

Volunteer Profile: Antonia Terrazas, Site Manager

Volunteers at WAI all have their own reasons for getting involved in the program.

For Antonia Terrazas, Baylor University senior and Site Manager for WAI, seeing the growth and creative development of the children she works with is the inspiration that has kept her deeply involved in the organization. She describes her most rewarding experience at WAI as having the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with the children and seeing how much of a difference the WAI programs make in the children's lives.

"It's really cool to see how [the children's] creative process has developed," says Antonia. "Being able to see the difference between the before and after—while recognizing that there is so much more room for growth—has been the most rewarding thing."

Antonia got involved in Waco Arts Initiative because she liked the idea of serving her community through art, which she thought was a unique way of helping others. As the Site Manager, Antonia's regular responsibilities include overseeing what goes on in the programs on a given day at WAI. She collaborates regularly with the teachers to help keep the WAI environment conducive to mentoring and to the kids' learning. Nonetheless, Antonia says that her time volunteering for WAI has been eye-opening and rewarding. Seeing firsthand how art can impact lives has always been the best part about volunteering.

"There is one great moment that sticks out in my head when I think about Waco Arts," Antonia recalls. "One Friday, I was working with a 10-year old boy who was having a hard time staying on task and listening to the teacher. In short, he was having a hard day. Finally, he started doing serious work on his project and really paying attention to what he was doing. By the time he finished, the other kids had left, so there were only a group of volunteers still hanging around. He timidly brought forth his finished product, and the room erupted with excitement over his work. He was grinning proudly, showcasing his work. As I watched him standing there, blanketed by a circle of praise, I realized that this is what I loved about Waco Arts Initiative—that creating alongside these kids often creates room for grace, that they can take pride in their work, that the process of making and sharing art can be life-giving."

Antonia's experience at WAI has been rewarding, fun, and educational. Although WAI primarily serves to educate children in the arts, the volunteers still walk away learning something.

"One of the biggest lessons I have learned is realizing how important consistency is in volunteer work," Antonia explains. "First of all, you get more of a big-picture feel. When hard days come, I know that there will be successful days yet ahead, because my experience has taught me that not every day is the same. Also, it helps to build relationships through trust—learning names and stories over time helps with effectiveness, and also keeps me seeing people as people, not projects. I think I will carry this understanding with me for the rest of my life."

WAI not only has a lasting effect on the children; Antonia believes that the lessons she has learned about friendship and commitment will influence her for the rest of her life. For more information about volunteering, contact Meredith Noles at info@wacoartsinitiative.org.