children take part in, for example, maintenance of the playground, they take better care of the toys”.

The international volunteers are very appreciated in the seven projects interviewed. They are seen as very important and beneficial to the project, and they have good relation with other employees, they make local people learn about other nations and cultures, they are always welcome to their project or community, and their work helps the development of Ecuador. The majority (85,7%) thinks that international volunteers have valuable knowledge that the project staff do not have, that the volunteers’ different points of view gives value to the project, the volunteers make the local people to learn about their own country and culture (Ecuador), they attract international attention to the community. Only two respondents think that the work that is done by an international volunteer would be done better by full time staff. The explanations given were, for example, that in that case there would be continuity and a person educated to do the job. Still three people (42,9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed and saw that the volunteers can do the work perfectly well. Noteworthy is that none of the interviewees thought that the volunteer would be replaced by a local worker if they did not come to the project anymore.



### What do you think are the potential benefits of hosting international volunteers?

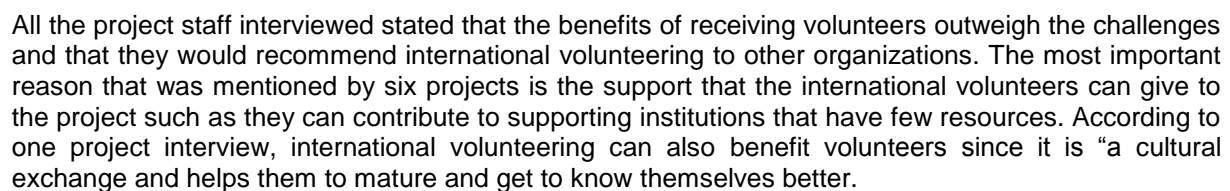


All the interviewees see that the international volunteers have a positive impact on the project, in the community and at the national level. That is because with international volunteers there is more intercultural interaction and cultural diversity that adds richness, and they can help to increase the quality of the project with their help and new ideas. They work towards sustainable development because they “leave long lasting learning” and their workshops benefit development. Moreover, they attract positive attention to the project, giving stimulus for the Ecuadorians to do volunteering and they can promote social work and tourism. Four (57,1%) respondents reported that international volunteers keep promoting the project after they have gone back home and they can also help increase international relations.

The volunteers are very important for social projects with few resources. The respondents estimated that if their project would not receive international volunteers anymore, there would be less process and development, less workers and less teaching. They would need to hire people, look for national volunteers and it would be more difficult economically, there would be “less intercultural interaction” and they would lack a permanent process and there would be fewer options for children.

For the project interviews, the respondents also filled in a questionnaire where they pointed out the possible challenges of international volunteering. We can see that international volunteers do not cause a lot of trouble or challenges. The only small challenge seems to be that the international volunteers are hard to find as three (42,9%) people agree or strongly agree with the statement, but still more than a half, four people (57,1%), disagree or strongly disagree to the very same question. We can also see that two people think that the international volunteers need a lot of training and two that they don't, while three do not either agree or disagree. Finally we can see that the project staff does not think that the volunteers take the place of local volunteers or local workers, they are not expensive for the project, they do not cause many problems in the community, it is not difficult to interact with volunteers, and they do not need a lot of supervision. On the other hand, as one interviewee stated, volunteers are different and therefore they have different needs: “It always depends on the education and interests of the volunteer and the receiving institution should take these into consideration”. An

***What do you think are the potential challenges of hosting international volunteers?***



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All seven interviewees believe that volunteers get enough support from the project. Still, one of them mentioned that there are certain “limitations” in the resources of the project and one pointed out that when there are many things going on in the project and “they might forget a little bit about the volunteers”. The projects see that the people that are mostly responsible for training and supporting the volunteers are the coordinators, VASE/ICYE Ecuador, and the staff in the projects. Two interviewees mentioned the volunteers’ sending organization and one mentioned family. One also stated that the volunteers should feel free to ask for help because volunteers can get help if they need it. Also three interviewees pointed out that the project staff may notice that the volunteer needs help and offer it, for example “if volunteers are shy and do not take initiative or if there is not much motivation, then they try to ask what is happening and teach and activate them, and give them feeling of security. Also, if the volunteer is having difficulties with the language, the project looks for a person who can help”. According to the projects, the volunteers have mostly needed help with information, for example “how to manage the classroom and control the children” and “how to use the materials”. They have also needed technical help to diversify the projects, to have something to do and to make projects more personalized depending on their interests. The project staff reported that the volunteers mainly take the feedback and support well: Generally thankful, flexible, patient. They react well, they know that they are helping, they never get angry, and they assimilate. Sometimes they can react first with surprise and at the beginning there can be some problems with the language but in both cases volunteers have “adapted” and “understood” later on. Still it is hard to make generalizations: Depends, some integrate and others not, there are people that have too many questions [about the project] and no initiative to do the things on their own. In general, the project staff helps volunteers adapt better to life in Ecuador and gives trust, security, knowledge and motivation.

