

## Argentina Partnership

I am thankful for the opportunity to be able to be a part of the Argentina Partnership. I find it very hard to put into words quite how much this trip has affected me and how special it is to be able to say I was a part of it. Seeing the work that the Hogar does for the children is truly amazing. It was an experience which I hope other Canfordians will want to be a part of.

In the mornings, we worked repairing the gym's walls and repainting them all. As well as this we helped to build a greenhouse where the Hogar can grow various fruit and vegetables all year round, which they use in the meals for the children with the excess is sold to local markets to help fund the Hogar.

Whilst I hope my writings below give a flavour, only way to truly grasp how much the children mean to all those who go on the trip is experience it for yourself. If you ever get a chance to visit the Hogar, now or in later life, either as part of the partnership, or through another route, please do go and see first hand the work that it does, meet the kids, the workers, the staff and hear their stories. I can promise you will be left with no doubt in your mind that the children are by far the most important part of the Partnership and are at the centre of what the Hogar is all about.

While we were there we heard heartbreaking stories from some of the children personally and were told of the stories of some of the others. Almost all involved the children coming from broken families where they were either physically or sexually abused, often both, and it was wonderful to see how they could come to the Hogar and feel safe, like they had a new family. For them to have the chance at not only a childhood but a future really shows what the Hogar does. As well as this we met Aaron, a 12 year old boy who had come from a very bad background with both he and his sisters experiencing abuse. However, after being given the chance to have an education he has not only found a family, who adopted him 2 days after he told us his story, but also secured a scholarship to a private school. This would not have been possible without the Hogar. While there are, of course, other homes in Argentina the Hogar allowed him to continue to live with his sister until she went back to her biological father as well as providing him with all the love and care he needed along with his education.

Along with Aaron leaving we saw some children arrive at the Hogar. Three brothers came in the middle of the night and they were very violent to begin with, yet within a week they were playing with the other kids like any other child. This is likely due to how the Hogar mix children of all ages in the houses and as a result these brothers quickly learned what was and was not acceptable behaviour. As well as this we saw the arrival of Kevin and Luna. Their story is particularly hard to listen to and very close to me personally after talking to their older sister Brisa, who was at the Hogar while they were young, and hearing about what had happened at home and how the Hogar had helped her personally. They come from a broken home due to their mother being in and out of relationships after her husband got arrested for robbery. As a result their mother became an alcoholic due to the stress of taking care of six children. In this time she became abusive and hence Brisa went to the Hogar. While she was there Kevin and Luna grew up and were sent to beg for the mother so she could afford to put food on the table for her children. After they missed the last train home, after a day begging in Buenos Aires, they were found by police and taken to a home in Buenos Aires. When asked if they knew of anywhere they could go Luna said the Hogar as she knew of it because of the time her older sister had spent there. As a result they arrived while we were there. The thing that really put this story into

context is that when we worked back, using the timings we were given, we realised that they were begging in Buenos Aires whilst we were there on our weekend tour. However, seeing how they adapted to their new home and how, after a couple of days of being relatively shy, (understandably), to see them open up to the Canford team and come and give us hugs and to then see them begin to play with the other children was truly special and again drove home just how important the Hogar is and how amazing the children are.

We spent our evenings doing various activities with the kids with football being a common theme of the evenings. Once we were back at the accommodation we either sat together reflecting over the day or we listened to the children or staff tell us the stories like the ones I have outlined above.

I think the work that Canford does is invaluable and this was highlighted by something one of the residents of the Hogar said to me on the second day of the trip. Christian, who has been at the Hogar for many years, due to family issues similar to many kids as well as mental issues, said to me that *"Every year everybody here waits all year for Canford to come and visit, it is the highlight of the year. We count down the days"*. This shows that the kids really do appreciate the work we do and that it is not only the staff. As well as this on our final night, when the staff asked the children what the most important thing Canford did when they came, every answer was the same: it wasn't the building work, important as it is, it was simply "playing with us".

I have attached a photo of Aaron, the boy who was adopted while we were there, you may notice he is in a Canford top. These were given to the children who were brave enough to tell us their story in person as a means of thanks and were worn by them a lot. Aaron wore his every time he returned to the Hogar. Another child at the Hogar was wearing a hoodie from the 2015 partnership, again highlighting how much the value Canford's work at the Hogar. I personally have found it to be the most amazing experience of my life so far and think it will be hard to top, and as a result have already started to enquire about the possibility of returning next year to do more work and help the kids even more.

**James Chapman, Lower Sixth**



Aaron – a 12 year old boy with a promising future thanks to the Hogar.