

Davis Projects for Peace 2009  
Computers for Orphans: Bringing the World to the Heart of Jamaica  
Project Proposal  
Sponsors: Florence Maher, Adnan Kummer

On the outskirts of Mandeville in central Jamaica lies Hanbury Home. Built atop a restored mine in the midst of an area severely affected by the environmental effects of bauxite mining, it is home to 80 abandoned, abused, or orphaned children of all ages. Although the children's physical needs are provided for, they are emotionally starved and have little contact with the world beyond rhythms of orphanage life. This project will remedy both of these deficiencies as part of its short-term and long-term goals. Our proposal is to establish a media center and library for Hanbury Home and spend two weeks reading and playing with the children and teaching them how to use the computers and educational software. We believe that the greatest defense against conflict and despair in this world is education and communication, because these enable individuals to come together and become the change they wish to see in the world.<sup>1</sup> Providing these children with a media center will allow them to access a world beyond their daily lives, and spending time with the children will be a concrete proof of that world's tangibility and accessibility. The project design further allows for its implementation to encompass students from Howard University and additional International Student House residents.

We have contacted the director of Hanbury Home, Major Rudolph Richards, and ascertained that a media center would be welcomed and that we would have access to the children. The Home has a small room which would be suitable for a computer lab containing six computers, and we are welcome to come for two weeks in mid-August. Our plan is to spend two weeks at the Home, setting up the media center in the mornings and interacting with the children in the afternoons. Although our skill set includes advanced IT experience, we anticipate that clearing the room, working with local IT conditions at the Home, and training staff members in computer maintenance may take time. There is a small hotel within walking distance at which we plan to stay.

The lives of the children are strictly regimented. They get up at 5am and perform chores around the Home, after which they attend school. The youngest children or those who do not fit into the regular public school system are schooled at the Home itself. Homework and more light chores follow in the evenings. In the summertime, school is out of session and the children have more unstructured time. We foresee ourselves installing the media center and training Hanbury staff in its maintenance while the children are occupied with chores, and interacting with them during their free time. Our interaction will take the form of reading to the youngest and teaching the older children how to use the computers and play with the educational software. According to our contact, the children do not receive a great deal of personalized attention due to the limited resources of the Home and are extremely eager to play and feel loved. Many of the children were taken from abusive homes or abandoned. The Home's director told our contact that even more than the toys and clothes donated by well-meaning strangers, what these children need is contact with the outside world, with people who can demonstrate a different vision for their future after the Home than they receive from their limited experiences.

As students at International Student House, it is our desire to leverage our diverse experiences and resources into a lasting impact on these children's worldview. We have benefited from the educational access afforded by studying in Washington, DC and the interactions with our international fellow residents, and the resulting understanding and inspiration. Our goal is to take these chief attributes of an ISH residency – education, communication, and mutual understanding as a path towards peace and global citizenship – and extend it to the children of Hanbury Home. Perhaps one day they themselves might be ISH residents.

After we leave, we intend to “hand over” maintenance of the project to Hanbury Home and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Paraphrase of Mahatma Gandhi.

Rotary Club of Mandeville. Throughout our stay, we will train designated Hanbury Home staff members and the older children in basic computer troubleshooting. In addition, we will leave behind the equivalent of US\$1,000 in a bank account for necessary upkeep costs. This account will be administered by the Rotary Club of Mandeville to ensure its proper use. Through Dr. Grace Virtue at Howard University's Office of University Communications, with whom we have been closely working to develop this project, we have gained the pre-approval of a member of the Club's Board of Directors, Dr. Patrick Adisua. In addition, Dr. Virtue has a familial relationship with Systems Plus, a computer repair firm in Mandeville, and has obtained a commitment to offer repair services to the Home for no cost beyond that of the parts.

If possible, we would like to expand the project in two important ways. Although Hanbury Home is located just outside one of Jamaica's largest urban centers, the Home lacks Internet access. We have researched two major Internet service providers (ISPs) in the Mandeville area, Digicel and Cable & Wireless, and ascertained that monthly fees range from US\$40-\$60 per month depending on the speed of the connection and other services. It is unclear what constraints are involved with hooking the Home up to the Internet grid. If feasible, we would like to make the computers Internet accessible, with the initial monthly Internet costs coming out of the US\$1,000 we leave behind. In the long-term, we would look for a donor to provide for the access costs beyond the first year, such as the ISP itself or possibly the Rotary Club. Dr. Virtue is herself in the process of establishing a charitable foundation and has pledged the proceeds of her forthcoming book to benefit Hanbury Home, so this is another possibility for long-term access.

We would also like to invite the participation of more ISH residents and Howard students in this project. It is our hope that ISH residents who were unable to commit to the development of this project in the autumn or whom are new to the house this winter, spring, or summer may wish to become involved. The relatively low cost of traveling to Jamaica and the flexible design of the project encourages wider participation as residents' summer plans solidify. In addition, Dr. Virtue has a list of Howard students interested in providing community service in Jamaica. She is interested in bringing Howard students to Mandeville this summer and would like to complement and reinforce our project. Young Howard students could assist us with our project and provide ideal role models for the children.

The outcome and impact of the project is two-fold. In the short-run, we expect the children to gain computer literacy and familiarity with the educational software. We also hope to have a short-lived but meaningful positive influence in terms of satiating their needs for attention and affection. In the long-run, we anticipate that the media center and library will serve as a resource and reinforcement of their regular educational curriculum, and will allow them to develop savvy with informational technology that they will need as they grow older and seek to enter higher education or the workforce, and to which their peers in Kingston and other large urban areas already have access. In addition, we hope that the combination of our interactions with the children and the future interactions we provide through the computers and books we leave behind as well as our continuing contact with them will foster a greater sense of the wider world, its people, and the possibilities beyond the rhythms of their current lives. In sum, we hope to nurture the seeds of a worldview which encompasses ambitions towards higher education and global aspirations.

*Florence Maher* is an undergraduate senior at Howard University where she majors in Political Science and Economics. She has lived or traveled extensively in India, Poland, Germany, and Japan. Her hometowns are Portland, Oregon and Las Vegas, Nevada.

*Adnan Kummer* is studying for a Masters in International Public Policy at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies. He holds an M.S. in Applied Economics and an M.B.A. from the University of Texas at Dallas. Prior to entering graduate studies, he worked in the IT industry for such companies as Sabre and Electronic Data Systems (EDS). He was born in India.