

In 2000, Jennifer Boehme received a BA in international studies, with a development emphasis, and a double minor in TESL and Scandinavian Studies. “There were a few pivotal experiences at BYU that changed my career path,” she stated. “Three professors in particular helped shape and influence the work I am doing today. Gary Bryner’s introduction to development and many of Valerie Hudson’s classes brought together my social consciousness with my interest in international affairs.” Prior to that, Boehme said she had been fixed on working in the political arena.

“I also had the privilege of studying development and its theories with Warner Woodworth. Warner is a visionary who believes in the power people have to make a positive change in the world. As I studied the integrated nature of development, I became fascinated by the complexities of appropriately serving our brothers and sisters,” she said. “At first, I was disturbed by the number of people who are trying to do good, but whose activities not only go awry, but in the process also hurt the lives of the people they are trying to assist. I became committed to educating both people trying to assist the poor and those we are seeking to serve.”

Mother Nature and other events conspired to shift Boehme’s course during the spring of 1999. “I was involved in creating a group then-called HELP Honduras and traveled with them to assist in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. The process of preparing and serving was an amazingly challenging and rewarding experience,” Boehme declared. “We worked with FINCA International in their microcredit banks and assisted in Honduras’ recovery from Hurricane Mitch.”

After their return, the group explored ways to continue what they had begun. “We became convinced of the positive effect this experience could have on both the students volunteering and on the people we were serving. We grew the organization, moved off BYU’s campus, and become a federally recognized not-for-profit corporation, HELP International,” she explained. After graduation, Boehme became their executive director. She said, “Summer 2003 will be our fifth summer of training and sending students to Latin America to partner with local organizations in helping to eliminate poverty and human suffering.”

Working with HELP International has given Boehme a broad range of experiences. “Being in a small organization has meant that I am involved in every facet of the organization, ranging from Third-World development activities, financial planning, and long-term strategy, to marketing and training. My education at the Kennedy Center encompassed a broad range of topics including political environments, development theories, and understanding of cultures and economies, which are vital for our success as an organization,” she said. “For students desirous of a career in international development, BYU offered a unique opportunity for a multidisciplinary degree. With my degree, I garnered knowledge from a number of fields. I found this multidisciplinary

education extremely helpful in my career—very few things in this field are not interrelated.”

Recalling her passion for the right kind of service objectives, Boehme said, “Attempting to undertake a development intervention without understanding the political, cultural, and economic background and history of our participants could produce horrendous consequences. On the other hand, going into a community with an intimate understanding of those factors, coupled with development techniques geared toward learning the needs of the people and facilitating their own growth and development, leads to positive outcomes and lasting change.”

Boehme’s involvement with her organization has brought a sense of fulfillment on a global scale. “Directing and growing HELP International has allowed me to take steps towards educating both our American populous and those persons in developing countries who take steps to better our world,” she concluded.

No Events