Center for Inner Peace & Outer Health: Combating Eating Disorders & Addictions in Mexico

Project by: Charleen McClure ’10 and Andrea-paola Martinez ’10, Agnes Scott College

Background

Peace can be considered as the absence of violence, the presence of justice, and equally as important, is the peace within oneself. This refers to the peace that is associated with health; peace of body, peace of mind, and peace of self.

The rates of eating disorders in the U.S. and abroad are staggering and are underestimated due to the stigma associated with these disorders that deter people from seeking help. More people die of eating disorders than they do from any other mental illness, yet only one in ten people receive treatment due to lack of access to and the enormous cost of treatment (from $500 to $2,000 per day in the U.S.). These truths do not apply to those in the U.S. alone; health studies have revealed that weight dissatisfaction, low body pride, and harmful eating habits permeate throughout all ethnic and socio-economic groups.

The Project

The area our project is centering on, Michoacan, Mexico, has appeared as an area of heightened concern through research studies that show elevated frequencies of dangerous eating behaviors among teenage girls, including binging, vomiting, and fasting (ingentaconnect). Educating both those suffering from addictions and the wider community encourages understanding; and where there is understanding, there exists a foundation for growth towards peaceful interactions within communities. Those struggling from addictions are prisoners in their own bodies, unable to help themselves and others, unable to enjoy life and fulfill their capacities as human beings.

We know from personal experience that in all of Monterrey, Mexico, there is only one facility equipped to treat this malady. Today still, there is only a single in-patient facility center in all of Mexico that addresses eating disorders. However, there is a growing grassroots movement in Michoacan and the opportunity for us to help establish a permanent facility there and start grassroots efforts in 4 other cities in Mexico. We will be working closely with an expert in the field of eating disorders, Jorge Sanchez, who has written a book about his own recovery and now dedicates his life to helping those suffering from addictions. We will be using a program plan that aims to find and treat the underlying cause of the disorder, rather than just the symptoms. This treatment is multi-faceted, focusing on establishing inner peace, strength, and self-love while making use of a developed twelve-step program and medical professionals.

This program is currently provided to small groups of people out of the home of a generous individual, but in order to expand and develop the program, we will be creating a fully functional facility with office and teaching supplies that can serve larger groups, and can serve as a framework from which to create similar treatment centers. We want to expand the reach of the center and develop a training program so that others can spread this method of treatment and lead similar programs in other locations.
We are prepared for implementing this project. Charleen has experience working in the field of public health in a Spanish-speaking environment through her summer abroad in the Dominican Republic, taking public health courses as well as participating in field work in rural and urban settings. Andrea has the personal connections in Mexico, plus a background in psychology and health, and her work in the developing community of Mainero’s charity hospital.

**Part I of the Project – Developing the Center**

We have been given the free use of an office space to house the Center and will be using a portion of our grant funds to equipment the space with desk, chairs, bookshelf, file cabinet, a laptop computer and a projector. We will also supply the space with phone, internet, educational and promotional materials, books and other supplies needed to fulfill the Center’s goals.

In addition, to getting the Center’s facilities prepared, we will also be expanding the network of individuals and organizations that are associated with the Center and training them to recognize and identify young people in need of assistance. We will also be developing a special group of volunteers, that will be eligible for small honorariums, to become trainers and community organizers in order to build the program.

**Part II of the Project – Expanding the Center’s Reach**

As the second part of the project, we will travel to Guadalajara, Mexico City, Morelia, and Monterrey to provide education to students, teachers, parents and others (visiting schools and churches) about addictions and the truths of eating disorders. In this way, we will dispel misconceptions while also teaching students in addition to their parents and teachers about how they can be watchful of signs and symptoms of the disorder, as well as how to take proper action. We have a connection to an esteemed professor in a university in Mexico City. She has agreed to help us in outreach to other schools and in arranging for us to appear before the student body. We will work closely with the school health centers to distribute information about treatment locations, engage in dialogue, and encourage victims to seek help.

**Outcomes**

When we complete our project, we will leave behind an actual treatment facility with a staff of trained volunteers to continue the work to help young people in the community combat eating disorders and learn to be at peace with their bodies. We will also have initiated grassroots movements in 4 other cities, where we will leave behind a network of individuals and organizations to continue the work to identify and educate those that need help.

We believe that every human being holds in them a tremendous capacity for good. We want to help people to realize this capacity within them. People are like pitchers- they can only give from what they have inside; and we want to help fill them with peace, and a love for themselves, so that they may then be able to give it to the world. With the help of this funding, we can only imagine what miracles are to come.