

History Highlights



“The Dump: The End of All Stuff”

Many years ago before Spectrum began our founder Pastor Von heard of people living at the Tijuana dump, but the people he asked in town had no idea where the dump was located. Since even paper maps of Tijuana were nonexistent, he finally hit upon the idea of following a garbage truck back to the dump. God probably worked on his patience while he was waiting for the truck to finish its rounds, but he did eventually discover the community, and it was a wretched state of affairs. People lived inside the dump in the trash, in whatever little shelter they could construct of the materials they found there, while gulls circled overhead. There was a constant threat of being buried under the next truck’s load of refuse. But the loads brought potential for survival – metals or cardboard for recycling, items to use or sell secondhand, even food for eating. The smoke from burning tires made driving difficult, and often someone had to jump out of the van with a walkie-talkie to guide the vehicle through. With little access to water everyone was beyond grimy, especially the children, and the bathing program that Von had begun in the orphanages was a natural fit to the needs here. Sometimes the kids’ bare feet were so caked with filth that a Brillo pad was necessary to remove the grime.

Through the years the canyon that housed that original dump filled up with trash, and the location of the dump has moved twice. At the current dump, conditions have improved somewhat. People no longer live inside the dump, but nearby. Children are not allowed inside the dump. However, electronics are regularly burned at home to extract the metals for recycling, producing unhealthy fumes. Access to safe water is still limited, so groups have been working on bringing in water filters. And although it is honest work, picking through garbage remains a dirty and hazardous occupation.

Many of the families at the original dump location remained when the dump moved, and while Spectrum serves at the current dump, we also continue the work that Von began over 50 years ago in the original dump community. Its history is hardly recognizable on the surface now, but there is still much work to be done, including helping with immediate needs, breaking the cycle of poverty, sharing the good news of Jesus with people, and empowering the local church to reach the community. The ministry at the dump was a blueprint as Spectrum began to work in other poor neighborhoods, many of whom had squatter residents. The neighborhoods form the backbone of our outreaches today.

