



A GATHERING PLACE
FOR SHORT-TERM MISSION ARTICLES,
RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

How STM Teams Can Bless Missionary Kids

By Liz Borroni, missionary with Youth for Christ Italy (and missionary kid and now missionary mother)

Many churches send teams to countries where they know, love, and support missionaries. Sending people from the congregation can be a huge blessing for missionaries, as it communicates a commitment and support in their work. **However, many churches forget that this is an opportunity to bless the children of their missionaries as well.**

Missionary kids have unique lives; they have usually seen more of the world than most children, often speak foreign languages (sometimes better than their parents), and live adventures that we only dream about. Yet **missionary kids can sometimes feel like they are playing a great game of capture the flag—only there's no home base. There's no anchor. There's nobody with whom they really connect.** They aren't really a citizen of the country where they are ministering, but they don't really belong in their home culture. **Short-term mission teams are uniquely equipped to bless missionary children—but do you know how?**

Americans will always be somewhat of a curiosity to missionary kids. At least they were to me growing up in Italy as a missionary kid. Many missionary kids are known in their schools and communities as the Americans, yet they don't feel like it. There are several misconceptions about missionary kids. Many see them as just another average American kid. This assumption can get short-term missionaries into trouble, as missionary kids are not normal American kids. Others think of missionary kids as somewhat of a peculiarity, and wonder on what level one can connect with this kind of person. But no one likes to be treated like an oddity. So here are a few ways you can bless missionary kids:

Take a sincere interest in missionary kids. Like most missionaries, my parents welcomed short-term mission teams to help them in their ministry. I always looked forward to spending time with the teams. They would often stay in our home, so our interaction was up-close and personal. I sought to glean from them anything I could about what it meant to be an American. It was important exposure for me, especially since the only other thing I had to teach me about America was *MTV*--which was probably not the

most healthy for me! Developing relationship with our American visitors allowed me to have a connection with a part of me that I did not understand.

Bring gifts that are uniquely American. In my younger years, I anticipated the arrival of the American teams mostly to enjoy the gifts they would bring us. The bulk of it was various kinds of food we requested that we could not find in Italy. Of course, my sister and I only knew of what our parents would describe for us, but we would ask for things like peanut butter, marshmallows, and jell-o. Occasionally, a team would surprise us with items we did not know to ask for like Skittles, Root Beer, or Hershey's Kisses. Perhaps the teams did not think that commodities like these could be terribly exciting for kids our age--especially in a land known for its culinary delicacies--but these gifts blessed us more than anyone could know. They were more than just food and candy; they were small connections to America that made us feel like we belonged.

Include missionary kids as much as and whenever possible. When short-term teams came to participate in my parents' ministry, I was often recruited by the team to be an interpreter. I loved participating with the teams in their ministry and felt honored that they would include me. But beware! Do not assume missionary kids will understand all your slang and cultural references. We may speak English and appear to be American, but we do not have the same shared experiences. Sometimes the most lonely feeling is when a short-term team is hanging out, having fun, and laughing about things you just don't understand. Be sure to include missionary kids not just in the ministry activities but also in your fun and relaxing times.

So, before you go on your next short-term mission trip, find out if you will be interfacing with missionary kids. Know that you will have an affect on them, and you can choose to influence them positively or negatively. You are what they know of the states. You are their connection to what they haven't experienced for themselves yet. Take an interest in them, treat them special, and include them as part of your team!