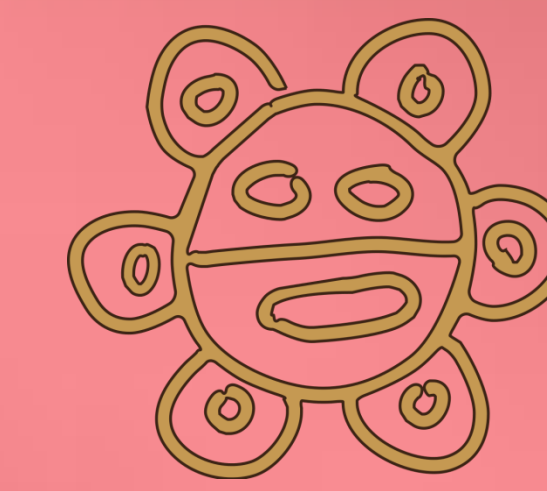


My Puerto Rico Service Initiative Trip With NECHAMA



My team and I in El Yunque with Carlos, a park ranger who guided us through our tasks and hung out with us for the two days we were there.



My team and I on the roof of Mercedes' house, in Loíza. We did concrete roof repair on her house for a week.

Many other volunteers who I worked with actually volunteered through the CUNY Service Corps. I wish that SUNY and CUNY coordinated so that there wasn't such a division between SUNY and CUNY students. Nonetheless, this was one of the best experiences of my life, and I would recommend it to any student who has the opportunity to do so.

If you are interested in volunteering with a program like this, I suggest you research the disaster that occurred, how it affected the people it did, and mentally prepare yourself for emotional challenges you may face.



This is me on Mercedes's roof, during a water break.



My team and I with Mercedes, on our last day of working on her home.

Challenges: Working in the hot sun in 90+ degree weather was quite challenging. I was not used to this type of weather, and working in it made it that much harder. I was also warned by my family members who live on the island, about mosquitoes. However, bug repellent did not seem to prevent me from getting over thirty mosquito bites. While these were slightly difficult circumstances, what was most challenging for me was to be working on one home in an area where most of the other homes were in the same awful conditions. Wishing I could, but knowing I couldn't help everyone in the neighborhood, was a challenge I faced when seeing the damage firsthand.

Benefits: I feel as though I benefited greatly from my Post Maria experience. I got to be surrounded by amazing and hardworking people who were there for the same reason I was. I also personally benefited by getting to visit the island my family originates from. This made me feel more connected to the island, and my people. Giving back to my people, in the way that I did, not only made me feel more connected to them, but it also gave me a sense of purpose. In the world that we live in now, it is so easy to lose sight of how fortunate we are, and how grateful we should be. This trip reminded me of how fortunate I am to not only have everything I need, but to help those who lost everything they had during Maria.

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