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College of Medicine sends groups to help needy

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FSUCares will send groups of students to far-and-away places to assist the less-fortunate population by supplying basic necessities. Six students, two faculty members and one resident will travel to Filipinas, Panama, while McAllen, Texas, and Immokalee, Fla., will see host to four students and two members of faculty.

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There are so many different kinds of people, so there tends to be a lot of energy and excitement in the room. If you're around campus this weekend, you'll probably hear our cheers.

— Lindsey Day FSU Resident Assistant

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Bethann Mohamed is one Florida State University sophomore who will be traveling with the group; this trip will be her second with FSUCares. Bethann and her friends will take bags full of clothing, soap, bandages, sunscreen and many other supplies to these rural villagers. These bags provide an otherwise hard-to-come-by lifeline for many people.

"Everything is over the counter, but for some of these people: a Tylenol is hard to come by," Mohamed said.

The medications included in the bags range from acetaminophen and ibuprofen to vitamins and antacids. The bags will also include travel-sized toiletries.

"We ask the faculty in certain departments, when they go on conferences, to bring back their toiletries for us," Mohamed said. "We package them up in bags and we put soap, shampoo, conditioner and lotion in a bag and we give them out to all the people."

Mohamed said that these locations were chosen because of cultural similarities—all three have Spanish-speaking residents. Immokalee has migrant farmers who work in tomato and other fields; Panama is a village on the side of a mountain; McAllen supports those people who are in transition between countries.

McAllen, Texas is a town located about 60 miles inland of the Gulf of Mexico and sits on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"There are areas there called the colonias," Mohamed said. "These are people who are in transition, either coming from Texas going to Mexico, or from Mexico going to Texas. They build makeshift communities that are basically shacks. Students go and make home visits and take these supplies. They make first aid homes that other people in the colonias know that, 'If I get hurt, if I need Band-aid, if I need pills, [I can] go to this house.'"

The FSUCares students have affectionately deemed this town as "TexMex." The group used to cross

into Mexico to assist with a clinic there.

"There was a lot of violence this year in Mexico, so we aren't crossing over into Mexico, but we normally spend a day with the Border Patrol and would go into a clinic over on that side [of the border]," Mohamed said. "We still call it TexMex but we're only staying in McAllen, Texas, which is on the border but it's on the United States side of the border."

Filipinas, Panama was chosen, Mohamed said, because of its proximity to the FSU Panama location. Panama was FSUCares' first site, which has been in operation for 10 years.

"FSU built a little community and a school for the children," said Mohamed. "Last year, the community was able to build together a building, which is now their clinic," Mohamed said. "We helped them buy supplies to put in the clinic, finish the floors and get electricity. We're now helping them fill up supplies with pills and syringes and needles and all kinds of stuff."

All three of these locations are home to a mainly Spanish-speaking population; only some of the students involved with FSUCares speak Spanish. Mohamed said that this didn't seem to be a problem because most of the people seeking the care were grateful to receive it.

"I do not speak Spanish," Mohamed said. "Last year I took a medical Spanish course. A lot of it is pointing and doing the motion of itching, and the patient will say, 'Oh, picazón,' and then I learn, 'Oh, picazón means itch.' These people are so appreciative of everything you say and do, so even if your grammar is horrible-I could just say '¿Tiene picazón?'-'do you have itch?' I can point to body parts if I don't remember. We all have been practicing. Most of the time you get by half-pointing and explaining."

In order to determine who goes to what location, the students rank their preferences and those who have been more involved receive more seniority. It is based on amount of service, where the more active students usually get their first choice.

"Every single student, even if they didn't get their first choice, when they come back with all of their stories, say, 'Oh my God, I had such a great time,' " Mohamed said.

"No one is ever disappointed."

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