

Slogan on the tee Shirt at the Canaan Reforestation Project



Partout, pour tous, Ansanm nou Kapab

“Everywhere for Everyone - Together we can”

I joined the Ventures in People (VIP) group that traveled to Haiti in January 2019. My main motivations were three-fold: to travel with my friend to Haiti; to visit Red Cross sponsored programs in Haiti; and to see first-hand how Ventures in People (VIP) is helping the Haitian people. I also hoped that our group could make a small difference through our actions during the week.

My primary responsibility in preparing for the trip was to select books for our five afternoon teaching days in Mirebalais. I brought 15 children’s books with accompanying lesson plans along with pencils, pencil sharpeners, a world map and other visual aids. I also contacted the American Red Cross in Haiti to arrange a visit to three projects in Port-au-Prince and near-by Canaan. The Mid-Michigan Chapter of the Red Cross donated 60 backpacks that were distributed to students in the schools we visited during the week.

Our first day in Port-Au-Prince was spent touring the under-construction American Red Cross (ARC) Blood Bank. The \$6 million project includes a \$1.4 million solar installation to provide electricity for the blood center. The Center, scheduled to be completed in May 2019, will contain blood collection and distribution facilities, laboratories and private medical offices. We also traveled to Canaan, an area a few kilometers north east of Port-au-Prince which houses many victims displaced by the 2010 earthquake. The VIP group along with Haitian Red Cross volunteers participated in a small reforestation project and visited a school jointly sponsored by USAID and ARC.



Our reforestation project – dig in!

During our five days in Mirebalais our group had a chance to see the surrounding countryside. Our driver Ernest and guide Tenior lead us through the market, to a local waterfall, on a short boat ride down the Peligre River and a visit to the hydroelectric dam. With each stop we began

to understand the daily struggles Haitians face such as access to electricity, clean drinking water, health care, sanitation services and education. Each day of our stay we experienced electricity shut-downs for 5-8 hours accompanied by no water for flushing, washing or bathing.

Tour of the school in Canaan.



Vendors spread out their goods on the ground in Mirebalais. Fruit, vegetables, grains, poultry, clothing, spices and toiletries can be found at the sprawling marketplace.



The tour of the Hopital Universitaire de Mirebalais illustrated the challenges that Haitians face in accessing health care. Many patients travel in from the countryside with relatives who must find food and shelter while the patients seek care. Most are too poor to pay for lodging, so they sleep on the hospital grounds. The hospital is designed with large open areas with shade, plants and seating to make waiting somewhat comfortable. Food and clothing vendors surround the area to meet the needs of visitors.



Photos:

Left:

Our students enjoy singing and laughing!

Right:

Piles of clothing outside the hospital in Mirebalais

The efforts of our group to provide some meaningful English language activities to students was fun and challenging. Each afternoon we spent time with groups of 10-12 students in three rotations; numbers, letters, reading. My group focused on reading to the students in English and

providing some basic English phrases such as “Hello, my name is Nice to meet you”. We also sang songs in English and recited our ABC’s.

Reflections

The continual protests of the citizens over basic needs are ongoing. We saw evidence of civil unrest in the streets of Port-au-Prince and we were forced to leave Mirebalais a day early due to a city blockade to protest lack of electricity. One way to assist the people in Haiti is to use the *boots on the ground* approach. VIP uses this format with frequent group visits and financial assistance directly to families through the Haitian VIP staff living and working in Haiti. We saw evidence that this method is making a difference. Our group saw young people utilizing leadership skills in their 4H presentations. Continuing water filter distribution can decrease disease and increase well-being. The tuition support through VIP allows young people to have an education that hopefully will lead better opportunities. We saw many young people come to our classes eager to learn after attending their own school’s regular sessions.

The poverty is heartbreaking. Not a day goes by since I returned home, that I haven’t recalled images from our trip – faces with smiles, children who are hungry, pregnant mothers waiting at the hospital to deliver a healthy baby, families walking down to the river to wash clothes, bathe and drink, partaking of a dinner for our entire group lovingly prepared by our guide and his family. The VIP members I accompanied on this trip were examples of generosity and volunteerism at its best. I encourage VIP supporters to keep Haiti in your thoughts.

VIP volunteers head down a dirt path filled with waste, to board a home-made boat for a river ride. Lack of sanitation is an environmental and health problem.

Woman learning pottery in the Papillon co-op, Port-au-Prince. Papillon provides employment and training for women who are the sole wage earners for their families.



Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead

