

Samantha Ribey with Me to We in Ecuador

Doing their bit to build a better world

Aidan Labossiere

For two weeks in July, grade 11 student Samantha Ribey ventured to the Amazon Rainforest in Ecuador on a volunteer trip with the Me to We organization.

When I asked her favourite part of the trip, Ribey was at a loss for words. There were so many things about Ecuador and the Amazon Rainforest that were amazing. "The build-site [in Kanambu] was probably the highlight," said Ribey, mentioning that the community-led building project was inspiring.

Ribey helped build a school, a well, a clean water pump station, and a septic system. The goal of the building project was to reach the five pillars of sustainability for the community: opportunity (jobs for women), agriculture, health, education, and water. The first three of those pillars were already met, so the group worked to help reach the other two pillars. Ribey did a lot of concrete work, mixing, sifting, pouring, and building walls for the school.

In Atikokan, Ribey has been active as a student coach in volleyball and figure skating, server at a soup kitchen in Thunder Bay, and helps around

elsewhere in Atikokan. She continued this volunteer work by helping improve the education and water system in Ecuador.

Originally, Ribey wanted to go to India to volunteer, but it was just too far away. Next, she thought Nicaragua; a relative has been there and it offered a very enticing itinerary which suited her interests. Safety concerns ruled out Nicaragua, so she decided that Ecuador was the best option.

Ribey chose to get involved with Me to We because of its commitment in providing aid to people in need, which is important to her. She wants to travel and make a difference; going to Ecuador with Me to We covered both goals. She loved experiencing such a different culture.

Ribey's dream is to travel to all of the continents. She has already travelled to Europe (with the AHS French class in April) and has expanded her range by going to South America.

Although the itinerary was pre-decided, she had some choice because Me to We has different trips with different activities. Me to We

offers seven different locations: Amazon, India, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Kenya, Tanzania, and Ethiopia. All of these trips differ in length, price, and activity which give the volunteer variety in their choice. Ribey compares the itinerary to that of a school trip because of its strict outline.

The Rainy River District School Board awarded Ribey a \$1,000 travel scholarship for the trip. Ribey wrote an essay detailing her community involvement and commitment to her school; she also agreed to share her experience at AHS after her return.

Me to We covers meals, flight, hotel, and other travel costs. Extras, such as souvenirs or side trips come out-of-pocket.

Ribey did additional fundraising to help with the cost of her trip: a bottle drive and a vendor's market at the Riverview Church. It is hard to do a lot of fundraising because this is a solo trip instead of a group trip, which eliminates options such as a half-and-half draw, said Ribey. Nevertheless, she raised \$1,000.

Ribey said she did not experience culture shock because she was, "fully See 'Me to We', page 3

a millimetre of rain August 1-23. During the same period, Thunder Bay had 43 mm, Upsala 25 mm, Mine Centre 7 mm, and Fort Frances 16 mm.



Sam Ribey and her Me to We group straddle the equator during their July visit to Ecuador

Me to We in Ecuador

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immersed right away, and the places we stayed in reminded me of the cabins here [in northwestern Ontario].” She was gone for a significant period of time; twice as long as the Europe Trip, said Ribey, but the whole

experience felt surreal to her, and went by quickly.

Ribey took pictures around Toronto before her trip and took many during her time with Me to We, which she will compare during her presentation in the fall.