Ohlone students engage in outreach to Mexico

By CLAIRE EWING
Staff writer

Imagine having to drive a hour each way to your church every week. Imagine no shopping malls or movie theaters. Imagine seeing abandoned dogs and houses at every street corner. Imagine 4-year-olds wandering the streets by themselves.

In late April, members of my church and I drove down to Mexicali, Mexico, to help out and to give back to their community.

I’d never gone to a different country that does not have all of the opportunities that Americans have.

What I saw in Mexicali shocked me.

Children as young as 12 years old competed with adults to sell trinkets in the middle of street intersections. And yet, they all seem so much happier than I am even though they don’t have what the things we have, such as iPhones and MacBooks. They don’t even have the clothes that we have.

The kids are the biggest influence, however. They don’t care if your hair is dirty—we only got two showers during the week—or if your clothes didn’t match or if you have a Gucci or Prada bag.

Playing with the children, coloring with them and loving them is more enough for these children because a lot of their parents apparently don’t pay any attention to them.

Ohlone student April Davis-Engstrom said she has visited Mexico for service trips six times in 10 years.

“Oh each occasion, it always amazes me the stark contrast between the wealthy and the poor,” she said.

“It is not uncommon to see what would here be classified as a middle-class home right next to a falling-apart shanty house.”

Ohlone student Laura Knab said seeing how some Mexicali residents lived made her grateful for her home.

“The houses, which hold up to six people is a one bedroom shack, are built out of random pieces of plywood that are found around town,” she said.

“They barely have enough space to live.”

Caitlan Yamaguchi, a Washington High School senior, observed that the Mexicans they’d met responded positively to their invitation to join them in church services.

“Noe, a Mexicali resident, had a different perspective on California than that of the American visitors.

“The biggest difference I have seen is the agriculture,” she said.

“He in the states, even if you did say you were with a church, they wouldn’t say yes, much less give you the time of the day.”

Both Davis-Engstrom and Knab said visiting Mexicali made them grateful for what they have in California.

“I believe in order to truly realize one’s blessings, it takes seeing the conditions others live in,” said Davis-Engstrom.

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CLAIRE EWING/ MONITOR

South of the border, things are a lot different than they are in the United States. Ohlone students had the chance to experience what it is like to go without things they take for granted such as a daily shower when on a church mission. Above left, church members help fix buildings in Mexicali. Above right, stray dogs wander the Mexicali streets. At left, church members play with the Mexican children who don’t always receive the same attention from their own parents.