

Meaningful World

2017 Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Mission to Haiti 16 June – 1 July, 2017

Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, Transforming Horizontal Violence, Meaning- Making, and Establishing Peace and Forgiveness Gardens Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Rev. Julie Lira, & Lorraine Simmons

We gathered at the John F. Kennedy Airport at 3:30 am on 16 June, 2017 to begin the 12th Humanitarian Outreach mission to Haiti. As a trio of veteran Meaningfulworld Ambassadors, Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Rev. Julie Lira and Lorraine Simmons were a strong team. Despite coming together for the first time as a team, we shared similar goals and aspirations for helping as many people as possible while in Haiti. After 11 pieces of luggage-7 of which were donations-were checked in, we engaged in grounding exercises with a back drop of big plexi-glass heart representing the “big apple,” ate a hearty breakfast and boarded the plane. There the languages of Creole and French surrounded us, so the anticipation of the mission to come was felt immediately.



Arriving in Haiti, Port Au Prince airport was a bit shocking for Julie because she had been there with the first Meaningfulworld team after the devastating earthquake in 2010. For her the difference is huge, the rubble has been replaced by an organized clean structure with stores, restaurants, some even with air conditioning. Out in the blazing sun, dust and humidity, there were cars, tap-taps, and motorbikes crowding the streets and pedestrians moving about, but there were clear differences. For Julie, the rubble was gone, the streets cleared and paved, buildings restored. For the rest of us, it was clear that the crowds of people were still hustling to make a little bit of “change” to get through the day, but there were not so many vendors blocking the sidewalks. This is due to a real effort by officials to enforce a new law of street vendors in allotted areas only. The other difference that we witnessed was trash being swept off the streets and carted away.

After a week of being in Haiti and working with various people, Julie expressed a sobering realization. She had hoped that the extreme desperation and poverty that she had witnessed immediately after the earthquake was due to shock, trauma, loss of life, homes, and lack of clean water, and food sources. But to her dismay she realized what the rest of us were struggling with for years, namely that the extreme poverty had always been there even before the earthquake and the people of Haiti continue to struggle under that heavy burden.

On the first day of the mission, we were saddened to learn of violent riots at the University of Haiti. Riots and anger lead to a tragedy where a student was injured so severely that most of the major

bones in his body were broken. We met with the rioting students, with the injured victim, several Deans and some faculty members separately and offered our empathy, support, and identified the roots of the violence in Horizontal Violence. This violence and unrest at the University has a complicated 30-year history that continues to perplex and plague the faculty and students. Frustrations were high everywhere: the street workers were demonstrating as they had not been paid for 26 months, instructors were not paid for over 3 months, and so on...

Our team established the following goals: nurturing sustainable education in regard to emotional intelligence (EQ), transforming horizontal violence via discussion and distribution of campaign posters of “crab in the bucket” syndrome, establishing neighborhood associations, establishing Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, and nurturing resilience. The team offered psychoeducation, healing, and meaning-making interactive workshops to continue to decrease the impact of both direct and indirect trauma, caused by natural and human-made disasters. The mission had a three-prong approach: healing, education, and research. Additionally, we set goals to meet with the Ministers of Mental Health, Education and Cultural Affairs as well as the Chief of the Police Department. We delivered a lecture and a workshop at the 7th, met with the Minister of Education, the Minister of Mental Health, Deputy Director for Disaster Preparedness, and made contacts with the Minister of Culture, Minister of Health, and Foreign Affairs. We connected with several new collaborators: Haiti Partners, The Minister of Education, the Police Department of Haiti, Institut Universitaire de Formation des Cadres (INUFOCAD), a foster care organization, and Radio Tele Caraibes. We sponsored five children for food and education. Meaningfulworld is in the process of establishing an official chapter in Haiti.



The following programs were developed:

1. Campaign on transforming Horizontal Violence through posters of lifting one another up and not being a “crab in the bucket, pulling one another down.” Posters were donated to the collaborative centers, educational materials were distributed, & asked to continue;
2. Campaign for taking care of the environment, “Ayiti Se Lakay Mwen;” removal of trash and beautification of neighborhoods;
3. Establishing “Peace and Forgiveness Gardens” in the Universities, public schools, communities, and in everyone's home;
4. Invitation to establish pilot programs of the previous campaigns in the public school system in September;
5. Sponsoring children in need for education, well-being, and creating peace;
6. Introducing, connecting and partnering with local organizations for development of monthly workshops within the Police Department;
7. Establishing neighborhood associations, including Men's Circles, to prevent domestic abuse and gender based violence.

Gratitude to our donors:

Shulamit Lazarus, Lisa Schiller, anonymous, Ani Kalayjian, Julie Lira, and Lorraine Simmons

When one helps another BOTH become stronger!