Vase/ICYE Ecuador offers support and information to the projects that it cooperates with as well as to the volunteers. Six of the interviewed project staff informed that they and the volunteers get support from the VASE because of the meetings they have together, the information they provide, their contacts (via phone, email and visits), and that “they are available” if there is a need for a contact. There is also control through visits to the projects, which was seen as a *good thing*. If the projects had any problem, communication with VASE was efficient and there is a “good relationship”. Still, there was interest in strengthening the relationship with VASE and one interviewee commented that “we would like to know more about VASE and how it works.

## **2.3 ANALYSIS OF HOST COMMUNITIES’ INPUTS**

### **2.3.1 Host Families**

Each year, VASE has a meeting with its host families to evaluate the past program year and prepare them for the next. VASE currently works with 38 host families. In the meeting in July 2011, ten host families that had hosted volunteers the previous exchange year filled in a questionnaire to measure the impact of volunteering on the communities. All host families stated that they felt well prepared by this meeting and had sufficient information about the new volunteer who would live in their home. Still, two families would like to know more personal information about the volunteer’s personality and preferences.

100% of families stated that they hosted VASE volunteers for 6 to 12 months to have a cultural exchange. The families warmly accepted the volunteers into their daily life by sharing time, care and customs. This greatly helps the volunteer’s integration, and 9 out of 10 families stated that the volunteers adapted and integrated well, especially because the families “treated the volunteer like a family member”, gave the volunteers freedom and support and respected the volunteer’s ideas and preferences. However, one family mentions that the integration during the first few weeks was a bit difficult because “the volunteer was very scared to ask and say something because of the lack of Spanish skill”. If the volunteers needed help, the families felt that open communication helped resolve problems. It was seen as important to give the volunteers the necessary time to speak, while understanding and responding to their needs.

The families stated that the volunteers generally have very good personalities and are also generous, and that they had good relationships with the volunteers. Cultural exchange was achieved by forming bonds through “good and bad moments that we experienced together” and “sharing different food and celebrations”. This is not to say that the families did not ever need support, and in fact when they did reach out to VASE for any communication or conflict resolution, all felt that the support provided was very good.

The majority of the families (80%) saw that the volunteers receive enough support from VASE/ICYE Ecuador, which helps them adapt better to their families, projects and living in Ecuador in general. The information that VASE provides was said to be really good and it was stated that the “the orientation camp helped the volunteers a lot to adapt to a new group, institution and country.”

Taking into account the good aspects and the challenges of hosting an international volunteer, 6 (60%) of the families reported that their experience was excellent, 3 (30%) very good and 1 (10%) satisfactory. In the words of one family, “what they [volunteers] do is valuable to our country and for them” and this wouldn’t be possible without the host families.

### **2.3.2 Community Member**

A community interview was conducted in Picalqui, a small town about 1.5 hours outside of Quito. Picalqui is the project site of a foundation that runs an organic farm and, through its volunteers, supports a nearby elementary school. The volunteers live in a volunteer house next to three of the families who also work at the project and about 30 other families live nearby. In the organic farm, the volunteers help with the farm duties of feeding the chickens, milking the cows, cleaning the stables, cultivating the crops and harvesting, and at the school they are assistant teachers.

One interview was conducted with a community member and farm worker in Picalqui. The interviewee stated that the relationship between the volunteers and the community members goes two ways since they learn from each other as well as teach each other, they work together and exchange ideas. He described the relationship as successful.

The volunteers in Picalqui have a strong, albeit potentially unsustainable, impact. They are important for the community because of their presence, help, and support. Because of this, the foundation has been able to make improvements to the facilities. If volunteers would not come to the community anymore, the community would be negatively affected since there would be less teaching, less production in the fields, and less economic stability.

The interviewee did not see any problems with having the volunteers in the community. Although many of the volunteers come to the community with a low Spanish level, he said that this is not a problem since they learn in the community. The interviewee stated that the community needs more long-term volunteers to increase the positive impact of the volunteering because there are many people in the community who benefit from their work. With more volunteers, there is more teaching and learning and the longer the volunteers stay the better they adapt.

## **2.4 CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Taking into account the challenges and recommendations, there are things that can be done to positively influence the impact of volunteering.

### **SELECTION:**

The organization should have an adequate selection process to find a suitable volunteer for each project. One project stated that there should be a good selection process and reflection on whether the people are good for the project. The volunteers also stressed the importance of up-to-date and detailed project descriptions so that they have a better idea of their project.

### **TRAINING:**

Regarding the training of volunteers, projects mentioned that it would be worthwhile to train them about social problems that would help them better understand their work and also task specific training, for example, art, psychology and gender relations, not only English. Because of the low resources of the projects they also hope for volunteers who are professionals in fields such as dentistry and therapy.

