Education for Disabled Children in Baham, Cameroon
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People with disabilities and albinos in Cameroon are a marginalized group and therefore little or no effort is done to assist them. As a young adult living in Cameroon, I visited L'Association Humanitaire Pour la Promotion des Personnes Socialement Vulnérables (AHPV) in my hometown with my parents. I was shocked by the environment in which they received education. They were cooking outside. There was only a single classroom which was small and not adequate for their respective handicaps, and they did not have modern bathrooms. I believe that everyone deserves to be educated no matter their physical conditions and seeing the disabled children at the center inspired me to develop a project to improve their conditions and access to education.

This project aimed at building a large classroom equipped with accessible desks, and chairs, a balcony around the classroom that will permit the children in wheelchairs to be able to move easily. A wide entrance to the classroom which also allows easier access. A new classroom will help to separate the children based on their disabilities and will enable them to receive better attention. Children with disabilities are left behind in our societies because people do believe that with their disabilities, they cannot achieve anything. This is not true because with determination and hardwork, one can achieve what he/she deserves. Nothing is easy or impossible in life if one gets the support they need. For this reason, I wanted to pass a message through this project to children with disabilities and their families in Baham and around the world. They are not forgotten and they do matter as every other human being and deserve equal rights as abled individuals.

Despite the fact that Baham is free from the ongoing conflicts in Cameroon, I wanted to help the children from this center because Baham is a small village that is less developed and has limited access. Most of them have to go to the nearby cities in order to be able to go to school, parents have to go to the city to work so as to be able to support their families at home. Succeeding with this project will give hope to other children with disabilities, and let them know that they are not forgotten. The parents of the disabled children do not have the means to afford their education and many of them cannot read and write. Expanding the Center will give these parents hope because if their disabled children are better educated, they will be able to help their families. I envision the Center will need to expand as students' success stories are shared and more parents will value and seek education for their disabled children.

Working in the host site of Baham, Cameroon was a learning experience for me. Usually, when there is a donation in this community, the habitants will come and help as much as they can. This helped the construction to go faster and helped to reinforce the bonds between the members. During the construction, I had the opportunity to spend more time with the children of this center. We shared stories all together, did some crafting, played games and made lots of accessories such as jewellery, purses, and decorated some flip-flops with pearls. These accessories are bought by visitors and the money is used to meet their basic needs. I really enjoyed working with them as I learned so many things. I learned how to decorate flip-flops, make the accessories they do. I also improved my tribal language vocabulary as the tribal language called Ghomala is the main way members of this community communicate.

Setting up the project became hectic when I first arrived in Cameroon because we experienced some price inflations for the materials. Knowing that I had a budget limit, I became anxious about not being able to complete the project. My parents and I, together with the builder, had to go to many shops to compare the prices of the materials before buying. The price of some equipment had increased and this could be covered using the emergency fund that was reserved for this purpose.

I was working with a team that was older than me and this sometimes made communication between us difficult because some information was misinterpreted and misunderstood but we were able to sort things out through round tables we made at the end of each week. The round tables served as a checkpoint to
see where we were in the construction process, find some possible solutions and ways to improve things in order to be more efficient. We had a 15 days delay in the completion of the project as we did not finish on the estimated date. We had some logistics problems in receiving the funding as it was a large amount of money and we needed to find a bank that would accept the transaction from my US bank account. Towards the end of the construction, we were experiencing heavy rainfalls and we could not work in such conditions. Despite all these, we were able to complete the project.

The definition of peace varies from people to people depending on the context. I define peace as not only the absence of violence, but as a state of fairness, justice, tranquility, freedom, truth and equality. In the context of this project, peace could be defined as a state of tranquility in the mind. I thought this state could be achieved in the minds of disabled children when the society will stop treating them differently and consider them as someone with all the ability to succeed.

My project contributes to peace in Cameroon in both the short and long-term in several ways. Firstly, it will empower the community to serve the needs of children with disabilities who have largely been marginalized and forgotten. Secondly, it brings people together to value and support the education of children with disabilities who can in turn help build their communities when properly educated. Building another classroom will make the children more comfortable. Instructors will have more resources for each student and the school curriculum will be taught at a pace suitable for the unique needs of the students. Finally, realizing this project gives the members of this community, the disabled children and their families internal peace as they are encouraged to persevere.

This project has changed the way I view the wealth of a community. Having money without being happy is pointless. Money is not the solution to all our problems. Working with a peaceful and supportive community as the people in Baham brought me to a conclusion that every community can attain this if only they decide to humble themselves. This project has changed me in that I became more aware of the problems we face in the world, and how hard it is to find solutions. My project made me realize that in life, we should do things that are both interesting and meaningful to us and that have a direct impact on the lives of others whenever we have the opportunity to do so. We should be kind to one another because tomorrow we might be in a difficult situation in need of help.

This project was not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as the host site had little/no cases. However, all the precautions and rules were followed by my team and I. I was able to travel to Baham to implement my project but due to some delays in the implementation, I had to return to the US before its end. For the remaining 15 days, I implemented the project remotely. I was not there on the inauguration day but I was represented by my parents who organized everything and made sure good pictures of the building were taken.

I feel honored to have had the opportunity to implement this project. I see hope and a better world through it. Putting a smile on the faces of these children makes me happy and I encourage people to assist each other. I hope this project will encourage people with disabilities and their families.

Feeling grateful to have worked with this community as together, we move faster and stronger!
Photographs