

## Q'eros Health Initiative

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Davis Projects for Peace Proposal, June 18 – August 20, 2015  
Q'eros Nation, Peru

### Background:

The Q'eros people live in the Andean Mountains of Peru. The spread of modernity and globalization have begun to infringe upon their traditional way of life. However, the over 2,000 members of the fourteen villages spread across various river valleys remain isolated and are proud of their culture as one of the last Incan communities in Peru.

In 2011 a Project for Peace undertaking, carried out by Hannah Rae Porst (Bates '11), brought education to the Q'eros people through the construction of their first school in the village of Ch'allmachimpana. This initial project spawned Willka Yachay, the non-profit organization that helps this community thrive. In a highly collaborative effort since 2012, Willka Yachay and the Q'eros people have constructed four school buildings that provide intercultural education to children and adults in their homeland. As a team, they have undertaken other projects such as sustainable alternative energy management, food security, and cultural and music preservation. Despite these successes, the geographical isolation of the community has prevented access to contemporary medicine and improved health. Health has not spread to the Q'eros people as quickly as mining, roads, or other advances of modernity.

An ongoing endeavor has been to preserve the traditional medical practices and knowledge of the Andean Community while simultaneously creating better access to western medicine. Despite efforts already made, the child mortality rate among the Q'eros people is 40 – 50 %, compared to the child mortality rate of Peru at large of 1.7% (World Bank). Willka Yachay provides emergency transportation for critically ill patients and *Curanderos*, or Q'eros healers, have worked in the schools to teach future generations about native medicinal plants and their uses. Preliminary steps have been taken to improve health in this community, although much room for progress remains. The construction of a *Hampi Wasi*, or home of healing, is the breakthrough step that will ensure the better health of the Q'eros people going forward on their path toward a peaceful and sustainable future.

### Project Summary:

The initial major step of transforming the healthcare of the Q'eros people will be the building of a *Hampi Wasi*. The main focus of this structure is to enhance the preventative aspect of healthcare among the Q'eros and avert health problems before they occur, while simultaneously preserving precious and vulnerable cultural knowledge. Hundreds of dollars worth of supplies such as ointments, analgesics, vitamins, wound care products, toothbrushes and other healthcare materials have been committed to this project by the President of Baystate Health, a Massachusetts hospital company (which has donated medical supplies for my previous volunteer trips to South America), to provide the initial stock of medical supplies for the clinic. The physical structure will become as integral to the community as have the schools, allowing the community members to preserve their culture and improve their health.

Similar to how the construction of the schools was undertaken, the designing and building of the center will be done by the Q'eros people, as they are capable and willing to perform such a task.

### Project Objectives:

The overall objective of this project is to empower the Q'eros people. Right now, there is *no* health care in Q'eros. This work cannot wait because this community should no longer have to abandon a newborn to curable dehydration or watch preventable infection take a limb or a life. The Q'eros are threatened in the face of road building, mining, and outward migration from harsh living conditions, all of which decimate their vibrant culture. Healthcare is the next step toward systemic and lasting change.

Aligning with Willka Yachay's organizational beliefs, this project will ensure that western medicinal practices are used where they can be of assistance, while not overshadowing or dismissing the useful and legitimate practices of the traditional botanical medicine of the Q'eros people.

The centralization of health within the fourteen villages is essential, due to its ability to deliver better care to the community. Going forward, the district health ministry of the region will be able to better support the community if they are able to utilize a health center such as the *Hampi Wasi*.

Education will take place in the *Hampi Wasi*, based on the most prevalent needs of the community such as nutrition, sanitation, basic first aid, and pregnancy care/child mortality. Programs to carry out this

education will be developed in conjunction with the community and health officials since this education will encompass traditional and western medicine. Nurses from the Kawsay Wasi clinic (based in Coya) have volunteered to give first aid and sanitation classes.

Some of the older students of the schools who are keenly interested in medicine will be trained in first aid in Cusco to serve as *promotores*, or health leaders of the community. They will be trained at Kawsay Wasi in Coya, and have received one training session with two nurses there already. Current *curanderos* of the community, or healers, will be charged with documenting the already known traditional practices of the Q'eros people to safeguard this valuable yet vulnerable cultural knowledge.

#### Sustainability:

The sustainability of the project comes partly due to the nature of the project itself, since a significant portion of the finances will be put toward the physical structure that will be maintained by the community for decades to come. Willka Yachay, a well-established organization, will also ensure that the maintenance of health materials in the clinic and education programs will continue to be carried out. The community has demonstrated its devotion to maintaining, utilizing, and growing the school system, which has spawned three additional schools in Q'eros after the initial school that was made possible by the Projects for Peace foundation. The knowledge of traditional botanical medicine already exists and the desire to have individuals better trained in basic first aid is present, yet there is no structure for the *promotores* or *curanderos* to operate from, which severely limits the healthcare capabilities in Q'eros.

It is past time for this to change. The Q'eros people are ready to create a medical center, which will augment first aid capability, improve medical emergency transportation and hospital/recovery support services to bring peace through health. It will become an essential repository and teaching resource of traditional botanical medicine. Eventually, the *Hampi Wasi* will provide traditional and modern care and preventive education by trained residents and visiting doctors, dentists and nurses. Willka Yachay has already received offers from doctors and nurses to visit the Q'eros Community.

#### Personal Qualifications:

My interest in healthcare and the desire to pursue medical school and public health has been continuous throughout high school and college. This is evidenced by my roles as President of the pre-med club on campus for the last two years and as Co president of the Public Health Initiative this year. My working summers in the Emergency Department of Baystate Health allowed me to witness how a patient achieving respectable health is a profound life changing experience, yet simultaneously enabled me to see how poor health cripples the ability to pursue a dignified life.

The most recent of my three trips to South America was this past summer, where I spent nine weeks in Lima and Cusco. I participated in an academic program about Community Development and Sustainability before traveling to Urubamba to volunteer at a children's home and help build a greenhouse to increase the home's self sufficiency. This trip helped solidify my Spanish skills and move closer to fluency, which has been a lifetime goal that I have pursued while majoring in Spanish at Bates.

Tutoring kids at the Lewiston Public Library, cooking at St. Martin de Porres for homeless adults, leading an outdoor adventures and nutrition project with teens, or helping at the Trinity Jubilee Center free health clinic in Lewiston reflect my inherent desire to be a constructive member of my community.

My role in the project will be aiding in the physical assembly of the clinic and coordinating buying the construction supplies. This is similar to the role I had while at the Niños del sol Children's Home in Peru this past summer while building the greenhouse. The experience of erecting a physical structure, which will last for decades, is extremely rewarding and reassuring, since it guarantees the lasting impact of a project on a community and is the direct result of a determined team effort. I am scheduled to complete a Wilderness First Responder First Aid course this May, and I will share the knowledge that I learn with the community regarding basic first aid, such as making splints, preventing infection, and recognizing hypothermia.

I will engage in Willka Yachay's already implemented fundraising campaign for this project, because I am committed to seeing the improved health of this community become a reality. The Q'eros people are a part of my community, the global community. Family and personal supporters have pledged to fund my personal costs related to travel, lodging, and food so that all finances from the grant can be applied to the project itself. One prevented death or illness would make this project worthwhile, however, the possibilities are far greater. This is the next step for the Q'eros community to help them not simply endure in their beautiful yet harsh surroundings, but flourish into a successful and thriving nation.