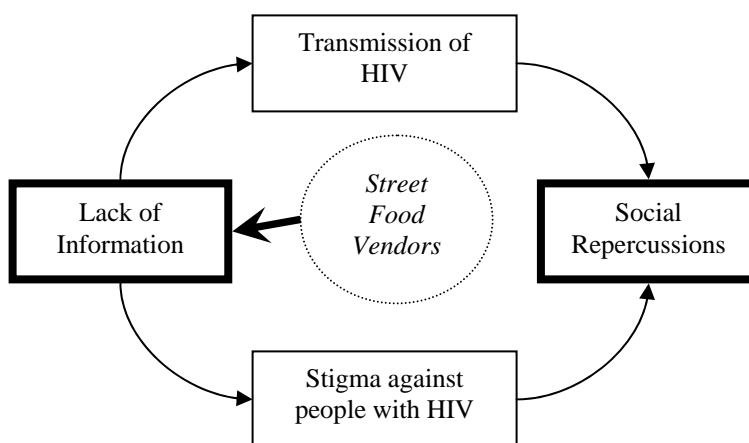


The Napkin Project: Health Education on the Street
100 Projects for Peace
Michael McCulloch '07 & Nazish Zafar '07

By most standards, Fortaleza – a city of roughly 2 million people on the northeastern coast of Brazil – is a tropical paradise. The city sits atop a seemingly endless string of white sand beaches, tall palm trees sway gently in the wind and it never rains for more than 15 minutes. Yet, in some sense, a cloud hangs over the city and, indeed, over much of northeastern Brazil. This cloud is the recent spread of HIV, which causes incredible suffering and often attacks society's most vulnerable demographic: young people. The stigmatization of HIV has led to physical violence, the breakdown of families, and mental distress. These social repercussions visibly strain the fabric of the community and consequently pose a profound threat to peace and stability. Our project confronts this problem with a simple system that will use existing networks to empower and educate the community. We intend to create a coalition of food vendors who will not only sell snacks, but fight both the spread of HIV and its corollary stigma through the distribution of napkins.



Fortaleza benefits from an extensive network of food vendors, snack bars, and small restaurants that are located throughout the city. This network functions very effectively. During the day vendors provide students, poor and working class Brazilians with lunch and snacks and, at night, they cater to couples and friends looking for something to eat before “hitting the town.” Vendors, in other words, have almost constant contact with young people and they have contact with diverse types of young people. For these reasons, we identified vendors as a critical resource for the implementation of our proposal. Besides snacks, we hypothesize that the city’s network of food vendors could also provide the community with information on the dangers and common misconceptions associated with HIV. We believe that – more than just a network of salesmen – vendors have the potential to be a powerful mechanism for both peace and education.

The question then becomes: how? Our response: napkins. Think about the last time you bought a snack from a food vendor. If you bought a hot dog or a hamburger, it probably came wrapped in a thin tinfoil cover and the vendor probably handed it to you with a small stack of clean, white napkins. If those napkins had any information printed on them, they probably encouraged you to buy a particular type of beer or, perhaps, visit a nearby restaurant; but, if there was anything printed on those napkins, our guess is that you took a moment to read what it said. After all, this is a piece of paper that you might use to clean yourself; it makes sense to subject this material to close inspection. Napkins, as such, are not only a potentially lucrative advertising space, but are also a material through which small amounts of information can be quickly and efficiently communicated.

Thus, arriving in Fortaleza, we propose to do the following: first, meet with as many food vendors as possible. We intend to talk with them about the importance of this project and about the enormous potential of their unique role in society. We plan to motivate vendors to participate in this project by

providing them with free sample napkins which will have short, tasteful messages and resource recommendations printed on the front. With the support of willing participants, we will then organize a coalition of conscientious, community-minded vendors who, as a group, would be willing to purchase napkins solely from producers whose product would inform and benefit the local public. Then, with a coalition in place, we plan to approach napkin manufacturers such as the *Corporação FACEPA* with a simple offer: print napkins that will educate the community and enjoy the exclusive business – as well as the flattering PR – of our organization of vendors and small business owners.



We have laid the groundwork for the implementation of this project by establishing connections with the following organizations: the School for International Training in Fortaleza, ICM Brasil, and the Batista Memorial Hospital of Fortaleza. These partners have assured us of their support and are excited by the relevance and practicality of this project. Of course, we realize that, as with any type of proposal, our plan may encounter unpredictable roadblocks. To these concerns, however, we submit that our experience, determination, and personal creativity will allow us to overcome any hurdles that might inhibit us from achieving our goals.

Michael McCulloch is a History major at Carleton College with a minor in Latin American Studies. He is fluent in Portuguese and has traveled to Brazil on two separate occasions. He traveled first to Salvador and Fortaleza to volunteer as an English teacher with Cross Cultural Solutions and to study both sustainable development and social justice with the School for International Training. He returned to Brazil the following year to study Brazilian history in Sao Paulo at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica and to volunteer as a mentor and children’s counselor with Projeto Esporte Talento. While at Carleton, Michael dealt with issues of sexual health as a Student Wellness Advisor and has a special interest in the interaction of social justice and private enterprise. At the Carleton Wellness Center, he is currently developing a special program for local elementary school students with learning disabilities. Michael also serves as the head of Canada Club and Carleton’s chapter for Habitat for Humanity.

Nazish Zafar is a Sociology/Anthropology major at Carleton with a minor in Cross-Cultural Studies. She spent two months in Russia living in Kitezh Children's Community where children from orphanages are rehabilitated in a therapeutic environment based on principles of experimental education. She then spent another summer in both Russia and Singapore conducting cross-cultural research on orphanage systems. At Carleton, Nazish is currently the Program Director of Ruth's House of Hope, a transitional housing shelter for women and children. In this capacity, Nazish coordinates outreach programs to engage and educate college students about homelessness.

Together, our passions and ideals motivate our interest in this project and our commitment to the eventual construction of a sustainable system through which food vendors in Fortaleza can use existent networks to affect positive change in their local environment. We believe, also, that the simplicity of our project speaks to its transnational potential. Global epidemics such as the spread of HIV are a profound threat to peace and social stability. However, solutions to this problem may not necessarily be so complex. Napkins, though plain, are a basic material that literally billions of people use everyday. Likewise, food vendors – though not always imagined as mediums of information – are an integral part of urban life around the world. With \$10,000, we propose to develop a simple process where the end product will, hopefully, end up in the garbage. At the same time, we hope that before these little white pieces of paper become garbage, they do more than clean your face.