

# Children of the Dump, Mexico 2011

Thanks to everyone who contributed school supplies, clothing, bathroom supplies, etc for the trip. It was an amazing experience for our whole family.

We were picked up at our hotel by the president of the Children of the Dump, his translator, and his wife. Did I mention that there are six of us and the vehicle is an SUV? That's NINE people and three large suitcases in an SUV. Needless to say, we got to know each other quite intimately during the short drive to the first elementary school!

When we arrived at the school, the children were having their recess break. The school is set up in a U-shape with an open cemented area in the middle with a roof overhead. This is their assembly area, play area, and sometimes, the classroom area too. The buildings are built with cement block and are VERY basic.

We took half of the supplies we brought into the principal's office and the teachers had the children line up so we could give them each a toy.



Each child waited patiently for their turn but you could definitely see the excitement on their faces. One of the teachers said that for many of these children, this would be their first toy! One little boy received an English word game that matched opposites like a puzzle. He immediately opened it, ran to his teacher, gathered his friends, and they started playing. Soon the whole school was gathered together and they were all playing the game.



After distributing the toys, we played with the kids for a little while. One little boy wanted to show me his new dinosaur book so we looked at it together. He giggled when I looked scared at the “mas dientes” (lots of teeth) dinosaur. Then, another little boy pulled out an alphabet book and we sang the alphabet song in English and Spanish together.

When the kids went back to their classrooms, we had a small tour of the school. There was a principal’s office, two kindergarden classes, one grade one class, one grade two class, one grade three class, and a science room with some animal pictures painted on the wall and a globe. The classrooms are very basic with all the kids sitting together around long tables. There are no bookshelves full of books, no colourful posters, no comfy rugs to sit on, and no computers. There were plenty of beautiful smiles, eager to learn children, and dedicated teachers. These are the lucky children – in order to be allowed to go to school, you have to have a school shirt, a pair of shoes, and basic school supplies. Most of these families struggle to keep their fast growing children in shoes that fit so that they can continue to go to school.

We left the clothing, shoes, and school supplies with the teachers to distribute to the kids that need them the most.

Then we all piled back into the SUV and went to the construction site to see the prototype of the home that they are building. Children of the Dump are planning to build homes for all of these needy families over the next few years. There is no lumber on the construction site. These houses are built with flour bags from the local bakeries filled with mud from the worksite. These are stacked on top of each other and long pieces of rebar are nailed down through a couple of layers to hold them together. Once they are all stacked up, they will be putting a layer of mud mixed with cement on top to make the house look like stucco or adobe. The houses are very small – two 10x10’ bedrooms, small living/kitchen room, and a bathroom/laundry room. Most of them will house between six and eight people when they are occupied.

After the construction site, we went for a drive through the neighbourhood and through the garbage dump where the families work. A couple of years ago, you would have found five, six, seven year old children working here alongside their older siblings and parents. Now, we only

saw two or three children in the dump. This is a place that you definitely want to have your windows UP when you drive through. I have never smelled anything quite so bad before!



These workers, sort through the garbage by hand pulling out anything recyclable, usable, or sellable. The workers are in the dump working about 10 hours a day and for that privilege, they are paid 10 pesos a day (about \$1.) The birds you see are turkey vultures. When we were driving through, it was mentioned that when the small children worked here, you would often see the kids fighting with the vultures for food scraps.

We then went just down the road and walked through a little alley where these families have staked out their lots and built their homes. You wouldn't believe what they build their homes from. We saw one house that had one wall built out of corrugated tin, the back wall was two pallets, and the third wall was a hanging sheet. There was no fourth wall. A rotten piece of plywood was propped over the top as a roof. There was a lady in the front "garden" washing the family's laundry in a small tin bucket. She already had two clotheslines full of brilliantly clean clothes. There was an old piece of gutter that she had planted a few vegetables in. In order to water them, she had to walk two blocks to get a bucket of water.

We saw this young teenager – I'd guess he's about 14 years old. He looks after his baby sister, toddler sister, and ailing grandparents during the day while his parents work in the dump. Because of these responsibilities, he is not able to go to school. Most of the kids in this area will not have the opportunity to go to high school. Notice in the picture that he has bare feet. These are tremendously hard working, destitute people but everywhere we went, we saw a lot of smiling faces. Never did we feel unsafe when we were walking through the streets.



After visiting their homes, we went to the second elementary school. This is the poorest school in the area. The children come from these homes we saw. We were told a story about a five year old who would walk to school every day and look through the fence hoping that one day she'd be allowed to go to school. Her parents had no money to buy her shoes or school supplies. The Children of the Dump got together and gave her a "scholarship" of \$25 a month for school supplies, shoes, and uniform (shirt) so that she can go to school.

The playground equipment is very basic but that doesn't stop the kids from having fun!



When we were at the school, we decided to visit the bathroom. We found the tiniest toilets we've ever seen. They were about 18" (45cm) high. Oh, and if you need to go, you need to get the toilet paper from your teacher!



The kids all gathered together in the open area and we told them a little about Canada. They couldn't believe that we got SNOW! Muy frio!



Then somehow we decided it would be a good idea to teach them the chicken dance (guess you had to be there!). There were lots of giggles from both the Mexicanos and the Canadians! The kids did a great job – MUCH better than the adults!



When it was time to leave, there were some great hugs from the kids and lots of high fives. It was Hasta Luego (see you later) as we will definitely be back!

These kids are in desperate need of just about everything but one thing I noticed is that they are genuinely happy kids and very grateful for what they do have. My kids now have a much better idea of what is “needed” and what is “wanted”.

Next year, we hope to take some toy cars, skipping ropes, dolls, and books as well as more school supplies and hopefully some nice new shoes. I’m going to start shopping very soon.

If you want more information about Children of the Dump, go to [www.childrenofthedump.org](http://www.childrenofthedump.org)

Thanks to everyone who helped make these little lives a bit easier. I’m going to be asking for your help again next year so start saving your unneeded stuff!