

## Meaningful World's 11th Humanitarian Mission to Haiti Sustainable Community Healing, Peace-Building, and Meaning-Making for a Healthy Haiti

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### Mini Review

With the blazing sun and humidity of Haiti, the Meaningful world team began its 11th humanitarian mission to Haiti in Port-au-Prince (PAP), (17 June to 3 July) with a population of 1,234,742. We travelled on roads with holes as big as a vehicle, stopping the traffic and creating chaos. We witnessed women with their voluptuous bodies, rolled up skirts and bosoms partially covered, sitting in the grounding squatted position all day long, just to sell a dozen of mangos, bananas, or pineapples. Their sweat running down their bodies, glistening in the blistering sunshine. Facing issues such as colonization, bureaucracy, corruption, poverty, illiteracy, earthquake, hurricanes, piles of trash in the streets and political oppression, their faces remain stoic with a hint of apathy.

Delving into working with the people of Haiti (total pop. 10,860,634) began the day the Meaningful world Humanitarian Team arrived. Dr. Ani Kalayjian, Lorraine Simmons, Michael Reda, Dr. Kyle Rundles, Billy Prophete, and Art Jaffe, went straight to the 6th International Conference for Centre D'Evangelisation du Spiritualite et de Sante Mental (CESSA) (Mental Health Camp; Spirituality) with 13 suitcases of donations in tow. The pace kept up as the team conducted 17 workshops and presentations during as many days in Haiti.

This year, the 11th Meaningfulworld's Haiti team goals were: nurturing emotional intelligence (EQ), educate on transformation of horizontal violence, establishing neighbourhood associations, establishing Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, transform violence, and initiating the campaign of "Ayiti se lakay mwen (Haiti is my home): Healthy and Happy Inside and Outside," which focused on protecting the environment and combating risk factors to medical and emotional illnesses. Each workshop grew from these goals, and were tailored to the specific group members, including self-care, compassion, empathy, non-violent communication, holistic healing, establishing Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, neighbourhood associations, indigenous healing practices, and sharing their knowledge with three people, and asking those to share with three others. In addition to educational and interactive workshops, we also conducted surveys for research on the continued impact of trauma from the January, 2010 earthquake that devastated Haiti [1]. These surveys on direct and indirect impact of trauma, forgiveness and meaning-making, and symptoms of trauma, all translated into Haitian Kreyole, and back translated, to ensure reliability and validity. The final count of surveys collected this mission totalled over 200. With an audience of over 300 attendees including representatives from religious organizations, medical, and psychological programs, we were delighted to be invited back to present for the 6th time at the International Conference of CESSA at the Hotel Montana in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Twenty organizations

supported this conference, with major support from The University of Notre Dame-Haiti, where Fr. Wismick, Vice President, chaired the conference. He opened the conference on compassion with words about integrative approaches that fuse spirituality and psychotherapy. As he said, "Pope Francis declared this year a jubilee year, which means the church wants us to exert mercy and compassion in abundance. We believe mercy and compassion can change our lives."

Dr. Kalayjian addressed the goals of the mission and, keeping in theme with the conference, she introduced the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model, and applied it to the theme of compassion and self-care. She had the entire room of attendees up and smiling engaging in her signature Soul-Surfing exercises to open the heart chakra and spread compassion to self and others.

On the third day of the conference, the dean of Universite de Haiti Professor Toussaint spoke about his expertise in Viktor Frankl's logo therapy. After lunch, a selection of presenters provided concurrent interactive workshops. Dr. Kalayjian focused on the mission goals in an interactive presentation. This workshop drew the largest group of participants and those attending enthusiastically participated in the exercises, smiling and laughing as they released negative energy. Fr. Wismick acknowledged the work of Meaningful world and presented new members with gifts handmade in Haiti. The conference concluded with words from Haiti's former Minister of Public Health, Rene Domercant. He stated, "There is a direct link between body and mind. It has become clear that the ministry of health alone cannot solve all of these problems that exist in this country. This is what puts this conference on a special pedestal, with support from universities. There is no health without the organizations present here. We have the obligation to work together to solve the problems apparent in mental health."

