

Argentina Partnership

I am thankful for the opportunity to attend the Argentina Partnership and to highlight how important Canford's involvement at Hogar El Alba is. While we were there we renovated the sports hall, which was dilapidated and falling apart. We carefully cemented the holes between the bricks, sanded the walls and finally repainted them. This sports hall is used by the population of the slum and therefore not only benefits the children but a whole community. In addition to the sports hall, we also sanded, stained and built the frames for two greenhouses, which will allow the home to grow their own fruit and vegetables all year round, which impacts their bakery and kitchen where children from the slum as well as the Hogar come to learn a trade. The legacy of Canford lives on as we saw many of the projects that Canford had previously completed and we were thrilled as a team to add to this legacy.

However, although the work we do impacts a community the children are without a doubt the most important aspect of the Argentina Partnership. Over three weeks we all became incredibly close with the children as we celebrated children leaving, children arriving, first birthday parties and evenings together. However, we also learned of their horrific stories as they spoke with us individually night after night. Most stories were very similar to 8-year-old Noelia's story. 'Noe' came to the home at the age of 4 with her brother Fernando and her sister Valeria. They came to the Hogar because their dad was an alcoholic and sexually and violently abusing them all. Their mother was unable to look after them as she herself was in a mental institution. Unfortunately, it is unlikely Noe will be adopted due to a court ruling that states she must be adopted with Fernando and Valeria who are respectively 15 and 18. Just a few days after our arrival Aaron spoke to us, later that week we celebrated him leaving the home. Five years ago Aaron now aged 12 was living under a bridge in a tarpaulin house with his older sister, mother and stepfather. The stepdad was an alcoholic and violently abused him and his sister. His mother was a drug addict and was unable to look after them. Once at the home his sister left him at the Hogar after three years when she made the decision to go and live with her biological father. Two years later and Aaron has been adopted by his new parents and has earned himself a scholarship at a private school in Buenos Aires. However, despite such horrible beginnings the Hogar has given all the children their childhood back and is enabling happy endings for lots of children in their care. It is an extremely happy place and nurtures and loves the children until they have a trade or a job and can build a life for themselves at 18 or beyond if it takes them longer to achieve this.

The children clearly had an amazing impact on us and we spent a considerable amount of time with them either playing with them, generally spending time entertaining them or listening to their stories.

The time Canford spend "building and helping the home is important but it's what you leave in their hearts, which is far more important" Kareena, one of the owners, told us this on our last night in Argentina. Therefore, I am very thankful to impact a community but most importantly give 53 children all our energy and love for three weeks and for them to bring perspective to our own lives and understand how fortunate we are.

I am grateful for the opportunity that Canford has given me and I hope it is one that many more pupils can go on to enjoy.

Kitty Arnold, Lower Sixth