**January 5, 2015**

Lindsey Lyons, The Arrival

A 5:00pm text the night before departure hat our flight was not as predicted threw the group for a loop. We departed DPS at 2:00am. Yes, 2:00am. 10 members of the group met to head to BWI to meet five others at 4:00am for a 6:00am departure. What a whirlwind day. As I write late night upon arrival – we are here safe. All 15 members. We met Beth from Peacework at the airport with native, David Flores. David had wonderful snacks of plantain chips chicken pies, and bananas. We sucked water out of bags, loaded vans, and departed the 45-minute trip to the Belize District. Our lodging was awesome. Wet, soggy, buggy, beautiful, bush-like, cabannas are perfect. Dinner was chicken, fish, beans, coleslaw, tortillas, coconut tarts, papaya juice. The orientation put everyone’s minds to ease and a night sleep will be great… can’t wait for tomorrow’s buds!

Andrew DiNardo

Our long-awaited arrival in Belize finally has come and gone. Although many of us are running on only an hour or two of sleep, our spirits are high, evidence in each individual’s willingness to help one another.

Although it took a while for the trip to become a reality, it is all coming together. Upon arrival, we were greeted with overwhelming hospitality and kindness. The people here are very honest and very eager to share (something I love).

My first encounter here was with a man named Tenkins. He took time out simply to sit beside me and talk about whatever it was that came to mind… don’t find much of that in the States.

Overall, today only built up my excitement surrounding this trip. For the people I am here with, the people I have had the pleasure of talking to, and the ones I have yet to meet.

**January 6, 2015**

Jamo

Today was our first day working and serving in Belize! I caught up on sleep and was ready to go this morning. When we arrived at the school we were greeted by the staff and students (the students even sang the Belize national anthem!)

In addition to meeting the students and playing some games, we began our project! We are helping out with a school greenhouse project: today we dug a trench around the greenhouse so we can install a fence tomorrow. The kids were able to play and have some fun with us during their breaks. I participated in a basketball game. It was awesome!

After a long day of work and play, we returned to our homebase for dinner and reflection. I am so excited to see what the best of our time here has in store! Everything has been so nice and interesting!

Ikram

Today was awesome!!! We had some super dope breakfast and I got 12 hours of sleep, so I was well-rested for a long day of work.

We went to the school and met not only the school children and faculty, but also representatives from the Ministry of Education. The kids were great and I had a blast meeting and playing basketball with them. I also got to do some serious manual labor and I’m eager to do more.

Though we did a lot of great work today and had a lot of great food, I’m really hoping to do work that’s meaningful and will improve these children’s lives in some. I’m getting super tired now and my calloused hands are cramping on me, so I’ll catch you later diary.

**January 7, 2015**

Frank

I know we’ve only been here for a little while, but today was the best day so far. We didn’t do very much work because we had to wait a while for supplies. This meant we got to have more time to play with the kids. Conversations with them has become a lot more comfortable, and I’ve begun to see myself a part of two groups – the basketball crew and the (non-) basketball crew. Each kid has a different story and its fascinating to talk to them.

Two of the kids live right next to the resort, and we got to see them in their home element. It makes me wonder about the things these kids go through that we won’t ever get a chance to see. It’s one thing to see someone at school, but it’s another thing to see what their home life looks like. I just really appreciate the opportunity to be a part of at least a small part of their life. I find myself more excited for recess than anything else. Looking forward to more good days!

