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Radford University's Catholic Campus Ministry went to Managua, Nicaragua for seven days over spring break to help restore different parts of a public school and to help clean out a garbage dump.

There were 10 students and four adult chaperones that spent their spring break this way. The trip was planned by Victoria Hansen, the outreach minister, and Mary Semenczuk, the CCM intern who reached out to the International Samaritan to help with their trip. The International Samaritan is a Catholic Organization focused on bettering homes. The organization's mission is to help end these horrible living conditions.

The students worked the entire week they were there; this was a life-changing experience for all who were involved. The students attended the school that they would be working. The school, Jose Artigas, has 15 to 18 classrooms, 2,000 students, and 40 students to every teacher. The younger kids, pre-kindergarten to fifth grade attend in the morning while sixth through 12th grade attend in the afternoon.

“People had nothing, but (. . .) they cared about happiness,” RU sophomore interior design major Haley Yost said.

They played with children at recess and teach subjects like math and English later on in the day in the classroom. RU students did some manual labor at the school as well. They uprooted, leveled and poured new concrete for the playground. They tore up the sidewalks and put down fresh, even cemented sidewalks. Along with redoing the boys and girls bathrooms they also repainted them.

Yost was a student who went along on this trip. She was very excited when she was given this opportunity because she was not able to make it to Poland with CCM last spring break. She had no worries about being disconnected from the outside world here in the U.S. without her cellphone or computer.

“A lot of the things we use to define our lives here in the United States don’t matter,” Yost said.

RU students got to experience poverty they have never witnessed in the U.S. They went to a garbage dump, La Churecha, where the children from the school go either before or after they get out. The children and their parents spend their days searching for anything they can turn in to make money; things like glass, plastic and aluminum are just some of the items they dig for.

Hansen, a sophomore elementary education major, had a lot to say about her experience. Although she has done mission work before, this had been the hardest manual labor she has encountered. She learned a lot throughout the week and was excited to share her experience when she returned.

“Watching our group of students grow as a family from our first meeting throughout our trip has been incredible. Life is about creating relationships,” Hansen said. “We created relationships with those we encountered in Nicaragua but also with each other and were able to bring those relationships back to the United States with us. This has been such a humbling experience.”

The students encountered different cultural experiences and learned a lot while they were in Nicaragua. The students said they would be more than happy to go back in a heartbeat and would encourage anyone to go if given the opportunity. This trip not only changed the lives of the students and families touched in Managua, but also the lives of our very own students from Radford.

“When the dust of Nicaragua settles on your heart, our world will never be the same,” Yost said.