

100 Projects for Peace
Final Report - Summer 2007

Title: Promoting Peace through Forgiveness
School: Luther College
Student(s) submitting report: Alyssa C.D. Cheadle and Anthony Sellu

1. **Project Summary:** Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

Our project was carried out at the Dele-Peddle International School that is located on the east side of Freetown, Sierra Leone. This school teaches students at the early childhood through high school levels. Our goal was to offer forgiveness training at this school for teachers and students. Our forgiveness-training curriculum was developed in consultation with Dr. Fred Luskin at Stanford University.

We arrived in Freetown in the early morning of July 27th and returned to the United States August 3rd. We met with a group of twenty-six teachers. The majority of these teachers were employed at the Dele school, others were recruited from nearby schools and churches. We shared a prayer with the teachers and gave them an introduction to our project that included a needs-assessment survey.

The teachers were separated into two groups, one which received training from us and another that was trained a week after we departed by teachers who we originally trained. The first week of training was completed by Dr. Loren Toussaint (Professor of Psychology, Luther College), Alyssa Cheadle and Anthony Sellu. This work (including travel, room, board, and other curricular expenses) was funded primarily by the 100 Projects for Peace grant. In addition, we received monetary donations from a variety of other sources including: 1) a travel grant by the Sense of Vocation program at Luther College, 2) a curricular grant from the Luther College Wellness Program, 3) a donation for teaching expenses from Fred and Jan Luskin, 4) a donation of 100 copies of Fred Luskin's book, and 5) a grant from the Board of Christian Outreach of Lake Edge United Church of Christ in Madison, Wisconsin. The Dane County Dental Society provided a donation of toothbrushes. The Build-a-Bear store provided a donation of teddy bears. Elementary age students attending the 2007 Decorah vacation bible camp made teddy bears and donated them to the school in Freetown.

We began the training on Monday July 30th. We trained thirteen teachers for one-two hours at midday. Afterwards, these teachers divided into five classrooms of middle-school aged children and repeated the training with their students. Using this method, we reached approximately 180 students. Students came from the Dele school as well as from other area schools. Additionally, we taught a modified forgiveness curriculum for kindergarten aged school children to about 30 students. Three Sierra Leonean teachers aided us in this effort. Though the official language of Sierra Leone is English, the dialect Krio is the primary spoken language. Teachers at the school and Anthony Sellu, himself a citizen of Sierra Leone, were instrumental in translating the forgiveness lessons.

Throughout the week, we also endeavored to meet with various officials in the Sierra Leonean government. We eventually succeeded in meeting with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare and an Officer in the Ministry of Education.

2. **Project Results:** Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

We completed the forgiveness-training curriculum with thirteen teachers and approximately 180 students. We completed various forgiveness exercises with approximately 30 kindergarten-aged students. We collected survey data for 30 teachers and 180 older students.

In total, we reached approximately 200 Sierra Leoneans through our training. We disseminated both ideas and materials promoting forgiveness through our trip. At the Dele school, we trained thirteen teachers in relaxation methods and forgiveness techniques. We facilitated numerous discussions of forgiveness, hurt, reconciliation, violence, and education with these teachers. These teachers were able to relay our training to their students within the time of our visit and continued to do so for the week following. Both the ministries of Social Welfare and Education were made aware of our program and provided with our curriculum and materials. We successfully assessed psychosocial needs present in Freetown through surveys completed during our training.

Unfortunately due to weight restrictions in air travel we were unable to return with our paper surveys and are currently discussing ways to get the data back to the United States so that we can use it for analysis. Due to the timing of our visit and its close proximity to the national presidential elections, we were unable to speak directly with the ministers of education and social welfare. Instead, we opted to meet with their permanent secretaries. While this was no doubt successful, we would have rather met directly with the ministers to assess their interest and enthusiasm for what we are doing. We had originally intended for two students to have an extended stay in Freetown, but again due to the upcoming national elections and associated security concerns, students returned after ten days.

3. **Implications:** What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

Forgiveness is a source of peace for oneself. One of the main elements of teaching forgiveness is to show people that there are alternatives to violence and anger in times of conflict. Once a person has learned how to forgive within oneself, the peace that comes is directed to others. Forgiveness is disseminated through one's affect, through sharing the forgiveness techniques, and most significantly through the act of forgiveness. Though it is difficult to measure the impact of the training, we know that the project reached 200 Sierra Leoneans directly. If even a portion of these 200 persons pass on the peace imparted by forgiveness, the project will have reached even more.

Teachers and students continue to focus on forgiveness in their regular curriculum and we are presently developing additional materials to aid in this effort. In addition to the materials (books, training activities, etc.) that we left with them, we will be developing some "assignments" to help keep forgiveness training a salient part of the teaching curriculum at the school. Teachers and students alike will maintain and enhance the practice of forgiveness as we taught it while we visited by completing forgiveness assignments.

The future prospects of this project are encouraging. We have the support of the school and Drs. Luskin and Toussaint to attempt continued training of teachers from Freetown. As one step toward continued education, we hope to bring a group of teachers to the United States to do a week-long intensive training (more advanced than what we offered this summer) sometime in the near future. Drs. Luskin and Toussaint have agreed to support this work at either Luther College or Stanford University. We are hoping to find a funding source for this effort in the near future. With appropriate financial support we envision a continued series of visits to Freetown to "recruit" and train teachers who could then train students. Teachers and students would eventually come to the United States for continuing education.

Overall this project taught us that peace is not easily won. We were faced with innumerable logistical challenges and had to be especially resourceful to offer our training and education in an environment that was not conducive to this type of learning. Nonetheless, we feel that the project succeeded in its goals and that work of this type, while enormously challenging, is needed for hope of peace in generations to come. We are truly grateful for the opportunity to have completed this project and will seek future opportunities to do the good and hard work of peace-building.

