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Lumos Final Report

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My Lumos experience in Argentina was nothing short of incredible. From the actual service to engaging in Argentine culture to having my entire career path thrown into question, it was an eventful trip. Working with children in one of Argentina's most infamous slums does not allow one to go unchanged, and the experience certainly taught me a lot. More importantly, however, I was able to make an impact in the community I served. Volunteering with Detrás de Todos allowed me to invest in people I would not otherwise have the opportunity to invest in, and I believe I was able to leave a positive mark on many of the children and fellow volunteers I worked with.

My service project in Buenos Aires involved volunteering with Detrás de Todos, a non-profit organization that provides after-school programs for children who live in Villa 31. Villa 31 is arguably Argentina's most infamous *villa miseria*, an illegal settlement of undocumented workers who live in impoverished conditions. What makes the villa even more emblematic is that only train tracks separate it from the neighborhood of Retiro, one of Buenos Aires' wealthiest *barrios*. For my Lumos project, I worked alongside Detrás de Todos to provide after-school and weekend enrichment programs for children who live in this villa.

My service consisted of various different aspects. Each day we put on a different workshop, and the common themes were homework, art, theatre, and music. When helping with homework, I assisted students with their assignments in math, reading, social studies, and English. For music workshops we did an activity where we gave students a rough rhyme-scheme

outline, then let them write lyrics to a song. We would later take these lyrics and put them to music so the whole class could sing along. Art workshops consisted not only of painting and coloring, but also of creating jewelry such as bracelets and necklaces with some of the older and more responsible students. Theatre workshops were some of the most raucous and fun workshops, and they were a special favorite among the children. In these workshops, different volunteers would dress up and act out different skits utilizing members of the student “audience.” All the workshops served to develop aspects of the children’s creative and socio-emotional being, and they often intersected with themes or topics students had been covering in classes lately.

I was able to leave my biggest impact through the individual relationships I formed during my time in the villa. I connected on a deeper level with some of the students I got to know through helping with homework or leading workshops. Over the course of my service I was able to get to know them and (in some cases) their family members, and I was able to invest in and encourage them as they progressed throughout the school year. As a foreigner, I was also able to share part of my own story with them and expose them to different set of cultural values and practices. One of my favorite aspects of the trip was getting to learn about the experience of life in the villa and seeing how the children pushed through this and strove for something greater than their current situation.

My experience in Argentina also changed me a lot on a personal level. For example, it helped increase my independence and taught me to get around by myself in a large city. Since I lived with my Argentine family outside of the main downtown area, I had to commute in to work by myself every day. This consisted of me walking to the train station, taking the train into

the city, riding a subway across the city, and then taking a bus into the villa. Learning how to commute in a large and foreign city was a great experience that often pushed the limits of my comfort. Additionally, I grew a lot on a personal level by investing in a church community by home and getting to know the different people there. I was able to see an expression of faith that differs from the American experience of Christianity, and I also made some good friends along the way. Interacting with these people on a weekly basis helped me paint a good picture of what life is like for people living in Buenos Aires.

Additionally, one of the biggest impacts my time in Argentina had on me was the way it influenced my future career path. Before heading to Argentina, I was dead set on working in the music business and nothing else. Upon returning, however, I have a very different outlook and am considering a wide range of career options. It's not so much that I don't want to do music business, but rather that there are a lot of other opportunities out there that would offer me a more dynamic career where I can move around and live in different places. One thing my time in Argentina showed me was how much I enjoy connecting with people and learning about different ways of life, and this is something I want to replicate in my future career.

While the trip was great, it wasn't always easy. One of the toughest things I struggled with was having to show patience with the children during the afterschool programs. I was tried and tempted various times by certain rambunctious kids, so learning to stay calm while keeping the class under control wasn't always the easiest. Another difficult aspect was not having as much independence as I do at home or school, because even though I was able to do a lot, not being familiar with the layout of the whole city sometimes caused me to rely on my host family more than I would have liked to.

Overall, I believe I made the most of my trip to Argentina. I was able to make a visible impact on people in Villa 31 and contribute my time to an organization that is doing great work in that community. I was able to see my old Argentine family and reconnect, and in meeting a lot of their friends I was able to educate them about many of the issues still being faced in Villa 31. I'm extremely grateful to Lumos for the opportunity to serve abroad, and I'm also grateful for the ways this trip was able to impact citizens of Villa 31 and myself in ways I had never anticipated.