

Testimonial submitted by Alyssa Sheets
Recipient of the 2009 Judith Peters *Aprender ayudando* Spanish Service Award

Throughout my experiences serving the Hispanic community, the moment that taught me the most was the moment in which I was doing the least. I learned how to best serve the Hispanic community when I fell asleep.

The third day we were in Mexico over Spring Break, I had just finished working in the Spanish preschool classroom, and was sitting in the day care center watching and playing with the children. One of my students, Ana Delia, who was the smallest girl in the class, came up to the rocking chair I was sitting in and crawled up onto my lap. I gave her a blanket, and she curled up and closed her eyes. I had my arm around her and felt something in her sweatshirt pocket. “Ana, ¿qué es?” I said. She looked at me with fear in her eyes and slowly pulled out part of a bean burrito partially wrapped in aluminum foil. “Es mío.” She said quietly, as if I was going to steal it from her. I couldn’t help but smile, and simply said “Bien amor. Está bien. Es tuyo.” She smiled back at me cuddled back up in my arms and drifted off to sleep as I rocked in the chair. What seemed like seconds later, I heard my friend Jess saying “Alyssa, Alyssa, wake up.” I opened my eyes to find that I had fallen asleep, and that several of the other members of Sweetwine were watching me with smiles on their faces. They told me I had been like that for awhile. I just laughed and looked down at Ana who was still sleeping deeply in my arms.

As I looked at her, I couldn’t help but wonder if this was the first time that anyone had ever had the time to sit in a comfortable rocking chair and rock her to sleep. A little girl who had parents that had to work from dawn until dusk, who had seven other siblings to share a room with, who had to hide a taco from breakfast, or maybe even from dinner or lunch the day before in her pocket in case she did not have the opportunity to eat that

day. I couldn't help but wonder if anyone had been able to show her that she was special enough to sit on their lap by herself and be rocked to sleep and protected and cared for. She trusted me because I knew her language. She trusted me because she knew I was there to help her. She trusted me and loved me enough just simply for being there for her, to fall asleep in my arms.

This moment showed me that all you need to serve the Hispanic community, or anyone for that matter, is a willing and loving heart. When you realize that no one is too low for you to serve, and no one is too lost for you to love, you can reach and connect with so many different people. I realized in that moment that I have been blessed with so much, and that there are so many who have very little. I have had the opportunity to have an education, to be understood by those around me, to be cared for and taken care of by those around me. This one little girl had so much love to give, and all I had to do to serve her, to care for her, was to fall asleep. Whether I am in the United States helping the children of Mexican immigrants learn English, or in Mexico helping the indigenous children speak Spanish, how much more can I do, can anyone do, if they put their whole heart into serving a community? When I fell asleep in a chair holding a precious little girl, I learned that it doesn't take having all the financial resources or having perfect language skills to serve the Hispanic community. All it takes is the ability to love.