Ecuadorean community unites to rally support in earthquake aftermath

Students from Tufts For Ecuador have been working to mobilize the Tufts community to assist relief efforts in Ecuador in the aftermath of the 7.8 magnitude earthquake on April 16, which has caused upwards of 650 deaths. The group’s first fundraising event, which raised $2,000, served as the inaugural event for a larger campaign among university students in the Boston area.

The fundraiser, held on April 21 on the Tisch Library Roof, included a photo exhibit and a bake sale of Ecuadorian goods to raise money for the Ecuadorian Red Cross (ERC), senior Ananda Páez, one of the event organizers, explained. She said that all proceeds from the group’s initiatives will be donated to the ERC, which has been the primary coordinator of the humanitarian response in the area. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ website, the organization has deployed over 800 volunteers and distributed over 60 tons of aid — consisting of supplies such as cleaning kits, blankets and shelter kits — since the crisis began.

According to Páez, Ecuadoreans who are connected to the Tufts community “are suffering due to lack of infrastructure, basic services, food [and] water.” While not directly benefiting them, the proceeds will help the ERC in its overall humanitarian rescue effort.

According to first-year Cami Rovalino, who has been involved with the group since the beginning of the process, efforts will continue tonight in the Carmichael Dining Center and next week at the Dewick-MacPhie Dining Center, where students plan to continue to raise awareness about the earthquake and raise funds for relief. At the dining centers, the group will be presenting photos of Ecuador before and after the earthquake, and providing postcards for
others to buy, in order to keep or to write a message to send to victims, she said.

Rovalino added that she has also been working to organize a meal swipe donation program in Carmichael Dining Center before the end of the academic year, an effort that has included speaking with Carmichael Unit Manager Peter Kourafalos to coordinate the group’s efforts.

The student group formed on April 17, the day after the earthquake occurred, after a group of Ecuadorian students reflected on how they could make an impact in the wake of the earthquake. They quickly set up a Venmo account to collect student donations, which the students have subsequently used in their events and outreach, Páez explained.

The group has consistently been posting updates on the situation in Ecuador, the number of casualties and injuries and requests for donations on its Facebook page, she added.

According to Páez, members of Tufts For Ecuador also reached out to other members of the Ecuadorian community from neighboring schools to get them involved with the cause.

“We are now collaborating with Ecuadorian students from Harvard, MIT, BU, BC, Northeastern and Berklee as well as the Association of Ecuadorians in New England and the Consulate of Ecuador in Boston,” she told the Daily in an email.

According to senior Juan David Nuñez Hurtado, several of these students attended last week’s fundraiser.

He explained that this collaboration has been empowering in light of the difficulty of dealing with the news of the earthquake for members of the Ecuadorian community.

“It was really shocking when I heard about it, that night I was barely able to sleep … I was very anxious thinking of [what I could do] to help,” he said. “It was really nice to see all of the Ecuadorian students come together creating sort of a community.”

Páez, who is from Quito, Ecuador and still has family living there, said the personal aspect of the crisis has motivated her to mobilize support.

“Luckily none of [those in the Tufts’ Ecuadorian community have] lost any friends or family to the earthquake,” Páez said. “But some Ecuadorian students have family and friends in affected areas.”

Rovalino added that while she herself is not from the affected areas, those areas have been important parts of her upbringing.

“Going to Kanoa and Bahía de Caráquez were some of the highlights of my teenage years and it is just horrible to know that the beautiful people and places I have in my memory are now absolutely devastated,” she said.

Rovalino also said that efforts to rally support come from a very personal place.

“It is one thing to read in the news about a catastrophe somewhere else in the world, and it is another one to know that it actually happened in places you know, to people that you once walked amongst,” she said.

Arin Kerstein contributed reporting to this article.

Correction: The print version of this story mistakenly said that Ananda Páez was born in Quito, Ecuador, but she was in fact born in Tokyo. Quito was also referred to as a town, but it is the capital city of Ecuador. The Daily apologizes for these errors.