

Meaningful World

The Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP)

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Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Relief Mission to Puerto Rico Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, and Transformation of Trauma 17-30 December, 2017

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The island of Puerto Rico and its people were ravished, naked and vulnerable in the wake of hurricane Irma first, and then unforgiving hurricane Maria on 20 September, 2017. The lush green vegetation was stripped from the island, only brown broken branches remained. The people were drenched in shock and disbelief, but there was no time to waste, they needed to survive.



“MARIA IS HISTORY, WE ARE THE MOMENT”

Hurricane Maria wiped out the communication system, there was no electricity, no running water and many roads were impassable so that the entire island was paralyzed. People could not prepare adequately with provisions of food and water for the extended period of time that basic essentials would be unavailable. For the past 19 years Puerto Rico has been in the path of multiple hurricanes threatening to hit the island and each time they suddenly veered away, giving residents a false sense of protection. They thought their beautiful island was blessed, or at least secure. So, while they prepared by barricading their windows, battening down the hatches so to speak, and bringing in food and water for 3 or 4 days, they could not have been prepared for the 225 mile an hour winds, and slashing rain that came upon them. For 3 sleepless days and nights, they fought back and did their best to protect themselves and their property. Some were able to hold their ground while assaulted by the unrelenting winds and rain, while others had their homes toppled, roofs ripped off, glass shattered around them, and water invading their fortresses of safety. Children, the infirm and the elderly were of course the most vulnerable. Caregivers sacrificed their own needs to protect the vulnerable, while praying that their own families were safe.

When the storm finally subsided after 3 days and the devastating impact could be surveyed, everyone was in shock. Many people could not even venture out of their homes, as live electrical lines were down all around them, with trees uprooted and tossed about anywhere the fury of the wind decided to drop them. To make a horrendous situation even worse, there was no way people could communicate

with one another; the phones, television, and internet service were completely out and radio service was inconsistent. People did not know if loved ones were safe. They had very little gas for transportation and no accessible roads. They knew they needed to take action because it became clear that the “government” was not going to move fast enough to bring them food and water, as well as medical care and necessary medicines to survive. Neighbors helped one another; they started cleaning up the fallen trees and debris, people started to come together to support one another, the island united.



Before the hurricane, the people of Puerto Rico were suffering from an identity crisis due to a long history of colonization and often treated as a step-child of the United States. The disaster response from the US government was frustratingly slow and inadequate and, the residents of Puerto Rico were frustrated by this, and in addition many are still trying to cope with the delayed response of their local government and institutions. Over 100 days after the hurricane, almost 75% are still without electricity, and many are without consistent communications and running water.

The devastation and destruction of hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico is multi-layered, and we have witnessed emotions of frustration, fear, worry, anxiety being repressed as Puerto Ricans soldier on with their remarkable resilience, and determination. We have seen professionals and community leaders, all working non-stop since the hurricane. They participated in our workshops to release, heal, and learn new tools; which was the first opportunity for self-care they have had since the hurricane. We have been given a glimpse into their pain, their fear, and the back-breaking work that went on for hours and hours as the hurricane pounded down upon them. We facilitated the expression of their individual experiences to help individuals and communities process and release their pain, sense of loss, worry, fear and the myriad of emotions they are carrying.

Our established goals for this mission were; to promote emotional healing and well-being with the focus on the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model and flower essence and essential oils, to assess the level of trauma as well as forgiveness and meaning-making, to offer supportive and integrative interventions, to train professionals in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model, to help create a sense of empowerment and a sense of personal control, to transform Horizontal Violence, to establish Peace and Forgiveness Gardens for reflection and healing. To supplement these goals, we also purchased plants of rosemary and palm trees which are native to Puerto Rico.



Our first humanitarian relief mission to Puerto Rico felt like it was guided by light and a higher power because as soon as we contacted Dr. Gilberto Herrera Silva, it seemed that doors were beginning to

open and key people were coming to us without an effort, invitations for interviews and workshops were multiplying increasing our outreach with success. Our goal was to reach multi-stakeholders of the Island, to have a holistic and comprehensive view of PR: Police department, Minister of Education, Health, & Social Welfare, shopping malls, Scouts, schools, teachers, hospitals, morgues, Department of Housing, Women's shelter for domestic abuse, FEMA, Red Cross, churches, orphanages, and communities without homes. Although we had planned 10 workshops in 12 days, we actually conducted 18 workshops, 3 radio and 2 TV interviews and distributed 10 luggages of donations. We impacted 750 people directly, and 25,000 indirectly. We reached 300,000+ through radio, and 2 million through TV. Additional 15,000 through social media posts twice a day.



