

Haiti Service Project 2009
July 8, 2009
Platon and the city of Les Cayes, Haiti



Our service project in Les Cayes, Haiti this year was focuses on building a culture of heart and service. We focused our energies on developing the relationships between Haitian students and American students for the purpose of learning each others cultures, traditions and life styles. This journey that was foreign to all of us was embarked upon by 30 people form both countries. The vision for the service project was to realize one family under God.



The project took place in Platon, Les Cayes, which is located near the Peak of the Macaya Mountains. There, we planted Moringa trees near the peak, to offset deforestation and we worked to serve the medical needs of the inhabitants of this region.

Arrival

We arrived in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on the 15th of June 2009, to begin the most incredible adventure of our lives. At the airport, we boarded a school bus that was arranged to pick us up and take us to the center for orientation where we met our group leader and other members of our group, than we headed south. After a three hour ride we finally arrived in the city of Les Cayes on the 16th of June. We held our orientation and meeting to discuss the plans for the next 10 days, which consisted of planting 1000 Moringa trees donated by International Relief Friendship Foundation (IRFF) under the direction of Mr. Richard Sapp, and the medical service project with the medical group ALMEDHA (Alliance Des Medicins Haitian).

In the morning we met with the Mayor of Les Cayes, Mr. Pierre Yvon Chery and the Les Cayes city delegate, Mr. Abou Yves Mary at the Delegate's office. We shared about our project with them. They were very interested in our project and stated that they would like to partner with us in the future to plant Moringa trees on the Peak of Macaya Mountains. They shared a lot about the historical facts and culture of Les Cayes to all of us.

Trip to the Mountain

On June 17th, at about 8:00 a.m., we left for Platon on an adventurous trip. We had to cross the Port Canal River on foot, which was a great experience for everyone. Most of our team members never had such an opportunity before. Everyone was very excited. We held hands together as we crossed the river. The water was clear as crystal and cool. The children from the community welcomed us and many were swimming in the glistening, shimmering stream. We heard that at certain times the river can swell so much that no one can be able to cross. It was a spectacular sight to see, that we all enjoyed this beautiful clear river. We crossed it without any problems and headed for the mountain.



Before entering the mountain, we stopped in a small town to get ourselves ready for the road ahead. We started climbing the mountain after lunch. We walked and walked for miles. While walking we met many of the inhabitants of the peak on their way to sell their goods at the market. The people of this mountain walk many miles every day - some 8, 12 to 24 hours from the peak to Platon. They were very surprised to see people from various ethnic groups - black, Asian and white - walking and talking together with such friendship. They asked us, "What were we doing? Where were we going?"

We told them that we had come to serve their community to plant the Moringa trees and do a medical project in Platon. They knew how far Platon was and how far we would have to go to do our service work. At the time we really did not know how far we would really have to walk to reach the summit. So, they were in awe that we would travel that far to serve them, and they thanked us for coming.

From this walking experience, we learned about the difficult life of these people who have to walk days and hours under difficult circumstances to find a way to make money to live. We saw all ages walking this path; old men, women, children, pregnant women carrying heavy loads, sweating heavily. We saw all kinds of animals like horses, mullets, carrying heavy loads, as well as cows, goats, and sheep walking ready to be sold in the market. We also learned that in these communities there are no clinics, hospitals, even doctors to see these people. They live far away from civilization. They have to walk many miles to sell their goods to obtain money for their daily needs. Walking up the mountain was an unforgettable experience for all of us.

Medical Service

Early the next day, June 18th, we had our prayers and gathered to receive instructions for the day's activities. At 8:00 a.m., the medical group ALMEDHA left to begin the medical project, a mobile clinic in an elementary school. During that first day alone, they were able to hold consultations for 176 people. Among these patients, one girl of 10 years had yellow fever. The doctors administered



intravenous care and monitored her all day to make sure that she was out of danger and prescribed her medicine. Another patient had an abscess inside of his mouth that required surgery. There were able to perform the immediate surgery to save that man's teeth and mouth. Without the surgery that man would have lost all of his teeth and the infection would have eventually affected his whole body.

On the second day of work, the doctors saw 76 patients, mostly children. Most of the children were diagnoses with mal-nutrition. Vitamins were given to all the children. Some had eye and ear infections. Due to a lack of medication, the doctors had to stop the consultations. Much of the medicines were given out the first day.

All together, 252 people were able to be consulted and received medicine for their various illnesses. Many had no money to buy medicine or even to go to the town, which is almost impossible for most of the people. The fact that we were there during those days to serve the people in Platon,

brought great relief to their medical needs. We were also able to distribute over a thousand toothbrushes and toothpastes to the patients.

Moringa Trees

In the afternoon after lunch on the 19th of June we visited the location where the Moringa trees seedlings were prepared for planting. 1000 seeds, pails, heavy duty shovels and black gloves were donated by IRFF under the direction of Mr. Richard Sapp. We had a briefing in which Agriculturalist Lebien Jeandini Laurenceau and Mr. Sony Thelusma instructed and demonstrated the ways to plant the



Moringa trees. The land that was being prepared for the trees was donated by the parents of Mr. Sony Thelusma who will take care of the trees and prepare them for future distribution to resolve the deforestation situation associated with tree cutting for charcoal consumption.

Seminars will be given by Mr. Sony Thelusma to educate the community about the health, nutritional, and environmental value of the Moringa tree to deter from it being cut down. Educating the community and giving them a seedling to plant on their own farms is a way of giving new hope to the people living in Platon and the peak of Macaya. Our hope is that the trees will continue to grow and the people's health will improve by the consuming of the leaves, flowers and pods. This is one of the solutions to end malnutrition, and help the environment.



Leaving Platon

We left Platon very early in the morning for the city of Les Cayes. In the Afternoon, we visited the Immaculate Conception Hospital, where we visited two wards, the maternity and pediatric. In the

afternoon, we visited the ACUSH (Association Des Coeurs Unies Sud d’Haiti). This organization created a way to solve the problem of deforestation by creating charcoal briquettes out of raw materials to provide a practical alternative to cutting trees. Seminars will be given to the people to explain the value of trees for themselves and the environment. Presentations of the charcoal briquettes will help them understand that there are other alternatives that are much easier and better for them and that will protect the environment.

We left for Port-au-Prince to begin our political visits. While we were there we visited the Minister of Justice and Public Security Judge McEdume Kenson as well as the Judge Tribunal of the City of Delmas. We were able to learn how the justice system works in Haiti. The students asked many questions pertaining to laws of both USA and Haiti. We visited the Judges Chambers and were invited to watch different judicial sessions.

End of the Journey

The end of our journey in Haiti came too soon for all of us. We boarded our Tap, Tap with tears to go back; remembering the experiences all the members of the Haitian and the USA team had together. Time stood still for many of us who served the people of Haiti. We met and worked with many wonderful people. We saw the reality and the suffering of the people who lived there and are grateful that we were able to make a difference in their lives. During our service project we brought smiles, joy, happiness, and comfort to the people in Platon and Les Cayes. The tears, the walks, and smiles truly are something else. We will remember them forever. We only wish we could stay longer and give more.

We realize that the needs are great. Life in the countryside is very difficult. We hope to inspire others to give more, to build clinics, so the people will be helped on a daily basis. It is our hope that someone will be inspired to make it possible for a medical clinic to be built in Platon to help resolve the people’s medical needs and save many lives in the future.



Reported by

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