

## Haiti Field Report #1, May 24, 2010

by

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We arrive in Haiti on May 20. The airport in Port au Prince is less chaotic than in March even though there are throngs of people arriving from all over the world. We talk to one Texan in the immigration line who is coming to help build pre-fab houses and we hear a symphony of voices, speaking different languages, reminding us of the global response to this tragedy. We also hear the rich, rhythmic tones of Creole reminding of us that we have arrived at our destination. We quickly find our bags and make the short walk to the entrance of the airport. We are swarmed by porters eager to help us with our luggage. The friendly, familiar faces of our interpreters, Marie Claude and Juliette Edwards, greet us. We all embrace and exchange kisses as we swim through the cars, buses and people to our vans.

We will immediately embark on the 3-hour journey to the Central Plateau. It is about 99 degrees F and muggy. It is a bumpy ride through small towns and rural countryside...winding up and down the mountains. The vegetation is now a deep hue of green as Haiti has entered its rainy season. There are five of us from TRI: Laurie Leitch and Elaine Miller-Karas, TRI's Co-directors and Sherry Wheaton, Nancy Barickman, and Ellen Elgart. In addition we have 6 translators: Marie Claude Edwards and her two daughters, Juliette and Maheda and Desulma Desulme, Evens Mary, and Limage Ricotson. Marie Claude and Juliette were with us in March and they have done an excellent job of orienting the others to our work and to the terminology used in the training. Translators are the essential ingredient for success in the training and we are always a bit nervous to see how we all work together. This group of 6 is enthusiastic and energetic...and the trainees enjoy them as much as we do.

Our plan was to provide 3 days of TRM-Community (TRM-C) to 30 people in Papaye and then to another 30 in Port au Prince. However, on the ride to Papaye Marie Claude tells us she thinks there will be 100. With only 5 team members, that would mean 20 per small practice group...which is way too many for the individual attention we give each trainee. We are relieved when we arrive to find that we have 57 trainees. Still more than the 30 max that we told the organizer we would take...but far more manageable than the 100 we had feared would be attending. One thing about this type of work is that nothing is as you expect...for any of us who like orderliness and predictability this is a great opportunity to practice equanimity and flexibility.

Most of the trainees are affiliated in one way or another with MPP...Movement Paysan Papaye...a grass-roots organization founded by Chavannes Jean-Baptiste over 35 years ago to improve the lives of the Haitian people. MPP has branches in all 9 districts of Haiti and has many thousands of members. We are proud to be collaborating with this fine organization. MPP's Community Animators (community leaders) have traveled to attend the training from many places within the Central Plateau. The participants are involved in a wide variety of activities and include the one psychologist from the

hospital in Hinche, workers from the Health Clinic in Papaye, Community Animators who work with the scores of survivors of the earthquake who flooded the Central Plateau after January 12, 2010 and the survivors themselves who have a passionate commitment to help their friends and family. Their dedication and enthusiasm to participate encourages and inspires our TRI team.

When we arrive in Papaye, we are greeted by familiar faces from our work here in March. People run up and kiss our cheeks and stroke our arms. One little boy jumps up in glee and quickly runs to each one of us and plants a big kiss on each of our cheeks. We are deeply touched by the reception and realize how much it means that we have returned. We are tired from the long journey but energized by the people and their kindness towards us.

The project has been funded by Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) for 4 trips between March and September. After that we have applied for funding from multiple sources for a Train-the-Trainer project. In this project we would select 30 people who have attended the trainings in May, July, and September to continue working with us for 4 sessions over a 1 year period. We would be training them as TRM-C trainers. A primary goal of TRI is to expand capacity at the local level to offer TRM-C stabilization skills for self-care and to other members of the trainees' communities. The Train-the-Trainer project will mean that a cadre of Haitians will continue to expand the numbers of people skilled in TRM-C's biological approach to trauma. This is very exciting since Haiti has very little in the way mental health interventions suitable following catastrophic events.

The part of the trip when we are in Papaye is the hardest in terms of living conditions....but we each have our own room...and the mosquito net "tents" we all brought are terrific...like a cozy nest at night where no creepy things can join us because the netting zips shut along the bottom. These little luxuries make a big difference in getting a decent night's sleep. It is HOT in the daytime and doesn't cool down much at night. We each brought small battery-powered fans and they are really a big help during the night. It is the rainy season here and most afternoons and nights there are huge downpours. The benefit is that the temperature drops a little afterwards...but the mud and puddles increase. There is a camp for displaced persons where we are staying at the Lakay Training Center and everyone is either in housing like ours or in sturdy tent so there is escape from the nighttime rains. This is in contrast to so many other camps in Port au Prince and other areas hard hit by the earthquake where people are still living in very flimsy tents or under sheets stretched over sticks and poles. Even after 4 months we have seen little evidence of change in the tent and sheet camps...and it is hard to imagine the misery that comes with these rains.

The nights are filled with sounds of braying donkeys, mooing cows, and horrible yelping from dogs that sound as if they are being hurt. Survival of the fittest is in evidence among the dogs...some are very adept at getting food, and although none are plump

their ribs don't show; while others are just a bag of bones with hardly a bit of flesh on them. If only a veterinarian would volunteer to come along with us and provide spay and neuter services the suffering of these poor animals would decrease.

During the first day of training, Germaine, a Community Animator from Hinche, raises her hand and enthusiastically describes a story about her son. She recounts that she used the TRM-C skills we taught in March to help her son. He was in Port au Prince at the time of the earthquake and was now living with her in Hinche. She noticed he had changed and was very "jumpy" and would have nightmares about the quake. She taught him the skills and his symptoms diminished. She was quite joyful when she told us the story. We learn that she not only works with survivors of the earthquake but also with survivors of domestic violence. Personal stories like this are not only inspiring to the TRI team but they give added credence to our model from those participants who did not attend our orientation trainings in March.

The TRM-C teaching requires our best creativity because most of the trainees are not educated beyond high school...and we have only a few who have clinical training. We designed TRM-C for just these types of populations and it is exciting to see them grasp and use the material. Their questions are excellent and each day we see their skills deepen. The TRI team and the Haitians share and exchange dances, songs and games. The Haitians are amused to learn that the song, Frere Jacques is also taught in American schools.

We have a TRM-C manual and laminated pocket cards in Creole. The pocket cards are designed for low literacy populations and have pictorial descriptions of the TRM-C skills. We have provided notebooks and pens to everyone as well. The trainees have very little in the way of material things and they appreciate the training materials so much.

On the afternoon of Day 3 we interview each trainee individually to help them develop an Individual Plan for using the skills for self-care and with others between now and when we come back in July. They have already had practice teaching the skills in their small groups and are now equipped to teach the stabilization skills in their communities. As we conduct the interviews, we hear many stories about how they have already applied the TRM-C skills with family and friends since the training started. Many participants describe detailed ways in which they plan to utilize the TRM-C skills with groups within their organizations. One man says, "I plan to spread this method to all of Haiti!" The Individual Plan will be reviewed and expanded in each subsequent phase of the project.

We'll be here until Tuesday morning when we drive back to Port au Prince. Although the living conditions are more comfortable there because we stay in a private house, there are a different set of challenges in PaP due to the fact that it is the epicenter of the quake and the devastation is always present.

We'll leave Papaye knowing that there are 57 dedicated TRM-C practitioners. And we will look forward to watching them expand their skills in the months ahead.

