



Above left: Lexie (fourth left) with students in Costa Rica; above right: Lexie being prayed for in one of the churches; below: with the family she stayed with

# Eye-opening trip to a real community

**IT was a golden opportunity to experience a different culture – and it may have changed her life forever.**

Lexie Glass spent seven months working with students in Costa Rica, and learnt lots about what an authentic community really looks like.

The 21-year-old, from St Jude's Church, Southsea, will go back to her university course in Nottingham committed to sharing her love for God in new ways.

"In this country, we're very task-focussed, whereas in Costa Rica they are completely people-focussed," she said.

"If you're on your way somewhere and meet someone who needs help, they become your priority, and it's not considered an inconvenience. I was overwhelmed by the love they have for each other in very practical ways.

"I realised that so often when I serve people, it is at my convenience. I need to humble myself and try to love people in the same kind of way. Perhaps I



abroad, half of which had to be in a Spanish-speaking country.

She heard about the mission agency Latin Link at a Christian youth conference, and realised she had a passion for South America. Although she passed through an interview, she was only told she was going to Costa Rica a month beforehand.

Latin Link works in partnership with Estudiantes Cristianos Unidos (ECU) in Costa Rica to support a network of Christian

those who are already Christians and helped them to organise outreach events to engage with others.

"It was a brand new project for ECU, and it was the first time they'd done this kind of mission work," she said. "They lack resources, so I'd brought along some fantastic studies we had done in Nottingham. I ended up translating them into Spanish and writing some new studies, as it was so popular.

"On a typical day, I might have to get a bus for two hours to get to one of the universities, then meet one or two small groups and lead them each in an hour of studies and activities. Then I might teach some English to them

informally, before going back to the family I was staying with. I was at the main university four days a week, and there were five groups there, with about 50 students in total.

"Costa Rica is a Roman Catholic country, so they say 'Thanks to God' automatically. But it doesn't mean they all have a real faith. Some of them see God as strict and judgemental, so part of what we did was talk about having a relationship with Jesus.

"The outreach work was fun, but also terrifying. My main fear was standing up in front of lots of people and talking about God in a different language, but God pulled me through it.

"We might have a stall set up in the main university square and activities that might help the students to think – like blindfolding them and asking someone to direct them to find some chocolate,

which helped us to talk about who guides you through life. We also did painting and acting, or offered people food.

"ECU are also setting up new branches in other parts of the country, so I travelled to a province up north

to help set up new groups.

"The main thing I learnt was the importance of community. I thought I had a great support system in place, in Southsea and at university, but the way that people in Costa Rica served each other was amazing. I'll take that back to Nottingham.

"There's been a focus on being a 'cool Christian', or rebranding what we do to make it more appealing. But being an authentic community is about focussing on the other person's needs."

Lexie grew up attending children's groups and youth groups at St Jude's Church, but didn't always enjoy them. She helped to lead sports camps run by fellow worshipper Chris Cox. When the church organised a mission to Kenya in 2010, Chris encouraged her to go.

"Basically I wasn't a Christian before I went to Kenya," she said. "The conversations I had there with other members of the team and the chance to ask questions I hadn't had answers to before made a difference. I came back with a passion for God. I realised I'd been trying to fit into an image before, and I needed to drop the act."

And in the future, she hopes to return to Costa Rica to see some of the friends she made there.

"I had an incredible adventure, and I'm ready for the next one," she said. "I hope and pray I can go back to Costa Rica, perhaps after graduating, because it feels like a bit of my heart is there now.

"But God might have something else for me, and he might give me the opportunity to live and love in other places."

## my faith

**When Lexie Glass signed up to work with students in Costa Rica, she had no idea that the most important lesson she would learn was about the power of authentic community**

needed to be put in this kind of setting to realise that!"

Lexie is currently studying French and Hispanic studies at Nottingham University. For her third year she had to work or study

groups in universities. Lexie was sent to join their existing team, supporting Christian students at three universities in and around the capital city San Jose. She helped to run small Bible study groups for



Lexie Glass