

Global Life Focus Project Description:

Haiti is one of the most severely under-developed countries in the entire Western Hemisphere. Its capital, Port-au-Prince, suffers from extreme poverty, illiteracy, disease and infamous violence. The political instability of Haiti combined with the pressures of poverty make crime—especially gang violence—an especially persistent problem. Much of this heavy burden is placed on the children of the community, especially those who lack a solid family structure or who have been orphaned by the AIDS epidemic. According to Sylvana Nzirorera of UNICEF Haiti, street children in Port-au-Prince “do not have access to food and education, and are constantly under the threat of all kinds of violence, including sexual abuse and exploitation.”¹ And, most tragically of all, they are not just the victims of this violence. Desperate for protection and unable to provide for themselves without an education, many of these children become involved with armed gangs themselves. Yet the key to unlocking this vicious cycle of violence lies in its roots: the lack of education. Barely more than half of children who are of primary school age actually attend school, and approximately 2% will ever graduate from secondary school. The statistics are even grimmer for orphans.

But through the organization started by the members of this group, we believe that it is possible to help stop the violence. Called Global Life Focus, the mission of the group is to help the communities of Haiti return to peace and self-sufficiency. The core group of students traveling to Haiti in the Summer of 2007 to implement the project would consist of Gabrielle Apollon '09, Jennifer Calvin '08, Nora Weber '10, and Winnie Siclait '09 [see attached résumés]. We are lucky enough to already be in contact with Olympia Francois, a Haitian woman raised in that community, who has generously donated her land and an abandoned building on the land for use in our project. She has also offered to provide us with room and board during the project, and was able to give us labor and supply cost estimates for the project. Ms. Francois has been in contact with a group of 15 orphaned street children, of school age, who would be the focus of the summer project, with the expectation of adding more children as more resources become available. These 15 children and others like them are exactly those most vulnerable to the armed gangs of Port-au-Prince, both as victims and future perpetrators of the violence.

Our proposed Summer 2007 Project would consist of three main elements:

1. Renovation of the donated building into an Academic and Life-Skills Center
2. Tutoring and educational supplies to get the children back on track and into school
3. Creating a documentary to record the situation in Port-au-Prince for these children and to aid in further fundraising for the initiative.

The first part of this project involves specifically the installation of blackboards, desks, chairs, light fixtures and a generator, as well as cleaning and repainting the building's interior. We envision the first week and a half of the project as a time to devote ourselves to these projects, preparing the building to be the Academic & Life-Skills Center. We also believe that many of the children would happily assist in the lighter tasks such as cleaning and painting, and hope that this could help give them a

¹ Li, Kun. "Haiti: Grim reality for street children." At a Glance: Haiti. UNICEF. 11 Feb 2007
<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/haiti_30578.html>.

feeling of investment in the program as well as a time when they can get to know us and we can earn their trust. We have already begun fundraising and soliciting for the donation of art, craft and school supplies to stock the center and plan on bringing 4 large suitcases full of these materials. Besides helping these children academically as a way to break to cycles of violence and poverty, we also just want to create a safe haven where they are free to be children again. Teaching them cooperative games which emphasize non-violence, and crating arts and crafts projects are important parts of the Center.

The second part of the program would begin midway through the second week, when the building project is completed. For the 15 children we will begin a tutoring series to help them catch up on the work they have missed in school, and we will be teaching from a prepared curriculum suited to the Haitian educational system. This curriculum will cover language skills in English and Haitian Creole, basic mathematics and science. We also will include lessons in hygiene and other health related topics. Secondly we will be providing the students with uniforms, books and school supplies, as well as paying their school fees for the year, so that they can get off the streets and into school. All but one of the members of our core group speaks Creole, and the fourth member will be concentrating on the documentary aspect (as well as the building reconstruction and life-skills section) of the project.

The documentary based on the work that we do and the situation we observe in Port-as-Prince will have two components. Firstly, we will get video footage of the children, asking them questions about their lives, as well as the Academic and Life-Skills Center construction, and recording the impact that our project has for the children. Secondly we want to be able to see the world these children live in through their own eyes. To this end, we will be distributing disposable cameras to the street-children and asking them to take pictures throughout their day. We will then incorporate these images into the final documentary, which we will use in further development and fundraising initiatives.

The expected outcomes of this project are many and meaningful. Firstly, we hope to begin a process of peacemaking in Port-au-Prince, by getting children off the streets, out of gangs and back into school. The difference in the lives of these children that an education will make cannot be overemphasized. Secondly we want to raise awareness about the plight of these children in United States, so that more resources can be directed towards the development and peacemaking efforts in Haiti. This program is not a one shot deal but is intended to have significant impact into the future. We will continue, through our own fundraising efforts, to fund these children throughout their entire primary education and to return to Haiti next summer to continue development. Through our connection with Ms. Olympia Francois we already have the groundwork in place for many such projects, but only need the starting capital to renovate the Center and begin our work. The vicious cycles of violence can be broken and we plan to start small and work our way up.

Nora Weber