Extra Training

Reading & Vocabulary
Task 483

A Street Education.

What would you do if you had three months to do whatever you wanted? Mitch McGregor spent his three months in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where he taught English to homeless street children. He told us all about his life-changing experience.

"Most of my friends were travelling the world during their summer holiday, but I wanted to do something worthwhile; I wanted to volunteer, but where and how? At the age of 20, I would say I'd had a privileged childhood. My parents had put me through school, led and clothed me, and given me plenty of love and affection.

So, after reading about the favelas, the slums of Brazil, where thousands of street children live in appalling poverty and often don't even reach the age of 18, I decided that I'd spend part of my summer helping these children in whatever way I could.

I set off for Rio de Janeiro where I would join a volunteer group that taught basic skills such as hygiene, literacy, English, and business skills in a makeshift school in the heart of the favelas. The residents of these slums, which stretch up the hillsides around and away from the wealthier city centre, make up about one fifth of the population of Rio de Janeiro. The poverty leads to many broken homes and, if they experience violence at home or their families can't look after them anymore, children end up on the streets. Those who can't survive by begging, selling newspapers, or shining shoes, often turn to crime to survive.

I was going to work in a school which gave those kids a basic education. My first day at school was really nerve-racking. I'd never taught before; I only knew a few words of Portuguese and I Just didn't know what to expect The ten children who turned up to my first English lesson were really friendly and eager to learn. They only got one meal a day of just rice and beans and at night they slept under bridges and in doorways, but these children saw learning English as a possible way out of their lives of danger and destitution.

As days went by. I got used to the place. The roof of the little shack leaked when it rained and there wasn't a schedule or textbooks; still, the kids trusted me and some of them made a lot of progress. During break times, we headed out into the tiny yard to kick a ball around and I found out why Brazilians have a reputation as the best football players! Then we cooked and ate together, but at the end of the day when they left to go back... where? ... I often wondered whether I would ever see them again.

The host family that I stayed with was marvellous. They adopted me as an unofficial "Carioca", which is the name for someone who was born and lives in Rio de Janeiro. It was the school, though, that made my time in Brazil truly special. Even though I was the teacher, the street children taught me a lot more. I learnt that no matter how bad conditions are, there is always hope for the future. My time in Brazil was eye-opening. If I hadn't gone, I would have missed out on the experience of a lifetime. If I could do it all again, I'd jump on a plane right now!"

1. Read the text and for questions 1-4, choose the best answer.

1. Mitch chose to volunteer in order to ____
- **1.** make his parents proud.
- **2.** help those less fortunate than himself.
- **3.** do the same as his friends.
- **4.** forget his own problems.

2. The favelas are a poor area ____
- **1.** where four fifths are unemployed.
- **2.** five times larger than the urban centre.
- **3.** close to city centre.
- **4.** situated on a mountaintop.

3. Mitch's job was difficult because ____
- **1.** many kids didn't come to class.
- **2.** he only had basic facilities.
- **3.** he had to cook as well as teach.
- **4.** it wasn't easy for the kids to learn.

4. Mitch's host family ____
- **1.** wanted him to stay in Rio.
- **2.** have invited him back to Brazil.
- **3.** gave him Portuguese lessons.
- **4.** treated him like a native.

2. Fill in:

privileged ***basic*** ***broken*** ***truly*** ***makeshift*** ***eager***
poverty ***host*** ***eye*** ***make*** ***shine*** ***experience***

1. _____ childhood;
2. _____ school;
3. to be_____ to learn;
4. _____ special;
5. to live in_____;
6. _____ homes;
7. _____ progress;
8. _____-opening;
9. _____ skills;
10. to_____ shoes;
11. _____ family;
12. _____ of a lifetime.

LIVEWORKSHEETS