

AguaClara Engineer Reflections

Reflections on a year as an AguaClara Engineer - Carol Serna 10/25/08 ([pdf version](#))

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So why should you be a volunteer for AguaClara? Devote a year of your life and move to a country you may have never been before?

AguaClara is a unique program and it is one that I was thrilled to find! Applying to go to Honduras was the best choice I have ever made, and it is one that I know will help me in my future as an engineer and as a person.

There are the obvious life benefits that come from leaving where you were raised or the country where you were born: learning a new language, cultural exchanges, new friends, a better understanding of a different part of the world, and exposure to different ways of thinking and living...to name a few. However with AguaClara your experience will be so much more than this.

During my year in Honduras I had experiences that were funny, frustrating, scary, embarrassing, and enlightening. It is rare to have a life changing experience in such a short period of time, but a year working for AguaClara was just that for me. The truth is that Honduras will be what you make of it. Some days it could be drab, frustrating and you will just need a hot shower. Other days it will be fascinating, new, and full of adventure.

AguaClara is a unique experience for those who are ready for a challenge. Not only does it allow you to develop as a person in a social setting, but also as an engineer. An AguaClara engineer does what the project needs, from troubleshooting at a plant to training new operators, to writing manuals, papers and budgets. The job is constantly changing along with the responsibilities and you get the chance to mold your job and do what you think is important for the project. I learned how to think outside the box and work with what you have. I learned things that I could never have learned sitting in a classroom or working in an office. I can't imagine there is another employer out there who allows their beginning engineers to have as much of a creative control as are given the AguaClara engineers. As I begin to interview with companies I find more and more that I already have some of the experiences and skills that many companies try to ensure their beginning engineers get or develop. I feel that my experiences with AguaClara have given me a competitive edge in the job market.

AguaClara is also unique in that at the same time you are growing and developing as an engineer, you are also giving back. Constantly sharing and teaching and touching people's lives. The project in itself is life changing for its recipients and a glimpse of development work. The constant praise and thanks for simply doing your job and working on the project can be embarrassing at times. Sitting at the inauguration of a water treatment plant in Tamara was, in one word-awesome. To see something from design through groundbreaking, construction to full operation was, again -awesome.

Your experience in Honduras will be molded by the landscape and culture. During your time in Honduras lush green vegetation and mountains will surround you. Some places are cold and others are hot. Tegucigalpa is a big city and in some ways just like every big city. Honduras is filled with different places to see and things to do. From waterfall, scuba diving to hiking it's definitely for the outdoorsy, but also filled with lots of sights that don't require walking boots. Beautiful churches and lots of history are everywhere. In Honduras you will be asked to step out of your comfort zone and into someone else's. It won't always be easy it won't always be hard either, and at times it will be more than fun!

Working for AguaClara is a privilege and an honor, one that will stay with any person. It really can be for everyone...and when you come back you won't even realize how much you've changed till after the fact.