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Sharing the Gift of Water: A Hoosier-Haitian Partnership

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Sharing the Gift of Water: A Hoosier-Haitian Partnership

Lauren Ward, *College of Science*

Student Author Bio Sketch

Lauren Ward is a senior in biology at Purdue University, minoring in chemistry and psychology and completing Learning Beyond the Classroom and Peace Corps Preparation certificates. She is the secretary of the Purdue Public Health Student Association. She intends to study infectious disease in graduate school next fall and hopes to pursue a career in global health and international development. In this article, she describes her experiences partnering with an Indiana-based nonprofit for the International Agri-Symposium at Université Antenor Firmin in Cap-Haïtien, Haiti.

Student Introduction

“Engagement Methods for International Food Security (YDAE 49100) provided an opportunity for enrolled students to travel abroad to Cap-Haïtien, Haiti. As both a course in agriculture and a service-learning study abroad, the overarching goal was to inspire, engage, and teach Purdue and Haitian students through service learning in agriculture. This was done by developing a project with teammates during the fall semester that was then presented to students in Haiti during the International Agri-Symposium at Université Antenor Firmin over winter break.

As a member of the water quality team, I decided to pursue a service-learning project with the other two members of my team: Paige Rudin, a junior in multidisciplinary engineering, and Timothy Jerger, a junior in social studies education. Our goals of this project were to emphasize the importance of cleaning *E. coli* and other contaminants from water, identify an efficient and cost-effective method of water sanitation, and discuss up-and-coming sanitation technologies. Through the literature search we conducted, we found that only 57.7% of the Haitian population currently has access to an improved water source, compared to 91% of the world population and 99% of the United States population (World Bank Group, 2015). With these statistics in mind, we aimed to develop a project that would give Haitian students resources that would have an impact that lasted well beyond our time in Haiti. This search for a project idea led us to consider a new approach: connecting our Haitian peers with a resource that already had infrastructure in Haiti and would be sustained long after our trip had ended—Gift of Water.

Community Partner Description

Gift of Water is a nonprofit organization founded in 1995 and based in Carmel, Indiana, that provides impoverished Haitian communities with an affordable water sanitation system made from assembled five-gallon buckets and a series of filters. They are located at 1025 Pine Hill Way Carmel, Indiana 46032, and their website can be accessed at giftofwater.org. The mission of the organization is as follows:

Gift of Water (GOW)[®] is a non-profit organization that provides filtered, clean and available drinking water to improve the health of impoverished children and families through community development and simple technologies in developing countries. Our objectives are to provide water in the home that meets international health standards, to improve the health of children, to focus on education and developing values, eventual self-sustainability in our communities, and for continuous improvement of our program. (Gift of Water, n.d.)

The organization provides WASH (water treatment, sanitation, and hygiene) training to the recipients of buckets in Haiti to help meet their mission of improving the health of the population. In addition, they employ Haitians as technicians to maintain these systems (Gift of Water, potentially creating job opportunities for some of our Haitian colleagues.

Activity Opportunities and (Potential) Impact

We connected with Gift of Water after one of our team members received an article from someone in their family about the work the organization was doing in Haiti. We set up a conference call with Laura Moehling,



Water sanitation team from Purdue with Jenjenio, technician trainer for Gift of Water



Jenjenio explaining the bucket filtration system to students attending the symposium.

Director of Operations, and were able to find out more about their mission in Haiti, and then we were asked about the goals of our project. We decided Gift of Water would be a great connection for our Haitian counterparts, and Ms. Moehling was generous enough to help us obtain a bucket and WASH posters printed in Haitian Creole to support our project. In Haiti, we presented safe water sanitation and storage methods during the symposium and introduced students to the Gift of Water organization, with the help of their Haitian technician trainer, Jenjenio. Gift of Water could be a potential connection for people who plan to serve on mission trips in Haiti, as a way to leave behind a lasting impact on the community served and to help provide the Gift of Water system to new communities. In addition, Gift of Water has volunteers who support their mission, and this could be a way for students who are passionate about public health or international development to get involved.

Reflective Conclusion

Developing a relationship with Gift of Water before traveling to Haiti helped introduce our team to the

culture surrounding water sanitation and hygiene and the country's culture, and it prepared us as much as possible for what to expect when we arrived. We were able to better understand the importance of connecting in ways we probably would have overlooked, such as simply providing printed materials in Haitian Creole rather than in English. We hope the students in Haiti will be able to use the information we presented to help improve water quality in their own neighborhoods in and around Cap-Haïtien. Communities in the United States (and beyond) are able to contribute to Gift of Water in a variety of ways, including volunteering, providing donations to support operations in Haiti, or sponsoring a bucket system to provide a Haitian community with safe drinking water.

Acknowledgments

This partnership would not have been possible without the Gift of Water team in Carmel and in Haiti, especially Laura Moehling and Jenjenio Conserve. In addition, my water sanitation teammates, Paige Rudin and Timothy Jerger, made our project happen, and we brought our varied backgrounds together to strengthen our project. Many thanks are due to Dr. Mark Russell and Tyson McFall for supporting us throughout the preparation course and during our time in Haiti. Finally, I would like to extend a huge thank-you to the Haitian students from Université Antenor Firmin and beyond who attended our symposium.

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