

Project Title: Building Intercultural Peace in Greenville

Project Implementation Location: Greenville, SC, USA

Sponsoring College: Furman University

Designated Project Leader: Lia Paw (Home Country: Myanmar, Burma; College: Furman University; UWC School Attended: UWC ISAK JAPAN)

Community Partner: Interface Ministries (iFace)

Date Range of Implementation: June 2022 – August 2022

Overview and project goals:

In 2021, the American Council on Education (ACE) talked to 1000 Americans and discovered that 43 percent of them had a personal bias that International students take away opportunities from American students. The “Building Intercultural Peace” project aims to highlight different scenarios of discrimination issues and lessen the tension between the Americans, who live on Furman campus, and the International students, who belong to different countries. Although the internal conflict and stereotypes towards both parties are not addressed directly, prejudice towards immigrants has been on the rise especially during COVID. My approach to this conflict is to invite the International students, people who live in Greenville, and American students who live on Furman campus to a 6 weeks long program in the summer of 2022.

This project will be partnered with Interface Ministries (iFace), which shares the same beliefs and values of increasing mutual understanding among the cultures and backgrounds represented at the event, in particular for Americans to understand the situation of international students studying here in the US. Vice versa, this project will leave a calming impression on the international students who are still learning of the new American culture and encourage them to get out of their comfort zone to interact with our Greenville locals. This project will be composed of 45 participants in total and will be in person. 15 International students, 15 participants will be from iFace staff and volunteers, and 15 American students who come from different backgrounds and upbringings. American students, who are attending summer classes, performing internships or training for athletic matches will be invited to this program through sign-ups sheets or word of mouth all over the campus. We will keep in mind to choose participants, who are unfamiliar with both western and international cultures to see the impact of the project.

The participants will meet up once a week for 6 weeks to learn about each other’s culture and values. The project will take place some days on the Furman campus and other days at our iFace staff volunteers’ houses to allow for space and privacy. There will also be different activities and agendas planned to focus on breaking the walls of tension and uneasiness. In the first week, we will start with some introductions to get to know each other. And we will play a game (The Line Game) where there will be participants on different sides of the room and red tape in the middle. I will ask lighthearted questions followed by serious questions to vulnerable questions to show the participants of their similarities rather than their differences, whenever they come up to that line. The project will create a non-judgemental, respectful, and safe environment, that allows our participants to be their authentic selves and speak freely regarding their views on different cultures.

In the second week, we will go around a circle and talk about the personal story that surrounds our identity. This is to understand how we became the person we are today and connect the dots to how our cultures and different upbringings surround our lives. We will do this through many different activities such as explaining the origin of our names, folklore, songs, stories and much more.

For the third week, we will be learning and understanding the meaning of conflicts and how to build peace by learning conflict solving skills. It is very important to understand how to approach and resolve conflicts with different people, and I believe that this knowledge will be priceless for our participants. I will have some guiding questions for the session to develop.

Due to the pandemic, human resources and the economy have become tight. We all have become too occupied with work and social distancing has limited our communication skills. The fourth and fifth weeks will be followed by country presentations and sharing traditional food. By building social relationships through food and communication, I believe trust and reciprocity can be established to decrease fear and intolerance while increasing a sense of belonging and pro-social behaviors to make the world a better and safer place.

Last but not least, for the final week, iFace leaders will lead us through mindfulness and gratitude circle sessions, to digest what we learned during the past weeks and reflect on ourselves in becoming better persons for our community, despite our different age and identity spectrum. And the leaders will talk about how we will apply what we learned in our future days at Furman. For example, by going

through this session, the American students can help explain to their friends and family who have judgment towards foreign food, scent, clothing or religious beliefs. The same goes for the International students, where they can learn to encourage one another and help explain the American culture on campus. This way, we will be able to send out messengers who promote peace and understanding. I plan to do this project again in the future if this summer turns out impactful.

In addition, according to the donut theory, understanding social boundaries is an important tool in building a sustainable world to reframe economic problems and set new goals. This project will help us realize the flaws of our society and aim for a world in which people and the planet, can thrive in balance.

I believe that this project will be a life-changing experience for both parties and give them reassurance to communicate and learn regarding one another, despite the background diversity and culture or language barriers. This project will leave a long-lasting encounter and memory for our participants as they will experience the meaning of realness, instead of the stereotypes and negative social media influences regarding our differences.

During the entire project, short videos will be taken to show the activities that are taken. In addition, we will take some short interview videos to portray the experiences of both International and American students to share it with the public on YouTube and social media. We will also aim to present the project to the public through Podcast and Apple music, which will allow more people to be impacted by the project than just the participants themselves.

Measurement of Impact:

There will be a before and after a survey on understanding where all of our participants stand with their personal bias and how will they react with a new or uncommon culture. For example, rather than being uncomfortable with a new culture, will they reach out and communicate to build a relationship. The responses to these questions will be the measurement for the project's success. I am confident that the changed mindset of our participants' behaviors will leave a lasting impact for many summers to come. The survey will be held through google forms.

The success of the project will also be based on meeting the agendas and objectives on schedule on a weekly basis, the project is maintained within budget, the participants are all present within the 6 weeks with friendly reminders for attendance, and analyzing the shift in the participants' attitude and perspectives through the survey.

If our project has to go remote due to COVID restrictions, iFace leaders and I will make sure to deliver the crafts and materials that are needed to each individual every week and meet on Zoom. Snacks and other refreshments will also be delivered. As for the American students and International students who live on Furman campus during the summers, we will try to meet up in person and interact through smaller groups, for further feedback.

Ensuring Project Sustainability:

Our goal is for the participants to go out to the world and help solve the conflicts that might occur in their inner circles, due to cultural barriers. The changed attitudes from our participants will not only promote lasting peace for the future but it will also spread in the community they return to. This positivity will continue to spread and lessen tension between different parties. Also, the videos and podcasts made for the public will be available after the project is complete so they can continue to be referenced.

Please describe how you will commit to the best practice of community engagement.

As I work with my community partner, I will make sure that the 6 weeks project is organized with both the leadership of iFace staff and the goals I have for the project. I will not hesitate to talk or clarify with my community partner, to prevent miscommunication. I will be humble, respectful, and assertive as I lead the project with grace and kindness towards my peers. I will meet on a weekly basis before and during the project to go through "what went well" and "what can be improved" with my community partner, for the project to run smoothly. I will be mindful and focus clearly on the goals of the project to prevent my personal bias. I will be patient and optimistic if the project does not go as planned but be persistent to make it better for the next week. I will ask for feedback from my peers regarding how they feel and learn from the project and be flexible to make changes to meet the project's needs. And last but not least, I will be responsible for the project and take it seriously as a job. Thank you.