

## U.S. DESIGN SCHOOL TEAMS UP WITH 'UN TECO PARA CHILE'

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A team of California design students and faculty on Friday shared their ideas on improving water access for some of Chile's most impoverished communities. Men who live in a "campamento" (shantytown) dig a well for water on Aug. 24, 2009. Photo courtesy of Gida Homad-Hamam, The Santiago Times

The collaboration has been in the works since last November when Un Techo Para Chile, a non-governmental housing organization, contacted the Art Center College of Design for help creating a water system that would improve day-to-day life for families living in "campamentos" (shantytowns).

"(Field work) is an important part of our educational process, because we believe it allows our students to go to another area, getting out of their comfort zone," said David MocarSKI, director of environmental design. "They look at what (families) do, how they do it and how they, as students, can really design for real people in an immediate way."

During their two-week visit, students spent one day shadowing families to study how they use and store water, tagging along as they washed clothes and cleaned their homes.

Water availability was not the greatest problem, they found. Families usually gathered around communal barrels to gather water for cooking, cleaning and bathing. But the way in which they store water - generally placed in large jugs or buckets located centrally within the home - makes it difficult to use efficiently. The repetition alone of lugging jug after jug of water to bathe or clean eats up hours of time each day with little reward.

Techo's goal of completing the transition of 10,000 families from campamentos to stable community housing by September 2010 has not distracted them from immediate problems facing families still waiting to move. Once achieved, the undertaking will have cost US\$250 million, with most funding coming from philanthropic donations and government subsidies.

"It's a project that starts now and that we want to continue in the coming year," said Mariana Amatullo, director of Designmatters, a branch of the college that fosters educational collaborations with non-profits from around the world. "It's an exchange of culture...a two-way street."

Campamento communities function much like mini-cities, often combining efforts to raise the US\$2,400 each family needs to qualify. Gerentes (managers) act as community organizers, keeping tabs on families and acting as liaisons for Techo volunteers. Families are dependent on one another for support, whether simply for child care or as partners in beginning a small business through Techo's micro-credit program.

As such, Techo works to move campamentos to new housing units. The process can take years, and even after families receive the keys to their new homes, some choose to return to campamento life. Paying utilities for the first time can prove too challenging or inconvenient compared to life in campamentos where water is free and families have a constant support system from neighbors.

It's a challenge Techo staff and the Art Center College are working overcome by developing a water system that will be an immediate as well as a long term solution.

The partnership will continue once the team returns to the United States, with leaders from the college and Techo hosting meetings via Skype.

"We want to create things that aren't just pretty, but things that actually function and have meaning," MocarSKI said.

By Amanda Woodruff (editor@santiagotimes.cl)