

VOSH/California Mission to El Salvador, Nov. 22-29 by Dr. Diane Williams.

I was one of the first time VOSHers on the trip to El Salvador. It was indeed rewarding, and tiring. We visited a different village each day for 5 days. We stayed in the large city of San Miguel and took a van out each morning and returned each evening, some trips longer than others. Our first day, Sunday, we were picked up at the airport by members of the nonprofit organization called Fudem. They showed us one of their satellite clinics in San Salvador and took us on a tour of the capital. They had organized all the trips to the villages, and many of them came along, putting in longer hours than we did. On our last day they showed us their main clinic in San Salvador, a low cost or free eye clinic (and small dental clinic) for the poor people of El Salvador. They had a surgical facility in their clinic too, and the patients that we had seen who needed eye surgery were sent there. They are doing an amazing job helping their countrymen. And they were so nice to us and gave us a big dinner of appreciation at the end.

In the villages we set up in schools, churches, Red Cross buildings, and community centers. The people were registered and then their visual acuity was taken. Those who did not pass or who had near or other complaints were sent on to the autorefractors, and then on to the five optometrists for refractions. We sent them either to the optical station, or to the consultation table if they needed a more thorough exam at the clinic or surgery. Two of the optometrists were from California, one from Australia, and two from El Salvador. We had portable phoropters or trial lens sets to work from. The majority of eye diseases we saw were cataracts and pterygiums. It was unusual to see a myope. Most were hyperopic presbyopes who really needed some help to see at near. I remember one woman telling me her family was upset with her because she was the cook for the family and she couldn't tell a stone from a bean. Her frijoles were too crunchy and she showed me her chipped tooth to prove it. She was a 60 year old +2 hyperope, so you can imagine how blurred her near vision was. Her new bifocals will help her immensely.

My only regret is that I did not take the time to learn Spanish before I came. Luckily, they had recruited local Peace Corps members for help in translating, and when one was not available, someone from Fudem helped out. But if I go again, I will be better prepared -- my French didn't help at all.



Taking a break at the end of the day on the veranda of a hotel in the area. The drinks were on the way.



Patients waiting to get their eyes tested at one of the venues.



The main clinic in San Salvador on a Saturday morning.



Our group picture on Friday at the end of the clinic week.



Three of the students from SCCO before the onslaught



Doing a refraction, with Sabrina translating

VOSH/California Mission to El Salvador, Nov. 22-29 by Dr. Greg Pearl.

Three optometrists, Dr. Greg Pearl, Dr. Diane Williams and Dr. Jane Le (from Australia), five SVOSH/SCCO optometry students, Dorothy Lea, Elise Swanson, Mariah Smith, Stephanie Johnson and Paul Kwon and two optometrist's spouses, Marion Pearl and Don Williams worked with a team of two FUEDEM optometrists and seven technicians and opticians in the southern state of La Union, El Salvador.

Based out of a hotel in San Miguel, the team travelled each day to a different village and set up our FUEDEM/VOSH clinic in a school or other public building. We screened 2058 patients in five villages and then examined and refracted 1879 of them using trial frames and portable phoropters on tripods. Reading glasses were immediately dispensed to 390 of the patients and orders were taken for 756 new custom single vision and bifocal lenses which are made at the FUEDEM optical lab for dispensing later. FUEDEM has a clinic in San Miguel which is staffed by an ophthalmologist and an optometrist so 417 patients were referred to that clinic for further consultation. Those patients needing surgery will then be transported to the FUEDEM surgical clinic in San Salvador.

While in La Union, the El Salvadorean Navy took our team on an afternoon cruise in the Bahia La Union aboard a patrol boat. We also enjoyed visiting the National Art Museum in San Salvador, shopping for souvenirs and an afternoon at a beach club before returning home to California.

I would highly recommend any VOSH team interested in working with FUEDEM (see fudem.org) to contact them and ask to join their ongoing rural vision campaigns. FUEDEM is very well organized and will take care of all food, lodging and van rental arrangements for your VOSH team.