According to the volunteers, the orientation and support from the sending and receiving organization are good. Still, considering the challenges mentioned, the organization should always listen to the problems and treat the volunteers equally to improve the service and facilitate the volunteers' well being. On the other hand, volunteers viewed training from the projects as less than sufficient. Training and support are important for the volunteers to know their tasks, materials, rules, people, how to control the children and personalize projects. This kind of an interaction is also important to the projects in order to know the interests, talents and expectations of the volunteers. A volunteer commented that the project should provide core training for tasks in the project. VASE facilitates a training manual for the projects, including topics to be covered in orientation and role/duties of the contact person. VASE should make sure that the projects use this manual to ensure a quality preparation for the volunteers.

Also, one project stated that when staff members are very busy, "they might forget a little bit about the volunteers", which means that the volunteers need to take high initiative to get help and support, as well as execute their tasks. Therefore, more attention should be put into training projects (by VASE), with mandatory meetings two times per year.

### **LANGUAGE:**

In order to help with the volunteer's adaptation, participation, and efficiency in the project and the family, volunteers should arrive in Ecuador with a basic level of Spanish. Although volunteers receive 30 hours of Spanish classes during the orientation, one project said that there should be more Spanish teaching for the volunteers because communication is a key concern. Therefore, learning the local language should be encouraged before arrival, volunteers should make a strong effort to learn and study Spanish during the orientation period, and the number of Spanish classes the volunteers receive should increase.

### **MONITORING:**

The most important recommendations from the volunteers to improve the quality of the volunteering projects are to increase control, organization, and monitoring of the projects. This can be done by making sure that the volunteer has a clear work plan and assuring that volunteers are able to contribute and make a difference in the project. The projects also stressed an importance on control, stating that there "should be visits from VASE and in general "more interaction between the project and VASE". Since the control and interaction were appreciated, the ties should be strengthened.

### **APPRECIATION:**

The volunteers do not get money for their service, and therefore it is important that there is a balance between feeling that their work is valued, useful and meaningful but not taken for granted and obligatory. Therefore, the project and volunteer should communicate to establish clear responsibilities and find meaningful activities; the goals should be shared to find how the tasks and talents would fit to the local needs in order to keep the work meaningful and motivating for both parties. As one volunteer said "it is important that the volunteer likes his/her project. In his first project, the interviewee did not feel that the tasks met his expectations for voluntary service, and after trying to overcome the challenge through conversations with the project and the receiving organization, the three parties decided that it would be best to have a project change. The projects should also take initiative to involve the volunteers into the meetings and celebrations in order for the volunteers to feel included and appreciated.

### **CONTINUITY:**

The projects that VASE sends volunteers are mainly social, concentrating on education and capacity building for disadvantaged children, adolescents, minorities and women. Social projects welcome international volunteers for the extra help since they do not have many resources. The intercultural interaction is also highly valued. Suggestions given by the projects to increase the positive impact of volunteering are that there would be more volunteers and continuation in the way that "VASE would

always support the project with volunteers". Long-term volunteering was perceived more useful than short-term even though it was mentioned that anytime is helpful. Still, with a longer stay, the volunteers can do their work better and they can be given more responsibility. The projects believe that volunteers should be "involved more in the communities", such as training community members in different workshops, but of course to do this communities have to propose an activity that is better trained by a volunteer than a community member. Because all volunteers work in social projects, the economic situation is difficult and there is a lack of resources. The projects stated that they need "economical support and materials, infrastructure, children games, and construction of classroom and other places". Because of this reality and the special role of the volunteer, it is necessary that projects understand that volunteers do not come to support economically but rather through their work. In order for continuity and development, volunteers and project staff to make a project or fundraiser together. At the end of the service, the project and volunteer should have a mandatory evaluation that allows an open communication regarding achievements, goals and tips for the next volunteers, and suggestions on how to improve the project and/or relationships with volunteers.

### **HOST FAMILIES:**

Host families welcome international volunteers as it facilitates cultural exchange, sharing a new and nice experience, and having a new family member. According to the families, open communication helps strengthen relationships and resolve problems. The families suggested that volunteers could be helped to adapt to the family by giving them information and emotional support such as "care, love and trust", by "involving them in the things at home", and by telling them "the rules of the house so they know how to act". The volunteers also want to feel part of the family and therefore it was suggested that the families should be chosen carefully and there should be monitoring of families. It is important that the volunteers be treated like a family member and that families host a volunteer because of the exchange and not for the money. The same was pointed out from one project: "the families should not see the volunteers as an income, they are there to help, and they are like family members... The volunteers are not like animals to be fed, but it is an exchange. It is important to ask how the volunteers are doing, if they are adapting and that they won't be ignored. They should be invited to participate because they are not tourists. It is important to feel useful".

### **VOLUNTEER TIPS:**

Volunteers advised future volunteers to have courage, motivation, patience and take initiative: Never give up! Stay motivated and patient; don't be afraid of coming up with ideas and speaking your mind, "try to integrate", "try to make some Ecuadorian friends", "start new things even if it might be difficult", and have "self-confidence"