

# Me to We

## Lending a Hand in Ecuador

BY DONNA MORGAN AND JUDITH OLDFIELD

Amazing, unforgettable, awesome, memorable and life-changing were just some of the words 10 Pathfinders and Rangers from across Canada used to describe our international trip to Ecuador last year. We went there to help build a school in a Girl Guides of Canada-Guides du Canada partnership project with Me to We, and to explore this lovely country. We came home knowing we had made a difference not only in the lives of the people we wanted to help, but in our own, as well.

**W**e were met in Quito by our Me to We facilitator, Camila, and spent our first day exploring the Old Town, where we were fascinated by the breathtaking architecture, especially the intricately-carved cathedrals, embedded with gold. We also visited the Guías Scouts del Ecuador at their headquarters, where we were introduced to Mafer and Anita, who joined us for the remainder of our trip. We played games both in English and Spanish and shared Girl Guide cookies, and despite our language barriers, we all were able to communicate well enough with each other.

### A Community Effort

*Photos: Judith Oldfield*  
The community we were building the school in is called Gula-huayco, where 23 families live in simple houses and farm the land by hand. Our job was to assist with the construction of a second classroom, and for seven days we mixed mortar, hauled 2,000 pre-made bricks, unloaded, sanded and painted approximately 1,000 roof tiles, and painted a healthy-living mural in the dining hall.







When not working, we found time for co-operative games, leadership activities, candy breaks and even a game of soccer to keep us warm – which was most welcome, as the week's weather featured snow flurries, sleet, rain and temperatures below 10 degrees Celsius.

Once the mural was finished, the roof tiles were ready to go, and the classroom walls were at the stage for the roof to go on, it was up to the community to finish the project. At the end of our final day, the foreman said a few words of thanks, and we could hear the appreciation in his voice, even before his words were translated into English for us.

### Leading and Learning

We spent our evenings working to inspire and empower the girls to create positive changes in their lives. Camila helped us gain the confidence and skills to achieve all our goals throughout the trip. She challenged us, bringing out laughter, tears and emotions we had buried deep, in ways that were both fun and enlightening. For example, we spent one evening discovering how much money a family of six to 10 members had to live on, and the following day we visited a local food market to see how much our "earnings" could buy. What an eye opener that was!

On one of our days in the village, we hosted 19 local children. We had lunch and then we led them in some group activities, before splitting into stations. When Mafer (or Muffin as we called her) explained that we were going to play "Duck, Duck, Goose" in English, the children looked downright terrified; however, in the end they had as much fun as we did.

On another day we visited a women's group for some "hands-on" learning about the daily work that provides them with a sustainable income. We tried shearing a sheep with scissors and spinning, weaving and knitting the wool. When we had finished with our efforts, we were amused, and not surprised, to watch the women efficiently undo our work and redo it correctly.

### Hiking and Reflecting

Our final days in Ecuador found us hiking in the Cloud Forest, where we spent time reflecting on our experiences, brainstorming ideas and setting individual goals for the future. "The Ecuador adventure has given me more than I could wish for," said one girl. "Without Girl Guides, I would never have an opportunity like this to make new friends and to learn about another culture, country and way of life. I experienced something life-altering with an amazing group of girls." Another girl said, "Memories of this trip will stay with me for a very long time and I hope that what I have done on this trip and what I plan to do in the future will help to create a better life for someone, somewhere, somehow." 🌍

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