One hundred days, post Hurricane Maria, challenges are numerous; Almost 75% in some areas still do not have basic needs of electricity and communications, poor communication with the neediest due to destroyed roads, large scale exodus to the United States. As a result, frustrations are extremely high, and people are feeling exhausted to live day by day with uncertainty, helplessness regarding not being able to provide for their families, despair and fear of the next hurricane season starting in May. Meaningfulworld programs were the first large scale workshops on the island to provide post trauma healing since the hurricane, especially for mental health providers, who were exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. Strengths are also numerous; Resilience, feeling united, helping one another, keeping the spirit of play, music and dance alive being the most prevalent.

We developed the following sustainable programs:

1. Men's EQ groups to cope with domestic and GBV violence
2. Integrating Emotional Intelligence in Teacher Certification curriculums
3. Planting trees
4. Teaching the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model in Technical Institute
5. Intergenerational dialogue programs to enhance positive lessons and wisdom
6. Assertiveness training for women
7. Collaboration with UPR to train facilitators to teach the 7- step throughout PR
8. Begin a Meaningfulworld branch in Puerto Rico

Some of the lessons-learned were; be more prepared with water and non-perishable foods during, plant trees which are native to Puerto Rico because they have roots which grow deeper into the ground, install solar panels, store gasoline for generators, alert authorities to systemic problems as they appear and have disaster preparedness bags.

When participants were asked what they liked most about the program, responses were: "When Dr. Ani points out the political and social aspects of horizontal violence we deeply understand because we experience it a lot but didn't realize the psychological dynamics of it," "The relaxing aspect of it was great," "This was the (the experience of the workshop) best Christmas gift ever," "The information that I learned today, I can use for the rest of my life," "This program, this intervention was the first time it has

ever happened in the history of the University of Puerto Rico.” This reality was echoed in all the groups we have worked with; “processing doesn’t typically happen at the University, for the fear of confrontation results in avoiding personal issues with others.”



A Meaningfulworld Puerto Rican branch, directed by Dr. Gilberto Herrera Silva is being established with several other people expressing dedication to be part of the team and an intensive training mission has been planned for March, 2018. We have made over a dozen new vital collaborations to organize and nurture new and sustainable programs in 2018. Meaningfulworld’s first Humanitarian Relief team expresses special gratitude to the following sponsors; The University of Puerto Rico in Aguadilla, Honeywell, QAVAENG Consulting, Flower Essence Services as well as many others who have given generously. Meaningfulworld team expresses deep gratitude to our collaborators; Dr. Gilberto Herrera Silva, Dr. Gypsy E. Rios, Dr. Sara A. Paredes, Natasha Hernandez and Terry Mar Anglero.



Your donations are fully tax deductible kindly, visit: <http://meaningfulworld.com/get-involved/donation>

Founded in 1990, the Association for Trauma Outreach & Prevention (ATOP) Meaningfulworld, charitable organization affiliated with the United Nations Dept. of Public Information, has achieved international recognition as a leader in training humanitarian outreach professionals as well as responding to two decades of global and local disasters. ATOP is committed to health and global education promoting state-of-the-art scientific theory, peace, forgiveness, consciousness research, internship, and the development of technical skills to train mental health professionals, teachers, psychologists, art therapists, nutritionists, alternative medicine practitioners, clergy, nurses, mediators, interfaith ministers, and lay persons committed to service the self and humanity. Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Outreach Teams have helped rehabilitate survivors from over 45 countries, making a daily difference in people's lives helping to transform tragedy and trauma into healing and meaning-making through post trauma growth, resilience, emotional intelligence, mindfulness, mind-body-eco-spirit health, visionary leadership, empowerment and artful collaboration through a new world view.

Our Motto: When one helps another BOTH become stronger