

NSUOCO SVOSH RETURNS FROM GUATEMALA

The people of a small Guatemalan village are seeing a little clearer in 2011 thanks to a group of eleven Student Volunteer for Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH) members. Immediately after final exams finished, bags were packed for a week long mission trip. Student volunteers included NSUOCO students Charlie Vojta, Summer Hilton, Sarah Forrest, Rodney Claborn, Jill Huelskamp, Nick Hardgrave, Aaron Reinert, and Jason Koshmeder. The doctors on the trip were NSUOCO faculty/alumni Ryan Fenska O.D. (2008), Sarah Gallagher O.D. (2010) and current NSUOCO resident Kaila Osmotherly O.D.

The team was hosted by Refuge International, a non-profit medical mission group based out of Gilmer, Texas. The mission of Refuge International is to “develop collaborative and sustainable programs providing healthcare, adequate nutrition, clean water, and education.” This group supports and maintains several clinics throughout Guatemala including the clinic in Sarstun. Sarstun is a small fishing village on the Sartstun River at the border of Guatemala and Belize accessible only by boat. Although Refugee has worked to provide multiple types of health care, this was the first time any optometric or vision services had been provided to the village.

After a five hour flight, seven hour bus ride, and two hour boat journey, the group from NSUOCO finally reached the clinic they would eat, sleep, and work for their stay in Sarstun. More than 300 eye exams were given over the course of four clinic days. With the help several local translators, the group was able to provide over four hundred pairs of prescription glasses and sunglasses and treat medical conditions such as glaucoma when needed. The clinical experience was not only a chance to volunteer services, but also provided a great learning environment for the students. The clinicians excelled at determining and dispensing glasses, but were able to see and diagnose many eye diseases they had only read about in text books.

After their clinic work, the SVOSH team returned to the mainland where they learned they had been featured in the national newspaper or, as they were informed, “*The New York Times*” of Guatemala for their work in Sarstun. They spent a relaxing day enjoying the historical city of Antigua, nestled in the highlands of Guatemala. The group toured ruins, visited the local market, took in the sights, and a few lucky members even got to visit with Vice President of Guatemala--a great way to wrap up a very successful mission trip.

For more information about Refuge International please visit their website
<https://refugeinternational.com/>

To send donations of glasses or monetary donations to the NSUOCO chapter of SVOSH please send to NSUOCO SVOSH attention Dr Alissa Proctor, 1001 N. Grand Ave Tahlequah Ok, 74464