

Ways and Dreams: *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* Alexandra Sisk (I-House New York)

Background

Poverty limits opportunity and shortens life expectancy. In Brazil, a child born into an impoverished neighborhood, known as a favela, will lead a shorter, less healthy, and more violent life.

Brazil boasts the 10th largest economy in the entire world and has made impressive economic strides. (CIA factbook) However, the dramatic growth has not benefited everyone. Brazil is one of the most unequal societies in the world according to the Gini measurement of inequality. Great economic inequality has created tremendous social volatility as the gap between the poor and rich has turned into a gorge. The marginalized and impoverished neighborhoods, known as favelas, operate largely outside police control. Instead, many are run by the lucrative drug trade. Violence and murder are commonplace. In Brazil's capital, Rio de Janeiro, approximately 21 murders occur everyday, mostly concentrated in favelas. (City Crime Rankings)

Poverty is the root cause of injustice and inequality is the root cause of conflict. *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* aims to target girls to alleviate both injustice and conflict. Women hold an especially important role in breaking the cycle of poverty and violence; they are the drivers of human capital. Women are more likely than men to invest in their child's health and education thereby expanding opportunity according to the United Nations. Unfortunately, many girls fall victim to poverty's limitations so early that they may never be able to break the cycle for future generations. These girls may be deprived of an education as they must work instead. They have a higher rate of early pregnancy. Sex trafficking is widespread. All of these poverty related issues may cause feelings of powerlessness and low self esteem.

Sonhos Sao Caminhos invests in each girl as an agent for change as she explores her own leadership abilities and connects the participants to local organizations for long term success. The intensive program will directly affect ten girls by bridging the digital divide through use of media, teaching profitable cottage industry skills and providing a supportive, positive, and safe atmosphere. The positive effects spillover to the girl's households and their interactions with the community at large. The participants will forever have the experience of being accomplished and valued and will be better able to seek out and create similar opportunities for themselves far after *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* has ended.

The Project

Sonhos Sao Caminhos is a girl's day camp that utilizes media technologies, the arts and cottage industry training. The program aims to bolster confidence, nurture positive self-image and support future goals of participants. *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* is a collaborative initiative proposed by myself, Alexandra Sisk and the the Co-Founders of the Bahia based non-profit agency, Youth Art Haven, Elicia Blodgett and Rachel Santos. *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* is premised on the notion that a supportive and safe network can foster a girl's personal development by developing skills to avoid the common pitfalls of poverty. This program will help foster peace as it provides an opportunity for girls to develop skills to escape poverty and associated violence. These young women drive development and investing in their success means investing in the success of future generations.

This project is rooted in a partnership of expertise. Youth Art Haven specializes in using the arts to transform the lives of impoverished girls in Bahia, Brazil. I have experience working with marginalized refugee youth and also lived in Bahia while conducting independent research in 2006. Through the local knowledge and connections of Youth Art Haven and my experience with youth and Bahia, *Sonhos Sao Caminhos* offers real ways to improve lives, decrease violent social tension caused by economic inequality and create a more peaceful and just society.

The three week camp will run from July 11th to the 30th during the month long school holiday at a youth center in Chacara, Bahia, a favela in the northeastern state of Bahia. Bahia is the poorest state in Brazil with nearly half the population living below poverty level. Ten low income girls, aged 13-15 , will be selected by Ms. Blodgett and Ms. Santos through an application process. Since many children work in Brazil, each girl will earn a weekly scholarship to ensure participants are able to attend in lieu of potential work lost. There will be four female counselors managing the activities. Healthy breakfast, lunch, snacks and transportation costs are provided.

Each week will be thematically divided: identity, dreams and aspirations, and tools/resources for success. The activities of each theme will utilize arts and media technologies. Positive self-esteem will be promoted through the exploration of the participant's rich cultural history and opportunity to create their own narratives, giving voice to their experiences through media technologies. Additionally, marketable artisan skills will be included as a part of the curriculum. Bahia is a tourist center known for its artistic richness and artisan trade skills can create, viable alternatives to poverty.

Week 1: Identity: Who am I? July 11th-16th

Theme: Discovering ancestry through oral history

-research cultural and family history. Digital cameras and interviews used to make Photostory, an easy to use web movie program. Discussions about cultural/group relation to self-identity.

Supplemental: Language through music

-learn English language through song

Supplemental: Confidence and the camera

-practice introductions with each other, group and with the camera to practice confidence

On-going Activity: Marketable artisan skills

-learn introductory knitting stitches and complete first triangle and square pieces

Guest: All female drumming troupe, Dida

Saturday Field Trip: trip to Cachoiera to explore the history of the oldest sisterhood of free slaves of the New World

Week 2: Dreams and Aspirations July 18th-23rd

Theme: Dream Trees

-What are you rooted in, what challenges are faced, what are your dreams and logical steps.

Exploring who we admire and the characteristics that make role models

Supplemental:

-staying healthy: emotionally and physically through basic nutrition, information on commonly transmitted diseases and prevention, family planning

Supplemental:

-cultivate supportive networks. Identify positive and negative mechanisms of inter and intra-personal interaction. Conflict resolution, role-play, developing healthy responses

On-going Activity: Marketable Artisan Skills

Continue to develop artisan skills and financial literacy

Guest: Jorge Conceicao, local nutritionist, naturopath and historian

Saturday Field Trip: Sauipe, ropes course to build confidence, teamwork and reach goals

Week 3: Tools and resources for success July 25th-30th

Theme: Pathways to success (identifying and using resources)

-Identifying issues for young women and making connections to relevant resources and opportunities to support girls at risk in the Bahia community.

Supplemental:

-financial planning, discussing economic strategies, and correlation to education

Supplemental:

-Exercising voice, becoming a role model, developing leadership skills

On-going Activity:

-continue artisan skills, explore marketing and making contacts with local businesses

Graduation Ceremony