**January 8, 2015**

Michael Daniel

Today was the day that I know that I finally made a connection with the kids. It was such a rewarding experience to see the children’s eyes light up when we arrived. We were greeted with smiles and by today they knew all of our names. My biggest highlight of the day was when we taught the kids the game, “Ninja.” They caught on so fast and I could tell that they genuinely enjoyed it. We shared laughs and made memories to last a lifetime. One of the downsides was that it rained.. A LOT! Some of the work that we completed was so easily reversed by some rainfall. Overall though, the work was rewarding because we got a lot done and truly bonded as a team. Although this didn’t happen today, I still want to write about it. Several of us spent time together while the power was out by exploring what nature had to offer around our accommodations. We found grass that closes and shrivels when touched, howler monkeys, and pineapple trees/shrubs. We did a short trek into the rainforest as well where we got bitten by many bugs but got closer to the monkeys and nature overall. We have had such amazing food and hospitality since we have arrived and it is mind-blowing. Well, I need to sleep so bye for now!

**January 9, 2015**

Andrew DiNardo

We are becoming more of a team with every passing day. With that, we have impacted the kids even more than before. As we continue to build each other up, we also have furthered our efforts with the greenhouse. Our progress today was amazing. It felt so great to see our team come together even with the off and on rain.

I truly hope that these people we are meeting remember us. Not only as another group that has come through, but as people that have played a part in changing their lives. It’s so cool to see how interested in us they are. They will huddle around simply to listen or watch us; it’s so amazing.

This area is all so new to me. At first I wasn’t quite sure I’d be able to connect to the people and the cultural lifestyle – I think I’ve got the hang of it.

Frank Will

Today was definitely our hardest day of work. We finished the entire gate today. This included putting up the fence around the pokes we grounded, clearing out the puddle of water that had built up in the trenches over night, and putting cement into the trenches for extra stability. It was actually a very interesting process. I was initially a bit dissatisfied with my work assignment. I was one of the few team members with work boots so I was assigned to work in the greenhouse. I wasn’t really understanding the vision for the greenhouse, so it was a tough task for me.

After lunch, I was assigned to a different post. I’m not sure how I ended up working with Dion on cement, but I did that for quite a long time. It was some of the toughest work I’ve ever done. We had to shovel the sand into a pile, lightly pour the cement, mix them together very well, add water, and then mix the cement all together. It was vas very taxing, especially since it kept raining. I still had fun! I now consider myself a concrete master.

**January 10, 2015**

Ikram

Today was a pretty dope day. We went to a farm in CAyo and got a neat tour of a vocational school that utilizes it. On the way there, I had an amazing conversation on the van and got to see some pretty badass things like a prison.

Afterwards, we hit up San Iguasio and it was pretty cool as well. Today was apparently “Market Day” so we had a chance to buy some great stuff.

The lunch we had was excellent and Michael’s birthday cake made it so much better. To end it off, we had an incredible three course dinner prepared by a new chef. All in all though, pretty good day.

**January 11, 2015**

James

Today we did a lot of awesome things. We ziplined over two rivers, ate at Cheers for lunch, went to the Belize Zoo, went to the ocean front in Belize City, and ate Chinese food!

It was a particularly exhausting day, but we were able to see a lot of amazing things and have some fun. My favorite part was driving through Belize City. It was interesting to see a city so different than any US city. The streets, stores, buildings, and city culture were completely different.

When we returned to the Nature Resort, everyone was exhausted. WE drove a lot today and kept busy all day. I decided to get to bed early tonight in order to be well rested for the service to be done in the morning.

**January 12, 2015**

Michael

Today was fantastic! We made new friends at each of our new schools and I ended up at Rancho Delores. All of the kids were so nice and at that stage where anyone is able to be their friends. I made a really close friend named “Kenton” and he was the coolest dude ever! He is only 5 and he is beyond his years. We played “Godzilla” where he stood on my feet and we marched around roaring like Godzilla, terrorizing the town. Later in the day, he “shot me” and “sent me to jail” where I was more than happy to read for him. We also made plans today to make the school awesome and I know the product will be breath-taking, inspiring to the kids, and lasting. I know that I will never forget this experience! Signing off, Michael.

**January 12, 2015**

Andrew

Going to a new school today was refreshing. As I look back on our trip thus far, I remember where we were roughly a week ago. An anxious group of people confined to conversations with the people they were already friends with. As we pass the halfway mark of our trip, I see us creating strong, meaningful bonds that could last a lifetime.

