

## **Davis Projects for Peace: Lekol Dete for Restavek and Free Children in Les Cayes, Haiti**

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This proposal for a Davis Projects for Peace Grant is designed to promote peace in Haiti by helping break down social and cultural barriers between children living in Restavek (i.e. indentured servitude) and free children. I have identified what might be a unique opportunity to develop and run a school-based program that combines teachers and students from a typical mission school and a special Restavek school in Les Cayes, Haiti.

### **Objectives**

1. To provide a 6-week 'Lekol Dete' (summer school) experience for 3<sup>rd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade children in Les Cayes, Haiti, including 75 Restavek children and 75 free children;
2. To develop with the local headmasters and teachers (from the Restavek and a mission school) a summer curriculum that promotes collaborative learning, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills; and
3. Evaluate and document the Lekol Dete for publication and future implementation.

### **Background**

Since its beginnings as the first independent black republic in the world, Haiti has been plagued with political unrest, dire poverty and domestic struggles to secure basic human rights. Recent challenges include four hurricanes in 2008, the earthquake disaster of January 12, 2010, the current cholera epidemic and tumultuous national elections. These have dashed most near-term hopes of peace and stability. Haiti's peace is further hindered by an insidious cultural element – childhood slavery, whereby destitute families 'loan' their children to better-off families. Ironically, this 'Restavek' (from the French 'stay with') system has been operating since the slaves overthrew their captors and defeated Napoleon's navy in 1804 to win their independence. In exchange for a place to sleep and basic sustenance (at best), these children – usually girls 7-18 – do chores such as cooking, cleaning, laundry and hauling water. They are generally denied access to school and often physically, mentally and sexually abused.

In Les Cayes (the third largest city in Haiti) I have worked with an afternoon school dedicated to the primary education of Restavek children whose 'host' families allow them to attend classes, provided that daily chores are completed. This 'Institution Miscte Maranatha,' run by headmaster Amos Filius, covers the same curriculum as the 'Bon Samaritain' (Baptist mission school) run by his wife, Collette Filius. Remarkably, the Restavek children perform comparably to their morning-school counterparts on national secondary school entrance exams.

Despite their academic achievements, the Restavek children are viewed as inferior and are ostracized by their peers. Privileged children derogatorily call each other 'Restavek' on the streets as an insult, and Restavek children may be excluded (also as a result of their labor obligations) from extra-curricular activities and other childhood activities. Peace, as defined in Webster's dictionary, is "a state of mutual harmony between people or groups, especially in personal relations." Lekol Dete will help cultivate peace among and between the free and the Restavek children - future parents, educational and community leaders in Les Cayes.

## Methods

In collaboration with the two schools and the Restavek Freedom Foundation (Cincinnati, OH), I propose developing and running Lekol Dete during an 8-week period from June 27 to August 20, 2011. The first week will be dedicated to developing and piloting the curriculum with the professional staff, to include both headmasters and four teachers from each school. The curriculum will provide a balance of fun and practical skills, as well as ample opportunities for children to form friendships and work together as equals. Lessons and activities will focus on team building, abstract reasoning, measurement concepts and methods, arts (such as painting and clay sculpting) and English language basics. Few, if any, opportunities to acquire these skills are offered through the regular school, and the headmasters have identified them as an important deficit in Haitian primary education. Collaborative learning of these skills will help reinforce harmony, respect and peace between the Restavek and free children.

Lekol Dete will run two three-hour sessions (10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and noon to 3:00 p.m., overlapping for lunch and recreational activities) for six consecutive weeks. Two hours of each session will be for collaborative educational activities. This schedule is cognizant of the Restavek children's work obligations, as well as the children's need for free time during the summer.

Part of the strategy of promoting equality and respect will be provision of a t-shirt 'uniform' for all children. Lekol Dete will provide a hot lunch (typically rice and beans, plantain or breadfruit daily, and chicken twice per week). The final school day will feature a bus trip for all children to the beach at Port Salut.

The eighth week will include program evaluation with the staff. Success of the program will be substantially determined by the degree to which morning school and Restavek children form friendships and collaborative learning behaviors, which will serve them and their community all of their lives. One sustainable product of Lekol Dete will be a framework and written curriculum for future Lekol Dete programs in Les Cayes and other Haitian communities. We propose writing an article on the Lekol Dete experience (including the teachers and administrators as co-authors), and submitting it for publication in an international educational journal. With the curriculum developed and course materials in hand, subsequent sessions (in Aux Cayes or in other communities) will cost much less so that the chances of sustaining the program will be enhanced.

We hope that children will be excited about coming to Lekol Dete, and find the curriculum rewarding and the teamwork approach supportive of improved relations between the 'normal' and the Restavek children. Uniting Restavek and free children will help them recognize that they all have the same desires, values and educational and social needs. By breaking down the cultural barriers between the poor and the affluent, Restavek and free, it is my goal to foster mutual respect among all children, enhancing a solid foundation for peace now and as these children become adults and community leaders of the future.