Art Jaffe also participated in this conference with the Meaningful world Team. He offered workshops on the Spiral Technique, a unique method of deep-tissue, integrative bodywork with therapeutic results that are rapid and often permanent. This method helps return functions to areas in or bodies previously limited by injury, restriction, pain, trauma, and emotional disturbances. Mr. Jaffe conducted 4 day training with the CESSA staff and also offered several healing sessions.

### 2-Day Training on Integrative Healing

On 20 June, 2016 our team was elated to conduct a two-day training with students from Enstit Travay Sosyal ak Syans Sosyal (ETS, a school of social work), with the assistance of new collaborators, Athena Kolbe and Marie Puccio. The program was hosted by Viva Rio, a non-profit dedicated to community violence reduction. We worked with about 50

attendees, mostly from social work, psychology, and teaching programs, as well as others working for NGOs in Haiti. The participants were engaged and enthusiastic, despite extreme heat and electrical challenges [2].

The second day of the training began as participants shared progress on the previous day's assignments, including diaphragmatic breathing, sharing their knowledge with three people, and researching racism in Haiti. Dr. Kalayjian reviewed and expanded on emotional intelligence and Michael presented on Logo therapy and meaning-making. Information on post-traumatic growth was presented, giving participants an opportunity to explore their own strengths, such as commitment to education, family, faith, and resilience. Participants were divided into two smaller groups to practice the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model [3,4], where several members shared feelings related to the trauma of the earthquake, as well as the growing violence in Haiti; the groups were able to practice empathy, meaning-making, and exploring information and alternatives to conflict. They asked specific and important questions about how to apply these skills with clients. The participants were encouraged to read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* [2], establishing neighbourhood associations, and beginning Peace and Forgiveness Gardens [5], which they accepted enthusiastically.

### **On 22 June, Dr. Kalayjian was Interviewed for a Culture Segment on Haitian Television**

Nationale d'Haiti. She highlighted our goals for the mission and answered pointed questions from the journalist. We then travelled to the Community Hospital of Haiti, where Jean Yves Valcour organized a workshop with 20 social workers, hospital administrators, physicians, pharmacists, and nurses. Dr. Kalayjian shared information on emotional intelligence and the "Ayiti se lakay mwen" campaign, as well as Peace and Forgiveness Gardens and a brief overview of the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model. The group enjoyed working with the anger wheel and identified their feelings and the overwhelming emotions that were shared were frustration, worry, and anxiety. Though difficult to take seriously at first, they engaged in diaphragmatic and alternate nostril breathing, which participants reported being very helpful, particularly for headaches. They were also enthusiastic about the positive changes in Haiti, beginning with increased sanitation work. The group ended together in a Heart-to-Heart-Circle of Love and Gratitude to connect with love and share gratitude.

On 23 June we visited the Universite d'Haiti to finalize arrangements for an upcoming workshop and we were faced with barricades of classroom desks and tap-tap cars blocking the entrances. Upon discussing with the dean of the school of humanities, Dr. Jacques Jovin, we found that students have been protesting for additional classes because school had suspended for a period of time due to recent strikes by personnel.

Students were unhappy with the way that teachers had decided to make up the time, asserting that they deserved time to finish their semester rather than simply beginning a new session. We interviewed students and discussed how to solve conflicts peacefully, as well as promoting health including safe a respectful sex. Unfortunately, we found that drought had not allowed for upkeep of the Peace and Forgiveness Garden from 2015. We then visited the school of art and music and were able to enjoy listening to a jazz music class, as well as make connections with the assistant dean of the school of art,

Professor Gabriel Jen Michel, for instillation of Peace and Forgiveness Gardens.

### **Working in Orphanages**

In the afternoon, despite extreme levels of heat and humidity, as well as overcrowded and dilapidated roads, we travelled across the city with Gregory Gustemable to work in Bonjour Timoun Yo orphanage, run by Madame Viney where Meaningful world sponsors several children each year. A chorus of welcome songs from the children and their smiling faces greeted us. The children enthusiastically engaged in Soul-Surfing exercises and were divided in groups to talk about emotional intelligence in age-appropriate ways. We played games, shared snacks, and learned from one another. They were given Heart-Hug-Dolls, made with care by team member Lorraine Simmons, with messages of hope written to them from other workshop participants. Dr. Kalayjian and Mrs. Simmons also contributed to continue sponsoring five children for their education, room, and board.

