



THE JOY OF SOLIDARITY THROUGH VOLUNTEERING



Honduran high school students learn solidarity through volunteering activities at schools across the country. De Lectores a Líderes (known also as the Honduras Reading Activity) prepares many of them to teach younger students in their communities to read.

Every Saturday, Valeri Jerezano, 16, tutors students at the *Primero de Febrero* school in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Valeri is in grade 11 and attends an exclusive private school. In Honduras, all high school students are required to complete 100 hours of community service in order to receive their diploma. This requirement is referred to as the *Trabajo Educativo Social (TES)* and usually consists of planting trees or helping the elderly. However, Valeri was invited to complete her service through the *De Lectores a Líderes* by helping children improve their reading skills.

“At first, I thought it was just a literacy project,” Valeri says. “But this is so much more. I didn’t know reading books or teaching children to like books could be so fulfilling.”

Since October 2018, Valeri has tutored three children as part of her TES, two girls and one boy, who are between six and seven years old. “The fact that I’m young and closer to their age than their parents or a teacher helps my children



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feel relaxed and less afraid of making mistakes,” Valeri says. “That is the most important thing. I can already see they are improving.”

The Lectores community participation team has been impressed with the commitment of the youth volunteers.

“It’s heartwarming what the volunteers do,” says Maritza Zelaya, Lectores’ community participation specialist. “Volunteers go beyond what they are asked, and they do it from their heart. They even buy books and give them to the children. They make furniture for the classroom. They laugh, dance, and enjoy these sessions, making us hopeful and happy that our work is being carried on by the next generation.”

And volunteering benefits both the tutor and student. “One of my pupils cut her *baleada* in half and offered it to me,” Valeri recalls, with emotion in her voice. “She comes from a poor family, and I’m sure that was all the food she was going to eat that day.”

For Valeri, this unexpected act of kindness left an impression on her. “This kind of situation teaches you a lesson of humbleness and care,” she says. “It taught me the joy of solidarity and hope for a better country.”

Valeri is one of 2,700 tutors who were trained by the Honduras Reading Activity from [month year] through December 2018. Since the end of the 2018 school year, the project has connected with 14 bilingual schools, which follow the North American system (classes from August to June). This number will grow once the regular school year starts in February 2019.