

By JC Montenegro

(Salesian Volunteers, CA) – It could be said that the Salesian volunteers started back in the time when Don Bosco started his ministry with the young. The Salesian cooperators took upon themselves the mission of Don Bosco, to form good Christians and honest citizens. Later on, the volunteer program as we know it today started globally in Ecuador in 1974. Two young men were sent for a short period of time to go serve in the Amazon jungle. In our province the program started in 2007 and have sent 37 young people to serve the youth in our communities. This year God willing we will have 3 more young people in our province.



However some might still be wondering, what are the Salesian volunteers? It's an opportunity, for young people to serve in the Salesian mission for a year. This is a special moment in their lives, where the young volunteers experience what is to live in a Salesian community and at the same time they

work hand in hand with our Salesians to serve the poor and the needy. Something that not many religious communities offer to our youth now days.

A life changing experience where young people transition from being students to collaborators; from being part of the bunch to being a point of reference of change; of living with their parents and having no responsibilities to living in a community with various responsibilities among those, animating children and teens in a mission; of caring of their own personal needs to discovering and taking care of the needs of others. All these change the life perspective of the young volunteers.



Critical moments like these, with a well intentioned accompaniment along with the “the guiding whisper in the ear” what Don Bosco used to emphasize, and the participation in the community life, prayers and living with our Salesians; being on retreat, could be a soil ground for our young people to grow personally and spiritually. I believe we need to ask ourselves: are the

Salesian volunteers just our collaborators? Or, are the Salesian volunteers the young people who God placed in our communities for our care?

We will now present the skills that many of our volunteers developed during their volunteer experience. The list starts from the most common to the least common according to answering the question as to what skills did they develop while serving as volunteers:

- Adapting to other environment, developing the ability to communicate with others and learn their culture.
- Self knowledge-who I am as a person, and my gifts as an individual.
- A relationship with God- it improved during the experience when you see God as the center and the only one I can rely on.
- Leadership skills-that will help me in life.
- Improvement- the Salesian volunteers helped me in acquiring the job I have now. (69% of our volunteers obtain a BA) all this was possible after what I learned in my volunteer experience.

There are other benefits in research to be confirmed but that are important to mention. Of all the former volunteers that participated in the survey, 1.6% has gotten divorced, compared to the universal divorce statistics of 27.83%. We can conclude that a volunteer experience helps our young people to establish more stable relationships. However, I emphasize that this information is still under investigation in our research.



Another benefit of our Salesian volunteers is that it opens the process to discernment, which shows that 5.6% of our former volunteers are now religiously consecrated. Their decision to join the religious life was based on their experience of service.

In conclusion we can see that the financial benefits of our Salesian volunteer program is not costly, on the contrary there is a higher benefit on investing in our volunteers if we consider what is our Salesian mission.