The purpose of our project was to educate Mexican communities about eating disorders and addiction and their connection to physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental well-being. We planned to achieve this objective through a two-part process which consisted of a series of educational presentations and training programs as well as aiding in the establishment of a treatment center in Morelia, Mexico.

We began our trip by forming a partnership with a treatment professional, Jorge Sanchez, to form a treatment center (named: Center BIOPSIE). Located in a loaned space, we furnished and outfitted the center with a combination of donated and purchased items. Establishing a permanent facility was one of our first project goals. By aligning ourselves with a treatment expert with the knowledge, clients and contacts as well as the ability to staff the center moving forward, we expect the center to have the ability to be self-sustaining.

Next, to better understand the nature of the treatment given at the center, we began to attend relapse prevention reunions, weekly meetings to provide continual support and encouragement for the graduates of the original program. Outside of the meetings, we made contacts with universities and community centers and also gained more insight about the work of the center through taking the three-day Intensive Treatment Program. After experiencing the program first-hand, we were then given training in order to administer the treatment programs, the three-day Intensive Course and the four month “Diplomado” program.

Trained and filled with anticipation, we traveled to Mexico City to present the three-day Intensive Course to a group of 28 male in-patients at a drug rehab correctional facility, Nueva Identidad. Lastly, we gave presentations in universities (Technological University of Morelia and the University of La Salle) and also gave the three-day Intensive Course again in the town of Valle de Bravo.

As with any project, we experienced a few difficulties. We encountered the first while making contacts with universities and community centers. Although initially, each appeared very receptive to have us speak there, maintaining a relationship with them proved difficult. Calling universities to establish meetings took longer than we anticipated and should have been completed before our arrival. Another difficulty we encountered was the hesitancy on behalf of the schools to take time out of academics to address the psychological needs of the students. A school psychologist we spoke with voiced her frustration concerning this philosophy, as psychological well-being and educational performance are tightly connected. Cultural barriers were at the root of some of the other difficulties we encountered, that included stereotypes and prejudices about sex and sexuality.

Furthermore, the political environment in Mexico was not conducive to the goals of our project. The drug wars produce a dangerous atmosphere for working with anti-drug campaigns. The lack of government support for rehabilitation centers provided us with another set-back.

Despite these set-backs, more often than not we were met with success. Intimate environments in relaxed, casual settings and one-on-one interactions prompted progress with the groups we worked with. Our approach to connect with others on a peer level, as opposed to on a superior level, allowed others to feel comfortable enough to be candid; sharing our own recovery related testimonies proved helpful as well.
This approach was especially effective when working with the patients in Nueva Identidad, who took steps towards recovery by sharing the traumas of their pasts.

An important goal for us was the sustainability of the project, which was further accomplished by the formation of a committee for the center to oversee promotion, scholarships, and fundraising. The sustainability of our project can be further measured through those who interacted with the program: the patients who voiced their desire to help others upon recovery, the volunteers at the center who are graduates of the program, and the director and psychologist of Nueva Identidad who traveled to Morelia to receive training to permanently incorporate our treatment program in their rehab center.

Overall, we worked with a diverse group of people, addicts, health promoters, rehab center directors, psychologists, and students. Collectively, their potential to affect others is infinite, so while we can estimate how many people directly benefited from this project to be around 270 people, it is our hope that many more people will positively benefit from our project.

Section II

Peace is the calmness in the soul that remains firm amidst turmoil. It is love and confidence in one’s self and in one’s neighbor; it recognizes the imperfect nature of humanity but, regardless, sees the potential for goodness. Therefore, peace can be applied to two aspects: peace of the individual and peace of the community. Peace begins when individuals realize they have the potential to positively affect the world. Moreover, inherent in peace is the concept of justice. The existence of injustice creates the barriers that inhibit peace in one’s self and peace as it extends to the greater community. The beauty of peace is that despite whatever tribulations may come it remains hopeful.

Our project strived to contribute to peace through nurturing the seeds of peace within individuals. As individuals compose the community, we believe that by making an impact on each individual, we made an impact on the community. Even when our outreach involved working in communities and universities, we still focused on connecting with each individual in the audience. Our project concentrated on individuals who could not define peace because they had encountered nothing but pain, suffering, hatred, and turmoil. By helping to guide this particular group of people away from a world of exterior conflict and into a world of self-love, self-esteem, and self-reliance, we not only provided them with the potential to develop internal peace, but also the potential to foster external peace. Even those we encountered who were not suffering from addiction are now better prepared to recognize and to assist friends and relatives in their journey to recovery. Addiction is a disease that does not just affect one individual; it affects communities. So by focusing our attention on the individual, we combated the disastrous affects of addiction from its roots to establish a network that labors towards peace.

This project has changed how we think about the world and those in it by instilling us with a deeper level of understanding and patience in regards to our neighbor. It has taught us that hope exists and prevails despite constant obstacles. We also re-learned the importance of getting beyond the surface. The old adage, “Never judge a book by its cover,” has become an empty saying in a society that is so focused on the superficial, reinforced by constant messages by the media. Working with addictions taught us that they are a collaboration of complex issues manifesting themselves on the surface. We learned that these issues were personal and societal. While on the surface we may see an addict, beyond that exists the issues of homelessness, violence, poverty, and illiteracy.

Personal Quote:
“The hope that illuminated the darkness of addiction and suffering was inspiring, demonstrating the infinite potential of each and every individual. Although at times we felt quite small, we learned that any change that arises from the budding seed of love, especially when it rises from suffering and devastation, inspires the hope from which peace springs.”

Andrea-Paola Martinez and Charleen McClure
Participants at one of the program presentations.

Student P4P leaders, Charleen McClure (pictured far left) and Andrea-Paola Martinez (pictured second from the right) pictured here with presentation leaders.

Drug Rehab Correctional Facility where one of the outreach programs was held in Mexico City.

A training session for volunteers.