



# A New Cultural Experience Shared By Nursing Students

By: Karen Carpenter

The health of our friends and neighbors here in Barnesville is very important. But sometimes concern reaches across the globe to instruct those less fortunate on healthy living.

Vicky (Dollison) Grove is on staff as a teacher in the nursing department of the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. She has been an instructor there for the past five years.

In November 2017 Grove and 12 of her nursing students went on a 17-day immersion trip to Belize. The trip was part of their public health course required of senior nursing students.

The idea of the trip is that the students immerse themselves in a culture and learn as much as possible about the people.

The trip is budgeted into student's tuition as it is a part of their class. Nursing students did have to buy their own plane ticket for the Belize trip.

The group provided public health education to school children in Belize.

"The main focus was on nutrition, exercise, and diabetes," said Grove. "The students also provided the same education to adults. With the adult community, the students also completed blood pressure screenings, blood sugar screenings, and foot care."

At a school, the nursing students built 20 arm chair desks for one of the classrooms that did not have desks. They also cleaned and painted at one of the elderly community sites.

Formerly British Honduras, Belize is an independent Commonwealth realm on the eastern coast of Central America. Belize has a diverse society, composed of many cultures and languages. English is the official language of Belize, while Belizean Creole is an unofficial native language.

The citizens of Belize, like many Central American counties, are very poor.

Grove grew up in Barnesville and graduated from Barnesville High School in 1990. She received a four year degree as a Registered Nurse from Bemidji State University and a Masters Degree in nursing



Nursing students from the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University in red, surround their instructor, Vicky Grove, front right, and their host Catalina in Belize. The public health class was on a immersion trip as part of their college curriculum.

from Minnesota State University Moorhead.

She and her husband, Chris, live in Osakis, MN and have three sons, Carter, 16, Logan, 14 and Mason, 12.

"I was lucky, I guess, to be offered the chance to lead the students on their immersion trip to Belize," commented Grove. "I am one of the faculty who teaches in their public health course where this immersion is offered. Last year I had a group of students who stayed in the St. Cloud area and were submersed into the Somali culture."

Faculty members apply to lead the five immersion trips. The chair of the department along with the course coordinator choose the staff who will lead the trips.

Belize is one of five sites that is offered to the students in their public health course. As well as Belize, students have an opportunity to go to South Africa, Dominican Republic, or stay in the area and be submersed into the Somali culture.

"We had a guide with us wherever we went so we felt very safe in Belize," stated Grove. "People were happy to have us there and we felt

very welcomed."

As a teacher one always has goals and hopes of ways that students will grow through any educational experience.

"I was hoping the students would learn what public health looked like in another culture and gain knowledge about another culture," said Grove. "I feel they gained that and more."

"We learned so much about the culture of Belize and what family means to the Belizeans. Students also learned that our health care system in the United States is very different from the Belize culture. I think they were able to see public health from a different perspective."

For a major portion of the trip, the nursing students interacted with the communities they visited.

"The first week we lived with a wonderful host family in San Pedro Columbia, Belize who had three boys," stated Grove. "It was nice for the students to get a different perspective of the family as one of the boys was just out of high school, one was a senior and one was 13. We

had the opportunity to live right in the community we were helping."

San Pedro Columbia, made up of about 700 residents, is the largest Kekchi Maya village in Belize. The village is well known for its hand woven embroidery. The original settlers of this village were Maya Indians

"The family fed us fresh food every meal as they try to live off what they grow and raise. It was the most amazing food I have ever eaten," responded Grove.

"I tried to convince our host mother, Catalina, to come to Minnesota with me but she thought her husband, Gustavo, and kids



Nursing instructor at St. Benedict/St. John's University Vicky Grove shares a picture with a little girl from Belize. Grove purchased the piece that the child had embroidered herself. That area of Belize is well known for their skill in fine embroidery work. Grove led a group of nurses on an immersion trip to Belize, a small country in Central America. The trip was part of the public health curriculum.

would miss her too much. The host family welcomed our questions and wanted to share their heritage and culture as much as we wanted to learn.

"Most evenings when we got back from our work days, we would sit and visit and learn about how our cultures were so different but also the same in many ways," continued Grove.

The host family lived off the land. They had 400 coconut trees and were hoping to have more to supplement their income.

During the first part of the trip

the food consisted of beans, rice and tortillas. The second area the group visited was closer to the ocean and fish was the dominant food at that location.

Punta Gorda is the capital and largest town of Toledo District in southern Belize, with a population of about 5,000 people. This was the second stop for the nursing students.

Chocolate is one of the main crops grown in Belize. All of the students were female so one can only

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The children at the local school in Belize were thrilled to receive the new desks. Nursing students from the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University built the desks for the children to use while on a immersion trip to the country.

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