Upon arriving at our new school, we were greeted by rows of eyes peering out the windows of the classrooms. I love kids. I love how genuine they are. I love how they communicate. Most of all, I love how they remind me to not be afraid to embrace who I am at the core. It’s always refreshing being in that kind of environment.

**January 13, 2015**

Ikram

Today we lead Candeu Day Activities at Douhle Haead Cabbage and it was great! Our group was dealing with the academic aspect of the activities and we were able to get across a lot of great ideas.

Jessica and James discovered the necessities for plant growth and different types of soil, and many of the (?) were already aware of the (?)… Katie and I discussed composting and how to make a compost pile/bin. This aspect was newsfor the students, and it seemed like (?) something that they would be willing to participate in.

Lastly, we (?) up at Roidio (?) and I feel like our team did an amazing job. I’m really going to miss these kids.

**January 15, 2015**

Michael

Today was the day that we presented our Garden Day Activities to the Belize City School kids. The school that we were at had about 700 kids but we only saw and taught about 100. When we first arrived, the children sang the national anthem, welcomed us, and recited the national prayer. It was strange to see that the children in the city were far more social than the children at Double Head Cabbage. They were different in the way that they approached strangers. When at “Double Head,” the kids were very shy while the kids in the city readily approached us and asked us about our presence. One child in particular touched my heart. His name was Gregory and his little sister was Kyla. His name is the same as my father’s, and he shared many awkward yet wonderful quirks with my father as well. He told us all his story of how he maintains his farm for his parents and what really hit me was what he did at the end of the day. He loved partaking in our planting activity and when we were walking out of the compound. He gave me a hug, said “thank you,” and asked for more seeds to plant in his own garden. That moment made me feel hope for this country and its agriculture/sustainability-based goals. It made me feel like our work was heard, understood, and taken to heart which truly meant the world to me. Until we speak again…

James

Today we woke up early and had breakfast at 7:00am. We needed to allow a little extra time to travel because today we were leading our day activities in Belize City.

We presented our activities and lessons the previous day at Double Head Cabbage and were very pleased with how they went. During that night’s reflection we touched on what new challenges we would face while presenting at a new school.

We arrived at around 9:00am. The school was surrounded by a large fence and a few staff members dedicated to policy who came in and out of the campus. We set up in an area directly outside at some classrooms and led our first round of activities. The Greenhouse at the Belize City School was a little further along (although, not by much) than Double Head Cabbage, so the students were able to utilize the space to learn about sustainability and gardening.

After lunch we taught 4 other rounds of 2 more classes before taking off to explore Belize City a little bit more and eventually eat dinner. The lesson went very well for the most part. The students were interested in the activities and had a lot of fun! In preparing for my group’s presentation and activity about soil, I realized how interesting the subject of gardening is. I hope to find a book that – like Gardening In Southern Belize – can teach me about how to garden in my South-Eastern Pennsylvania backyard.

**January 15, 2015**

Michael

Today was our last day with the children and also our last day as a service trip group. The day was bitter-sweet. We celebrated all of the hard work we put into our project, James’ birthday, and our love for the bonds we created. We visited the Altun Ha Mayan Ruins and that might have been one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I look forward o a life of travels and service. For the last time, signing off…

Lindsey

Today’s final reflection is running through my mind as we fly back to the U.S. People are worried about falling into “old routines,” not being as flexible, adaptable, and open-minded as they were in Belize. We discussed ways that we as individuals and as a team can continue to remain strong, flexible, and thoughtful as our busy lives resume. How can we continue to grow our love for service, giving, and peace? The final bonfire, final ceremony, and goodbyes to Betra (?) and the others made an impact on me that I won’t forget. Our team was strong, our memories great, and our service changed a community forever. I couldn’t have asked for a better experience and am so thankful this all happened! Best to All. Always, Lindsey