

On Monday morning we set out in two vans to visit a squatter settlement where 5,000 families are living in poverty. The settlement was once a train station where people who worked on the train were allowed to reside. However, over time the train station was abandoned, the tracks were taken out, and a large amount of people were left living in the community that became their home many years ago. There were a few small shops, a community center, and a church; all of which were surrounded by thousands of homes that were built out of concrete blocks, sticks, and various other materials that they acquired. Not to mention a large number of dogs that roamed freely, looked friendly, and would probably use your hand as a chew toy if you tried to pet them!

Our group split up into three smaller groups where we were invited into various homes to talk with the residents. On one visit there was a mother raising three children by herself while her husband works in the United States to send money home to feed his family. However, the support is not consistent or sufficient enough to meet their needs, so the mother has to knit scarves and sell them for a few dollars in order to make ends meet. Their home was considered a nicer home in the settlement because it was made of concrete bricks and had multiple rooms, including a bathroom.

Another family consisted of a single mother with seven children, one of which works as a doorman at the place where we stay. The boy's wages are used for purchasing school expenses such as text books, uniform(s), lunch, and his transportation to and from school. The other kids, when not in school, help their mother by biting off the tips of corn kernels and collecting them in a five gallon bucket. The full bucket is sold at the market for \$6.50 (approx. 65 pesos) and is the only daily wage that supports their family of eight. Their financial struggles were evident when looking at their home, which was made out of tin walls, a tin roof, and concrete blocks for the bedroom.

These homes are only two examples of what the living conditions are like in the squatter settlement. Our group visited a total of six different homes, each having very different support systems in place. In addition to the many day-to-day challenges these people face, they are now dealing with the possibility of being kicked off of this government-owned land. There are many issues in Mexico that are very apparent when you live in the country and meet the people. One thing that is clear is the complexity of the issues and that they are interrelated and are affected by decisions that are being made on both sides of the border.