

**Davis 100 Projects for Peace  
Final Report - Summer 2007**

**Title: Empowering Youth through Service**

**School: Wellesley College**

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<This is an excerpt from my diary from South Africa>

August 13, 2007

"Maria told me she left the picture book I gave her on her bed and asked me if I could get it for her. I went into the girls' bedroom of the orphanage and got "Clifford the Firehouse Dog" from Maria's bed. As I grabbed the book, something strange caught my eyes. The pillow on Maria's bed seemed unusually bulky. I also noticed some strange papers sticking out under her pillow. I flipped Maria's pillow to see what was under it. Under her pillow were drawings, paper animals, and hand-made diary arranged neatly. Ah! Maria had saved all the arts and craft projects she did with my team members and had been keeping them under her pillow! Under Maria's pillow I saw her treasures, dreams, and creativity. I saw a glimpse of what peace really meant."

**1. Project Summary:**

The project took place in Mamelodi, South Africa from August 5<sup>th</sup> to August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007. During the two week period, the team worked at the Carmel Orphanage in Mamelodi. Mamelodi is a black township set up by South Africa's then apartheid government in the 1950s. The town has large informal settlements of corrugated iron shacks, which according to the townspeople takes only two days to build. The township has been suffering from poverty, evidenced by high unemployment rate and crime rate. It has also been suffering from HIV/AIDS epidemic, leaving many AIDS orphans. The majority of the children at Carmel orphanage lost one or both of their parents to AIDS.

The goal of this project lied on two levels; first to empower high school volunteers to make peace with themselves by serving others in an internationally disadvantaged community. I wanted the students to be empowered as they see themselves beyond the difficult economic and social situations they are placed in back home. Secondly, this project aimed to create peace in the lives of the orphaned and disadvantaged children of Mamelodi through arts & craft and sports activities.

**2. Project Results:**

During the month of June and July the team met weekly and designed arts & craft and sports activities for the children of the orphanage. Some of the arts and craft activities included drawing activities, making a hand-made diary, writing encouragement cards to a friend at the orphanage, making animals with yarn, sticks, etc. The activities were designed not only to spur children's creativity, but also to empower the children to see beyond the poverty and the tragic experiences they went through, such as loss of a parent to AIDS.

The initial plan of the project was to have a team of four American high school students from a socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds serve the orphanage in Mamelodi. However, as the planning and fundraising process were considered more in detail in June, the budget did not appear to be sufficient to fund four high school volunteers. As a result, the plan had to be adjusted to fully carry out what I wanted to accomplish through the project. After talking to the director of the orphanage and seriously reviewing the budget and the goals of the project, I made some adjustments; instead of bringing four students from the U.S. I made arrangements with the orphanage director to have a team of high school students already living in Mamelodi to lead the arts and craft and sports activities that the team from the U.S. designed. The final team from the U.S. consisted of myself and my younger

brother, a high school senior whose story was shared in the project proposal. The team from Mamelodi consisted of high school students from the township. All of these high school student volunteers were from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds themselves.

The U.S. team designed activities during the two months of training period in the summer. Once the U.S. team arrived in Mamelodi, we met with the high school students from the township and shared the activities plans and discussed how we can lead and teach these activities together to the children of the orphanage. The schedule of our project was designed so that in the morning the team from the U.S. worked with the younger children who were not yet attending school by teaching arts and craft activities, reading stories, and leading sports activities. During the afternoon time, when the older children of the orphanage returned from school, the high school volunteers from the township joined and led arts and craft activities and sports activities for the older children of the orphanage.

Although the project went through some changes and adjustments, I believe that the goals of the project were accomplished. The project gave the high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Mamelodi an opportunity to create peace with themselves and their own situation by serving the children of the orphanage, who are going through even tougher experiences than they are. The project also created peace in the lives of the children of the orphanage by providing them various educational and creative activities and allowing them to learn, grow and dream. As the orphanage director wrote to the team after the project, "the children have benefited tremendously" from this project. This project provided the children of the orphanage an opportunity to create peace in their lives, which were attacked by death of parents and various abuses they experienced. As I shared earlier through Maria's story, the team from the U.S. and the high school volunteers from Mamelodi created peace through the various arts and craft and sports activities and the genuine relationship they built with the children of the orphanage.

### **3. Implications:**

The impact of the project on the children of the orphanage is not just one-time assistance. The improved education and art and sports activities will have a long-lasting impact on the children and the community. As the high school students worked closely with the older students of the orphanage (aged 13-16) in leading art and sports activities, it has empowered the older orphaned children to lead activities for the younger children even after the summer. The grant also provided teaching and learning materials, such as books, arts and craft materials, school supplies and sports equipments which will allow the children of the orphanage to continue with these activities. The impact this project had on the high school volunteers from the U.S. and Mamelodi is immeasurable. The high school volunteers have learned that they can be difference and peace-makers in the world even though they come from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. It was an invaluable experience for them to witness the fruits of their service this summer. The smiles, hugs and constant "thank-you"s from the children of the orphanage were enough to teach them how much their service and time meant to the children of the orphanage and touched their lives.

As for me, I graduated from Wellesley College in May, 2007 and have started teaching 6<sup>th</sup> grade in a low-income community in the Bronx, NY. Using the experience and lesson I acquired through this project, at the school I am teaching, I created a community service group called "Be the Difference-Makers!" through which I will be mentoring a group of 6<sup>th</sup> graders to design and implement community service projects in their own community and be the difference-makers. I will be sharing my experience with this project with my students and empowering and teaching them that they too can be the peace-makers in the world.