On 24 June, 2016, with the help of Pastor Rubinson Dorce and Mrs. Celianne Valmond, we went to Maison de Enfants in Carrefour (pop. 442,156) and worked with the principal, teachers, nurses, and orphanage staff. The 24 participants were active and engaged during the training, asking pointed questions about the process and how to use these skills with the children they work with and others in their lives. In the afternoon, we worked in the orphanage with the students on emotional intelligence, the Four Agreements [6], and exercises, emphasizing taking care of holistic health. The older children were more familiar with the words and model from visits in the past and were able to serve as leaders with the younger children. Donations of clothing, hygiene items, toys, and crayons were distributed.

On 25 June we conducted two different trainings. The first was for 22 Episcopal seminary students, who were very interactive and many questioned about corporal punishment.

They expressed pessimism that Haiti would be able to eliminate corporal punishment and domestic violence because they believe it is necessary to teach children in Haiti's culture. Non-violent communication and using rewards and other forms of punishments were discussed.

The group members asked excellent questions and were engaged throughout the training. In particular, they appeared to connect with information about using nature and soul-surfing, as well as forgiveness. At the end of the training, they were asked to share with three friends and family, establish Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, and engage in our campaign to keep Haiti healthy and happy inside and outside.

In the afternoon, we travelled to Carrefour once more and completed training with 20 young adults, age 18-25, from the Maison de Enfants orphanage. The students struggled with having adequate water and food, making it difficult to sustain attention, and many lack positive adult role models in their lives outside of the orphanage. In spite of multiple challenges, they were very engaged and offered wonderful suggestions for coping with anger in positive ways, such as: distancing, listening to music, taking care of physical health, and team sports. They were enthusiastic about the Haiti environmental campaign. It was very rewarding, to provide additional support and guidance for the students. Many expressed interest and action in pursuing university degrees in helping fields.

On 26 June, Sajois Romel, with Psy Pour Haiti, brought together a group of 30 social workers, teachers, administrators, students,

theologians, and technical workers for a workshop. The entire group acknowledged witnessing violence and all expressed frustrations as well as horizontal violence. In particular, they began to discuss how to form community and labour unions delete this please.

The group was engaged and active in the training, asking pointed and practical questions and, in particular, exploring horizontal violence and alternatives to talk therapy, such as exercise and connecting with nature. They discussed cultural and gender differences in expressing love and were encouraged to express their love in words as well as follow up with positive actions. The group took a pledge for nonviolence and peace building in their life.

On the morning of 27 June, we had a meeting with Athena Kolbe, a member of the leadership board of ETS, an organization providing affordable post-high school training to Haitian students or school of social work? We processed the 2-day training Meaningful world provided her students earlier, as well as students' feedback and enthusiasm for creating Peace and Forgiveness Gardens at the school. In addition, Athena voiced interest in collaborating in the future, as well as creating opportunities for yoga instructors and social workers from the US to teach programs at their center. This is an important new connection that we plan to continue nurturing Kindly delete as all of them are important.

In the afternoon, the team went to APAAC, an association for the prevention and rehabilitation of alcohol and other addictions. There, a lively group of 14 enthusiastic counsellors, clients, and administrative staff engaged in our workshop. The group expressed high levels of anxiety and worry about the future, generalized anxiety, shame, and fear. In particular, they appeared to connect with the metaphor of "Crab in the Bucket phenomenon" about horizontal violence, expressing that this exists everywhere in Haiti, including in the news. Further, they were quite interested in creating Peace and Forgiveness Garden in their center. One participant shared that her husband had recently been arrested for political reasons and her daughter could benefit from the training, stating, "I don't know if you realize it, but you were talking to me, and you helped me so much." Participants shared, "We have so much to learn, I hope you come back again," and "I don't speak English much, but you opened my heart," shared another one in tears. The organizers Gaetane Auguste and Maggy Germain, expressed their deep appreciation and we made plans to collaborate and conduct workshops and healing groups next year.

