

FIELD REPORT: HAITI EARTHQUAKE RELIEF PROJECT

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TRI team members: Laurie Leitch, Julia Gombos, Ellen Elgart, Nancy Sokolow

Papaye, Central Plateau

We arrive in Port au Prince expecting the usual chaotic crowds outside the airport only to find new organization on the way out to find our ride. This is encouraging and we hope that it portends other changes for the better in this struggling country we have come to love. Unfortunately, as we make our way out of the city toward Papaye there is little evidence that much has changed since the last time. And, in fact, very little has changed since we first came in March. The debris is mostly out of the streets now...but the collapsed buildings are still there...people just set up their merchandise to sell around the debris. We see no evidence of new housing...only the tents and sheets with tarps over them. The rainy season has been going on since May and there are puddles and mud everywhere. It is astonishing that there haven't been riots. There has been a rise in the already high rape rate...and we do see more security lights in some of the tent camps.

On this trip three people from our funding organization, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), are traveling with us. They have just completed an evaluation of our project and based on the evaluation interviews they conducted with our trainees they tell us that they will fund the first 2 phases of our proposed 4-phase Train-the-Trainer Project. This project will bring us back to Haiti for the next year to train TRM trainers. Our goal is to make ourselves unnecessary here because our trainees can carry on the work training others. This is exciting news. And we know the trainees will be relieved to hear that we have the funding to get started.

It is a 3 hour drive to Papaye through valleys and over mountains. everything is green because of the rain. We receive exuberant greetings from the people at the Movement Paysan Papaye (MPP) IDP camp where we stay in Papaye. There are fewer people living in the camp, which is a good sign that people are moving on to build new lives. We wonder if all of our trainees will be back, since many of them were living in the camp the last time we were here in July.

On Day 1 of the 2-day refresher training we have 36 trainees sitting with big smiles on their faces, ready to begin. After some songs from them to us and from us to them (we always do the Hokey-Pokey!) we get down to work.

It is so gratifying to hear the reports of how they have been spreading the TRM skills across their communities. Some report that it took some practice to learn how to best get across the rationale for teaching the skills to skeptical individuals. TRM skills were presented in women's groups, youth groups, church groups, schools, at a summer camp, in a hospital, as well as over the radio and with friends and family.

When we watch their practice sessions we see how well they have grasped the stabilization skills. Their questions reflect careful thought and they also tell us what they need more help with. On Day 2 half the day is fieldwork where we observe the trainees as they use the skills with people from the camp...adults and children. They work in teams, deciding among themselves who will present which material. The second half of the day we have practice sessions, review the use of therapeutic games with adults and children, and have the long awaited graduation ceremony.

We have printed their TRM certificates in color and embossed the certificates with a stamp. In July they had told us that they wanted something "official" and we have gone all out to provide it. We have had "Haiti Earthquake Relief" t-shirts made for them, official name badges, and a laminated card that briefly describes TRI and the TRM skills. This card was also requested by them as a way to standardize how they describe the project. They are clearly pleased. Chavanne Jean-Baptiste, the beloved founder of MPP, gives a speech congratulating them and giving each trainee his or her certificate and a huge hug. Chavanne tells them he doesn't care if they put the certificate in a drawer as long as they take the action to help the Haitian people. A party is held that night with music, cake, popcorn, and beverages. It is nice to know as we say our goodbyes the next morning that we will be coming back again and again. Constancy means so much when so many loved ones have been lost.

Port au Prince (PaP):

We travel back to Port au Prince and for the first time in our 4 trips here we stay at a hotel instead of at our Project Coordinator, Agathe Jean-Baptiste's, home. This is a sign of progress because until now very few hotels were

structurally sound enough for use. It is a luxury to have air conditioning and hot water...particularly since we were without any water at all for a day and a half while we were in Papaye.

It has been interesting to see the differences between our rural trainees and our urban trainees...and based on the differences we decide to continue meeting separately with the two groups during the train-the-trainer project.

In PaP we have a smaller group (n=26) than expected because 9 trainees were unable to attend because their organization had lost funding and they were needed at work. In PaP more of the trainees have paid work than in Papaye, where when trainees are working they often do not receive wages. Many of the Papaye trainees are what are called "community animators" a term comparable in the US to our "community organizer."

We follow the same format as we did in Papaye...2 days of refresher training that includes a half day in an IDP camp spreading the TRM stabilization skills. Day 1 includes lots of review and answering questions, including questions about some challenging cases trainees have worked with.

In PaP we have an observer with us for both days from another non-governmental organization, Helpage, which is providing psychosocial services to the elderly in 100 IDP camps. It may be possible to create a collaborative relationship with Helpage that would bring TRM training to their volunteers and could perhaps use our current trainees as mentors. It is exciting to talk about this potential collaboration.

On Day 2 we begin at the IDP camp...Camp Dadadou, a camp of 10,000 people all living jammed together in tents. The trainees do a wonderful job working with the many camp residents who have gathered to see us at the Support Center...one group of trainees takes a large group of tiny children (about 45), another takes the older children (about 85), and a third group does individual sessions with adults (about 58 individuals). The trainees are enthusiastic despite the heat and the camp Governing Committee gives us a warm welcome.

After returning to the training site we break into small groups and debrief the fieldwork. There are many excellent questions asked. The questions are thoughtful and probing. We then do a series of demonstration modules with the trainees to anchor the skills one last time.

The graduation ceremony follows with much hooting and singing as each trainee makes his or her way down the row of US team members and translators. Several trainees offer speeches in behalf of the entire group...and the US team makes speeches of gratitude as well.

It is so wonderful to be able to tell all of our trainees that we will continue to come back for the "trainer" project. We will offer two tracks in this 4-part training over the next year, a TRM Community Trainer program and a TRM Train-the-Trainer Program. Having two tracks means that we won't have to exclude anyone. We tell the trainees that our goal is to make ourselves unnecessary by training them to do what we have been doing over these past 6 months with them.

The finale of the day is a huge rain and windstorm that rages through Port au Prince ripping roofs off and downing many trees. A few of the trainees are frightened by all the wind...many receive phone calls about damage to their tents. It is hard to imagine having only the meager shelter of a tent in a storm like this. Driving back to the hotel the roads are filled with large branches and traffic is clogged as cars attempt to get past the destruction. Our thoughts are full of the images of the day and our concern for the trainees who are also making their way home. Each of us has had an amazing time here in Haiti and we are filled with gratitude for the privilege of working among Haiti's resilient people.