

Meaningful World

Haiti Empowered and Community Healing Post Earthquake: Meaningfulworld Ambassadors Return to Work on Resilience and Meaning-Making Alexa Kauffman, Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Emily Bales, & Shayla Tumbling



Photos of the streets of Port-Au-Prince

Imagine a place filled with energy, hope, life, and laughter – yet lacking in basic everyday resources and necessities, which we may often take for granted. Your home is rudely constructed out of concrete slabs or thin tin boards. Your food, growing out of dirt, is covered in garbage and rubble. Unpaved streets are littered with foot-deep potholes. The frenetic atmosphere adds to the scorching heat as scores of people stand outside, seemingly unaware of the sweat that drips down. Smoke rises from different piles of trash dumped on various street corners, as burning is a common means of disposal. The air continuously reeks of burning trash and the humidity traps the stench of the smoke, causing it to linger for hours. The streets are always overflowing with people and bustling with merchants, tap-taps, motorbike drivers, and schoolchildren always in motion, but with an unclear destination in mind.

Despite the seeming apathy about the state of the country, we found, after a little encouragement, that the spirit of Haiti is still alive and well. Concern for family, safety, and country are still at the forefront of people's minds, and they are eager to learn ways of helping their fellow man. Though culturally the intense feelings of caring appear to be masked, these surfaced when we discussed issues such as domestic violence, horizontal violence, and cleaning up Haiti. There is a desire to help and a “learned helplessness” that needs to be quelled.

As soon as we stepped off the plane, the Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Team, Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Billy Prophete, Shayla Tumbling, Alexa Kauffman, and Emily Bales, began to work. We met with Dr. Joel S. Charles who informed us about the Chikungunya epidemic. We then drove to meet with the Minister of Health and had a rousing discussion about horizontal violence and the problems of education in Haiti. We arrived at the monastery, where we met with Father Wismick, VP of University of Notre Dame, and the international speakers for the Center for Spirituality and Mental Health (CESSA) conference.

Over 250 attendees listened intently as speakers from Haiti and abroad spoke on Resilience and Trauma at the community level. Our team had three presentations, focusing on community healing, resilience, meaning-making and on the 7-step Integrative Healing Model and chakra balancing exercises. With Dr. Kalayjian's moving words, participants pledged to tell three other individuals what they had

learned, and to be mindful that peace begins with them, and that negativity or Horizontal Violence ends with them. During the second presentation we focused on forgiveness, as we asked people why we send love to those who've hurt us. At first the responses reflected religious reasons, as God was an external motivator for forgiveness, but as the discussion continued it became apparent that we send love to those who have done wrong to us because with love they will heal and stop hurting others. We donated the chakra-balancing exercises booklet to the library in the hope that people will continue the exercises all year long.



In order: The team at the airport, 1st Day in Haiti, the Heart-to-Heart Circle of gratitude with professionals at the University of Notre Dame, and Dr. Ani delivering a speech to rapt conference attendees

After the conference we conducted a successful two-day research-intensive training program at the University of Notre Dame. Close to 35 physicians, nursing professors, nurse practitioners, and nursing instructors from six different regions in Haiti gathered to improve their scientific research skills and prepare for publishing. The majority possessed 7-30 years of professional experience in educating physicians and professional nurses and each showed an eagerness to learn research methodology and to improve communities in Haiti. We witnessed within the group a sense of generalized helplessness concerning challenges in Haiti and the desire to overcome those challenges.



Eager students at the University of Haiti

On June 18th, we arrived at a classroom buzzing with energy at the University of Haiti. Over 60 third-year psychology students were wide-eyed, eager to express their opinions and to have their voices heard. The first part of our training included EQ, the Four Agreements, inquiry & overview of UN Declaration of Human Rights, the MDGs, and the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model. We then surveyed their experiences of violence against women (i.e., seen, heard, experienced, or engaged in, etc.). Although the first conscious reports ranged from 0-100%, follow-up anonymous reports (when students were asked to close their eyes) indicated around 95% violence against women. We inspired the students to think about and take action to make a difference. As one student said, “Thanks to your team you worked hard to organize this training and I’m grateful because there is no change without sharing, and you shared a lot.”

On June 19th, we ventured to Carrefour, to Mphelmat Maison de Infantes, an orphanage, where we were eager to train the staff members of two orphanages and were pleased to work with the kids! We emphasized the critical period of child development and the impact of separation from their parents for children ages 3-7, including symptoms of trauma and anxiety.

We then proceeded to visit the orphanage Maison des Enfants de Nazareth. After being greeted by the beautiful children, we embarked on a tour of their facility. We took pause and were sad to witness the poor living accommodations and learning facilities. We then engaged the children in chakra-balancing exercises, which lifted their spirits and decorated all of our faces with smiles.



The beautiful children of Mphelmat Maison de Infantes and Maison des Enfants de Nazareth, the street vendors, and other children needing love

On June 20th we arose to a beautiful sunlit morning and made our way to the University of Haiti. We met with the Dean of Psychology to donate Dr. Ani's books to the library and to explore the campus to find the perfect place for the new Peace and Forgiveness Garden that we have been nurturing around the world. The Dean was grateful for our help and he discussed how the University of Haiti desperately needed professors. We made plans to develop online courses through Skype.



Pledging to help with ecological beautification at the Mind-Body Institute

We then rushed to the Mind-Body Institute to conduct a joint training session with MBI and the Foundation of E.D.O. Twenty-five participants from different regions of Haiti participated. Our team reviewed what participants recalled from the previous year's training program, then elaborated on the Four Agreements (DM Ruiz), the 8 steps of Self-Healing, Horizontal Violence, and assertive communication. During the presentation we engaged the members in a lively conversation about cleaning up Haiti by maintaining commitments to implement neighborhood organizations. They also pledged to practice daily the 7-Chakra Balancing Exercises, and to read

Victor Frankl's and Don Miguel Ruiz's books before our return.

We then went to the Global Adolescent Project, founded by Dr. Nancy Sobel from California. Immediately upon our arrival, one of the children assumed the first chakra-balancing position activating her root chakra, indicating that our last training had been memorable! After a quick house tour, we gathered around the dining room table to discuss the Four Agreements and to practice speaking lovingly with one another and resolving conflict peacefully and with respect, as well as EQ. We focus on the body as trauma lodges in the body, and no matter how much we help them with catharsis, physical energetic balance is essential to integrate in healing trauma.

On June 21st we were early to rise and traveled to Haiti Christian Orphanage in Rue Frerre, where we were once again greeted with big smiles and warm hugs and kisses by the children. This reaction was heartwarming to us as this was Meaningfulworld's fifth year working with them, and we were glad they remembered us so fondly. We reviewed conflict-transformation skills, EQ, and assertive communication.

Upon leaving the orphanage after leading energy-balancing exercises and dispensing donations, we ventured out to a beach in southern Haiti near Duvalier town, where we met members of the National Initiative for the Coordination of Haitian Action (INCAH), an organization that works to empower the Haitian youth. We are grateful that in one day we were able to nurture our previous relationships as well as engage in new collaborations.



The children of the Global Adolescent Project serenade us – With Dean of Psychology Dept in the University of Haiti, donating Dr. Ani’s books to the library

The following plans were endorsed: 1. Peace and Forgiveness Gardens established in close to 10 institutions; 2. sponsoring a child in Haiti (\$100 for university, and \$250 for K-12); 3. publishing professional journals, 4. adding books to their libraries; 5. establishing neighborhood associations, 6. translating chakra-balancing into French/Kreyol; and 7. establishing online educational programs.

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In spite of all the challenges we faced during our mission, we returned home emotionally enriched and spiritually enlightened. On the emotional level we felt stronger, more confident as *Meaningfulworld* Ambassadors and in touch with our emotions. Developing our flexibility to face uncertainties and take on challenges with fortitude, we skillfully dispensed our knowledge and helped transform the lives of numerous individuals while learning about Haitians. We estimate that we touched the lives of more than 500 people directly and more than 3,000 people indirectly through our work in Haiti. We hope that we transformed their lives as they transformed ours.



Sowing the seeds in the Peace & Forgiveness Gardens and Dr Ani’s Heart-to-Heart Circle of Gratitude

Our Motto: When one helps another, BOTH become stronger.