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Amanda ReCupido
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Alumna Returns from Service Trip in Nicaragua April 20, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – This past February, Illinois Wesleyan University December 2006 graduate Pamela Solowski joined a team of doctors, nurses and volunteers in Nicaragua to distribute supplies and food and to assist in community programs. The trip was sponsored by the Bloomington-Normal Wesley Methodist Church, which seeks a healthcare-focused, Spanish speaking student to participate each year.



Pamela Solowski assists a family in a volunteer clinic in Nicaragua.

Among the poorest countries of Latin America, Nicaragua has nearly three quarters of its population living in rural areas with little access to healthcare, education, legal services and employment opportunities. According to the World Bank's Nicaragua Poverty Assessment, more than 25 percent of the population struggles to survive on less than one dollar per day.

Solowski, who earned degrees in biology and Hispanic studies during her time at Illinois Wesleyan, helped treat over one thousand patients with sicknesses ranging from a cough and a headache to anemia and diabetes. She described the trip as "a very shaping experience with a plethora of beautiful moments, mixed with some ugly, man-made realities."

A typical day for Solowski consisted of an early breakfast followed by a long bus ride to the clinic where Solowski explained to the patients in Spanish basic health information and how to use their medications. This position fell to Solowski given her Spanish language experience, which proved vital in translating between volunteer doctors and patients both the immediate actions and the long-term preventions they could take. "Giving a child an inhaler is a good temporary solution for bad attacks, but it was important to stress that it would be helpful not to be surrounded by smoky environments," she said. "It was also imperative to make sure that people knew how to use their medication properly. In these countries, the misuse of aspirin has been said to lead to ulcers."

This stress on health education was extremely important as the group realized their efforts could only go so far. "Most people do not have the resources to obtain medication. We can only provide temporary relief," Solowski said. She plans to work on an international level after pursuing a masters degree in maternal/child health with an international health focus.

"Despite how conditions are," Solowski said, "I am an optimist, an idealist, a believer that most people do care, but are just unaware. It was a special and rare occasion for me to participate in this trip with other caring volunteers."

Contact: Amanda ReCupido, (309) 556-3181