On Tuesday, 28 June, we said goodbye to Michael, our team member, who left Haiti for home. We took informational folder to the Minister of Health and encouraged them to join the 'Ayiti se lakay mwen' campaign. The team welcomed another group from Psy Pour Haiti for training at the Deux Sejour Hotel. There were 12 people in attendance and we were touched that eight of them were from our previous workshops, returned to continue learning. Participants expressed shame, frustration, fear, and worry as their most frequent emotions. Group members shared that they have frequently witnessed violence. One participant stated that a woman from her church had attained a divorce because of domestic violence and the group discussed corporal punishment for children. Participants engaged in a mindful breathing exercises and other healing breath-work, after which the participants reported feeling relaxed, free, floating, and at peace. One participant shared that his headache of several days had finally subsided. They were encouraged to practice meditation each day, and several shared that they meditate regularly. The group discussed indigenous herbal healing and myths in Haiti, including the healing power of basil and urban legends about burning salt and spices

to discover true feelings of friends, highlighting that there is still a strong belief in the mystical power of plants.

### **Working in Hospitals and Community Health Centres**

On 29 June, the team travelled to Bernard MEVS Hospital to conduct a workshop with doctors, psychologists, administrative and technical staff. The most frequently felt emotions shared by this group included frustration, fear and worry, in particular about security and politics, which they rated as very high. Dr. Kalayjian encouraged them to have a dream a la Martin Luther King, and participants shared their dreams of a more secure, more peaceful and clean Haiti where everyone is educated, and safe. However, they also expressed exposure to violence and sometimes support of corporal punishment.

One participant shared a story in support of domestic violence in which he heard of a wife being beaten for the food she served and, after the beating there was a marked improvement in her cooking. Dr. Kalayjian shared the phenomena of 'Learned helplessness,' and they agreed that the women had no other choice, as they are economically dependent on the men. The group was able to connect with the idea of "Crab-in- the-bucket syndrome" and horizontal violence, stating that this is rampant in Haiti and needs to stop. Participants avidly discussed homeopathic healing and engaged in a mindful breathing exercise, and Heart-to- Heart-Circle of Love and Gratitude.

### **Working with the Refugees Forced to Leave Dominican Republic**

On the evening of 29 June, we travelled about three hours over rocky, winding, mountainous road to reach Jacmel (pop. 137, 966), where the final workshops would be conducted. After taking in the beauty, the beach, and the art of the city on a day off, we conducted a full day of 4 workshops with a community of Haitian refugees from the Dominican Republic. The community of families was resettled in Bwa Bef near Jacmel, Haiti by the Joan Rose Foundation, including Jean-Paul Valteau and Marina. With extreme heat and humidity and no electricity or running water, we worked with the adults of the community in the morning and three separate age-groups of children in the afternoon. The workshops were interactive and participants were open with their feelings, sharing sadness, worry, pain, and adjustment issues in a new country. One adult participant shared his disappointment about the poor infrastructure they found in Haiti, in particular having difficulty accessing hospitals, and free health care. Another shared her depression, including that 'food has lost its flavour,' horizontal violence, feeling that she cannot trust anyone with her feelings, stating "Every day I'm thinking about it and it doesn't get out." The older teens shared gratitude towards their parents, especially mothers, for carrying them, giving them life, and taking care of them, as well as gratitude to our team for traveling such distance to work with them.

Each of the groups was tasked with several goals. In particular, participants were asked to share the information learned with three people in their life and to spread word about the Ayiti Se Lakay Mwen campaign, in order to increase knowledge and motivation for environmental care in Haiti. In addition, many groups were encouraged to meditate with a focus on breath-work and establish Peace and Forgiveness Gardens, promoting health, healing herbs, and connecting with nature. Many participants were also tasked with beginning neighbourhood organizations to create a healthier, more peaceful community. We were able to follow up with several

participants who had agreed to this goal and found that they were talking with their neighbours and universities and some had even set up initial meetings to begin working together.

Workshop participants expressed several personal and global challenges in their lives. Emotionally, the overwhelming majority of participants shared that they often feel worried, frustrated, anxious and afraid, in particular because of political turmoil and lack of security in Haiti. In addition, people shared stories of sadness, shame, and disappointments in their lives. Many groups stated that everyone in Haiti carries stress with them and they frequently experience many negative emotions. Other challenges shared included: poverty, racism, discrimination, oppression, horizontal violence, and witnessing violence. When discussing the importance of having close friends of family with whom to share these emotions, people in the workshops expressed mistrust of others, leading to difficulty confiding their deepest feelings and thoughts even to close family members.

