

Eva's Year as a Volunteer in Santiago, Chile

In order to go to Chile, I raised £6200 in 6 months by writing to more than 100 charitable trusts, hosting fundraising events such as bake sales, cinema movie screenings, a ceilidh, through part time work and through speaking to strangers in the streets of Edinburgh. The biggest donation having come from your charitable trust. Thanks to your donation, I was able to spend the last seven months in Santiago, Chile working as a volunteer English teacher.

Once in Santiago, I lived with a Chilean family living in Quilicura, one of the poorer areas of Santiago and worked full time as an English teaching classroom assistant at "Colegio Juan Luis Undurraga Anat" from August 2019 - March 2020. Working with children at risk encouraging them to learn English and to see the wider world of opportunities outside of the community they live in.



Initially, despite having studied Spanish throughout high school, I quickly found that my Spanish was very different to the Chilean Spanish that was being spoken. However, I engaged myself and learned quickly, to the point where I can now confidently say that I am fluent in Spanish.

Upon arrival, me and my Partner Lucy, were told that one of us would have to help with the older half of the school – the “high school” - and the other with the younger children. As I spoke more Spanish than Lucy, we decided that it was less nerve racking for me to work with the older children. Initially this was very scary, as I was not only working with 13/14-year olds, but also with children of ages up to 19 years old, which felt strange given that initially I was only seventeen. However, I quickly fell in love with the children and my job.

At first, it was clear that they were hesitant to open up, to welcome me into their lives, but as soon as they realised that I am no different to them, that I had no judgement towards them, they began to open up and reach out to me. I found that with my presence in the classrooms, the children felt more inspired and interested in learning English as they wanted to ask me questions and wanted to speak to me. All the children were all super interested in my story and how it was that a seventeen-year-old was in a completely part of the world, away from my family, working at this school. I heard so many stories from these children that were both heart-breaking and inspiring. Far too many of the children were adult carers, had undergone pregnancies at thirteen, had been kicked out at twelve, were part of gangs, had lost multiple friends, had families whose main income was drugs, to name a few. Every day I went into work knowing that I would hear a new story and would be able to share a part of myself in return with these children. I woke up every day feeling like I had a purpose, like I would be able to make a difference in one of these children's lives – even if it was just giving them the space to speak and be heard. In this way, my year turned out to be about a lot more than just teaching English.



The seven months in Quilicura passed quickly, too quickly, and before I knew it Coronavirus had arrived, and the schools had been shut for two weeks and we were sent back to the UK. Not having been able to say goodbye to the children I worked with was really upsetting, however I plan on going back to Chile independently as soon as Corona passes over, where I will hopefully continue to be a volunteer whilst studying Psychology at the Open university – a decision I made whilst in Chile. Speaking to the children helped me realise how important it is for them to have someone to speak to and how fascinated I am by these children's minds – Also a decision impacted by my love of Chile and not wanting to have to wait many years before being able to return.

I feel that I have found a second home as I completely adore the country and its people. I can honestly say that I have changed significantly during these months and I will forever treasure the impact it has had on me as an individual.

Thank you so much for your support and for making my year possible,

Eva Sigurdardottir

