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**Love Peace Hope- Youth in Haiti for Haiti**  
**School: Simmons College**

The youth summer program took place in Les Cayes Haiti, more specifically in the town of Torbeck. The area is located in Haiti's southern peninsula, in the very rural region of Torbeck, amongst Les Cayes many other towns.

Interviews were conducted by the chief assistant, Yvelt Leonard, Charline Gay, and I on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, where youth interested in the program attended a two-portion information and interview session as described on the flyers. Participants were questioned about their future goals, what they felt are the needs of their community, and how can they help as youth to meet those goals. On July 4<sup>th</sup> a group of 6 girls and 6 boys were decided as finalists for the program.

The first day of the program began on July 6<sup>th</sup>. There we gave a program overview, expectations, rules/regulations, and began to take the opportunity to learn about each other as individuals in the group. We elected a group of 12 individuals ranging from the ages of 14-21, all of whom are from different regions of Les Cayes. From there we gathered 3- 5 days a week from the hours 11-4pm depending on the agenda. A usual program consisted of gathering and transportation to the main city at our building site, attendance, announcements, group activity, games that promote bonding and team spirit, introduction to our lesson for the day, discussions on the lesson, lunch break, further discussions, and recreation or presentation practice. We also had get-togethers where we traveled to Jèlè, a notable beach in Les Cayes to engage in fun and group activities. Moreover, we wanted to motivate, influence, and advise the youth with their ideas on how to make their communities better. With this, the program is composed of two parts. The first is to educate the youth about Haiti and its daily struggles. This is done by gathering information about topics concerning the youth, such as Haitian history, education, political conflict, violence, healthcare, prostitution, gangs, and AIDS. The information was presented in form of a booklet titled "Love Peace Hope: Youth in Haiti for Haiti," with each topic in the booklet as an opener for group discussions and a generator of ideas. Discussions were led by group leaders (2) who helped teach lessons and open discussions by posing questions related to each subject. This helped the group form structured ideas.

The second part is focused on being active in the community. Fridays were usual visit days, where we would go to volunteer or get to learn about an organization. One of our goals was to have the youth participate in activities that promotes self-awareness and also the awareness of that of Les Cayes, so by visiting local organizations like an OBG/YN clinic in La Naj, helps us to educate the youth about abstinence and safe sex and also about the increasing rates of teen pregnancy in the area. The final day, which was also our presentation day, was July 27<sup>th</sup>. The presentation really exposed some talents of the youth as they prepared skits portraying issues that affect their daily life. The skits made humor of the issues, but also educated the audience made up of parents and friends in the community.

The program was an overall success. My sister and I had gone into a country that we felt so distant from for so long, yet this did not permit us to lose the heartfelt welcoming of people in the country. We employed workers with designated roles: four cooks, four assistants, a chief assistant, and a driver who knew their schedule, even though there were a few incidences of tardiness. Having to manage so much during the time really exposed me to a new form of leadership that I never knew. I dealt previously as an assistant to a summer camp, and led youth leadership in my church, yet nothing compared to having to manage twenty-three people at one time for five hour days, 3-5 days a week. Needless to say it was tiring. Despite the fact, I

enjoyed every second of my experience in Haiti. I felt connected to Haitians in a way I never did before. Having been a native of Torbeck myself, I felt an even deeper relationship with the people and community. I also saw the bond that was built within the group. Many of the members are now friends. I feel the students as group has evolved into more enlightened individuals with a sense of purpose. In the beginning of the program some members were very shy. By the end of the program they were able to stand in front of an audience to present.

One goal that was not accomplished in the program was the initiation of community projects. We had the opportunity to discuss the needs of the community, yet due to time constraints the youth have not participated in the hands-on aspect of the program. One goal is to have the youth start an adult literacy project in the area, where adults will get the chance to learn how to read and write. During our time in Haiti, we had visited another youth group in Beraud who were interested in collaborating on the project. I had departed before our second planned meeting, so the group reunited again, and plans to start the project with further funding. Another problem for us was finding a suitable area to unite as a group. We rented a location in the city area, with lights, running water, and electricity, but it was not spacious enough. In order for the youth to attend recreation, we had to travel back to Torbeck, about a 35 minutes drive so they could have an open field. Additionally, finding reliable transportation was above what we could afford and so we had work done in an old truck that had many mechanical problems.

One implication for peace through this project is that through the mobilization of youth in Les Cayes, we can create a strong potential for young men and women to be more responsive to the needs of their country by first being actively involved within their communities. The youth are a great target because they are truly the future of their country. They are tomorrow's leaders that know and live the constant rise and falls of Haiti's stability. What's best about the youth is that they are at an age where they can still determine an outcome; they can make productive decisions or counterproductive ones that can affect them for the rest of their lives. We are here to help them make positive ones.

Future prospects for this project are to continue this program in the summer on a yearly basis. Each year we hope to expand the program through employing the recruitment of other groups. Additionally, funding through donations and grants can bring jobs to the youth as being part of the initiative, which can give rise to employment opportunities that otherwise, would not be made available. I've come to understand that Haiti as a result of political instability has left its citizens disturbed and financially plagued. Families are prone to find income from meager means and any way possible to live. This leaves the attention that should be devoted to family, the emotional needs of children, and the support of children merely deficient. Too often youth are not given credit for their accomplishments and attention to their personal issues. Youth play a too important role in society to be overlooked. I learned that the Haitian youth are suppressed not only through politics but also in society as a whole.