Other challenges clustered around several themes: understanding "Mother Earth" and the concept of connecting with nature to improve their lives, belief in the current system of corporal punishment towards children and wives, and initial difficulty with the empathy. After discussion, many participants were able to find their own meaning for connection with nature and providing empathy. Still, the continuation and conviction of the need for corporal punishment towards children led to several avid debates during

The following heartfelt expressions from participants exemplify the value of lessons learned: "We so appreciate being able to learn from you," "We had not talked about the impact of ecology on health before now," "This is important work you're doing," "Thank you for your commitment and love for Haiti," "You have opened our hearts and our minds," "My pains have relieved and I could work better for my country."

Fr. Wismick stated: "I express my deep gratitude for who you are (Dr. Kalayjian) for me and what you do for our country, Haiti. I'm grateful to you for your fidelity at our annual CESSA conference. Thank you for staying longer to train other people and help our country." Jean Yves Valcour added about his transformation since our first team in 2010, and in the past six years, he has learned to be open minded, and accept other religions outside of Christianity, and that he has learned to integrate our integrative healing model into his life, and he is grateful to us for that.

## Team Reflections

Dr. Ani Kalayjian: As in every Humanitarian Mission to Haiti, I feel that I am coming home. I am grateful to all of our collaborators from the past, as well as the new ones we nurtured this year. Our circle of love and connection is increasing and growing exponentially. I am filled with mixed feelings: On one hand I am so grateful to witness many improvements, such as cleaner roads, and peaceful transformations in Haitians hearts and souls. On the other hand I also witnessed a lot of violence, some expressed in thoughts, and others expressed by many eyewitnesses of theft at gunpoint, killings for political and financial reasons, and much more. As was mentioned by Elien Isac last year, "Meaningful world is the cure for Haiti," as we integrate the environment, mind-body-and-spirit, which speaks to the hearts of all Haitians.

Lorraine Simmons: I find myself overwhelmed with emotion and my heart beats with deep compassion for Haiti. I witnessed wealth and

extreme poverty in the same breath, which leaves me feeling conflicted. The students, professionals and children we worked with were hungry for knowledge, understanding and starving for change. They listened to our presentations eagerly, questioned our theories and debated with us. Their energy and excitement was exhilarating which fuelled us in the unbearable heat and humidity. We were praised and thanked by many and we are already planning our schedule for next year. It was a successful mission and we made many new and exciting collaborators. We were a strong team and accomplished many wonderful things [7-9].

Dr. Kyle Rundles: This Meaningful world mission has been challenging and rewarding. I'm so grateful to have been able to meet and learn from Haitians and organizations doing wonderful work in this beautiful country. I was continuously impressed with the strength, resilience, and warmth of everyone we encountered. There is vibrancy in Haiti that I have not seen elsewhere and an avid drive for community, healing, and peace. I feel so inspired by all we have witnessed and experienced.

Michael Reda: I am eternally grateful for Meaningful world and all that we do, within this Haiti 2016 mission and around the world. Haiti genuinely embodies what the rest of the world tries to keep hidden and subtle; that we are good people living in a beautiful world that is full of tragedy and sorrows, both inside and outside of our control.

This year, the Meaningful world team was able to talk very openly about what frustrates, disappoints, and saddens the people of Haiti and teach them how to confront our problematic thoughts and feelings directly. What makes us happy is to appreciate and up hold one another. Joining the Meaningful world team this year is an opportunity I am very much appreciative of. Haiti is a country I am very proud to have visited.

We would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to our collaborators in Haiti: Fr. Wismick and CESSA; Dean Rev. Gabaud with the Episcopal Seminary; Dr. Jacques Jovin with the Universite d'Haiti; Athena Kolbe and Marie Puccio from Enstit Travay Sosyal; Celianna Valmond and Pastor Rubinson Dorce from Orphanage Phelmat Maison de Enfants; Kara Lightburn and Haiti Initiative; Sajous Romel (Jerry) with Psy Pour Haiti; Jean Yves Valcourt and Community Hospital of Haiti; Gregory Gustenable with Bonjour Timoun Yo Orphanage; Nancy Sobel, Gaetane B. Auguste, and Maggy Germain with APAAC; Polyanna Domond; Katherine Serrano, Jean-Pierre Valteau, and Marina with the Joan Rose Foundation; and Dr. Mariline Laguerre at Bernard MEVS Hospital.

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