

Agnes Scott College
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Light Up the Classroom in Haiti
Fond-des-Blanc, Haiti

Background & Peace Defined

As the daughter of Haitian immigrants and having grandparents with the educational equivalency of 3rd grade, I have a keen appreciation for how one's environment impacts their contribution to society and fostering peace. This perspective drives me to pursue the creation of a project much needed in Haiti, "Light Up the Classroom". The project will provide solar-powered energy for a computer classroom in Haiti. The Oxford English Dictionary defines peace as "freedom from civil unrest or disorder; public order and security," however, this definition is incomplete; it lacks the element of environmental impact across generations. Essentially, peace serves as a foundational fixture in life that allows people to have a safe environment to live up to their fullest potential. In the absence of peace, progress and development become very difficult to attain. As such, in Haiti, I see prolonged peace as a large puzzle requiring many individuals to contribute by piecing together a good dose of compassion, commitment, and investments (human & capital). I desire to empower the next generation of leaders with the tools to stabilize the country and propel it forward.

Challenge

Haiti is an island with a population of approximately 11.12 million (2018) and is the third-largest country in the Caribbean by area and is the most populous Caribbean country. While Haiti became the first independent nation in Latin America & the Caribbean, it is sadly the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Haiti not only faces challenges with civil unrest but is also significantly vulnerable to natural disasters. Very few can forget the devastating impact of the 2010 earthquake; however, each year, hurricanes worsen the plight of the already battered Haitian people. The project will focus on Fond-des-Blancs, ("FDB"), which is located in a rural region, 4-5 hours from the capital. I deliberately selected FDB because Haiti has a severe overpopulation problem in its capital city of Port-au-Prince.

Motivation

I strongly believe in Nelson Mandela's profound words: *"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Education is the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace"*. After working this summer as an intern with Patrick's Kids Foundation (PKF) as an Agnes Scott Advantage Award recipient, it became evident that there needs to be a significant amount of attention dedicated to capitalizing on technology's potential to help transform the education system in Haiti. Computers and technology are a driving force and a force multiplier that can help elevate students' imagination and confidence to reach for more.

Project Partner

PKF is a 501(C)3 corporation dedicated to helping close the education gap between Haiti and developed nations. PKF leverages technology and its mentorship program to help its students obtain a holistic education to become change agents in their community. In 2017, PKF strategically decided to partner with Ecole Assemble de Dieu ("EADD"), a school located in Franchipagne, Haiti. PKF partnered with EADD because of EADD's unique position as one of the few schools that provides formal education to one of the most rural regions in the southern part of Haiti. PKF provides the school's 238 students with school supplies and material for the school year and helps EADD with strategic planning and curriculum development. My Peace Project will provide one of the ingredients required to foster peace by building up the next generation in obtaining a strong education. My Peace Project would eventually allow PKF to accelerate its use of technology to supplement the brick and mortar education in FDB.

Proposal

Project Light Up the Classroom would be the first of its kind at any school in the region. It will introduce the students to new opportunities and lead to a more well-rounded educational experience. Electricity is unfortunately a luxury that Fond-des-Blancs rarely sees. The very few homes that have electricity primarily use solar panels. The lack of infrastructure to provide electricity throughout Haiti is a challenge

that ranks low for Fond-des-Blancs because of the many other challenges such as lack of roads, poor sanitation, etc. My Peace Project will impact the future of the entire community of FDB, Haiti, by providing children who are very eager to learn and explore the tools to connect with the rest of the world, broaden their horizons, and explore new possibilities. This project's focal point is to use solar energy to bring electricity to a classroom in EADD. The classroom will be used as a computer lab to help supplement the educational curriculum at EADD. The classroom will also serve as an area where students, scholars, and community members will have access to a reliable working and learning space with functioning electricity. This project will lead to a cadre of well-educated young leaders in the community, new job prospects, and a unique opportunity to help these amazing young adults connect to the gig economy.

The initial goal is to curate a space that can power, secure, and maintain a computer lab. To streamline the process, the project will be separated into 5 different phases. Phase one entails installing solar panels to power a classroom in EADD. Based on my initial assessment, six solar panels will be sufficient to power the computer lab. Hiring an electrician to install the solar panels for the classrooms and wire the computer lab with electricity will be a higher-order concern. Phase two of the project encompasses securing the classroom with a locked door so that the materials and equipment are not susceptible to damage or theft. During phase three I will procure the computers and necessary accessories for a fully functioning computer lab at EADD. PKF already has ten functioning computers, which will be used for the computer lab. During phase four, I will organize and help virtually train a group of teachers and PKF Scholars with the necessary technical skills to manage the space and offer technology-based learning programs. This part of the project will include developing a best practice manual of rules and procedures for operating the computer lab and providing supplemental online resources that correspond with the curriculum of the seven grade levels offered at EADD. During phase five, I will help EADD secure internet access for the computer lab.

Impact & Control

Project Light Up the Classroom in Haiti will empower the students in EADD and the broader community in Fond-des-Blancs. This project will not only directly impact the quality of education in Haiti, but it will also have a catalytic effect helping to improve the quality of life in the community. This project will also inspire other partners to model this same lab to the surrounding schools.

Measuring success on a short-term basis will include conducting research and identifying corporate partners such as Dell that can provide additional resources, help install the computers, or help support and maintain the computer lab. In the long run, success will be measured by the number of active learning programs and community meetings held in the educational space. Additionally, the project will monitor the number of hours used for online learning in the computer lab.

Towards the end of the project, I will create a metric to measure how effectively the lab is being utilized and its positive impact on the community. Because of the strong relationships that I developed over the summer interning at PKF, I will be able to virtually accomplish this project seamlessly. The project will include helping to coach selected staff members at EADD on best practices of using the computer lab and structuring a computer technology course for students at the school. As an intern this summer, I developed a PKF Entrepreneurship Development Program based upon the business model canvas, which ended in a pitch competition. I will bring the skill sets that I developed as a Schmidt Scholar at Agnes Scott and interning this summer at PKF to effectively implement Project Light Up the Classroom.

Lastly, part of measuring the computer lab's impact in the community is to monitor how the computer lab is being utilized outside of school hours to support programs in the FDB community, such as the PKF entrepreneurship development program. Overall, establishing a connection to and understanding of technology will place students in the best position to succeed in life peacefully.