

Spotlight on ILA Members

ILA Members are doing amazing leadership work around the world, from starting new degree programs to nurturing young people who make a difference, from running innovative workshops and seminars to fostering organizational change. We are pleased to shine an ILA spotlight on the programs of our members. If you would like to nominate yourself or another ILA institutional member to be featured on these pages, please contact ILA at ila@ila-net.org.

Spotlight on The Rural Haiti Project Inc:

Thinking Outside of the Box: The Steadfast Journey Towards Creative Leadership in Rural Haiti

[W]hen people are open to seeing the world from different perspectives, previously unimagined possibilities for action present themselves.- W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The Collective Leadership Framework

Building community engagement and collaborative leadership norms in rural communities is paramount to the fight against widespread problems such as poverty, violence and poor governance (or lack thereof) in developing countries. When individuals are able to come together despite differences and implement solutions to collective problems at the community level, it is possible for this collective spirit to spread across communal and regional boundaries to reach the national stage.



16. Recognizing that large societal problems must be addressed at local levels to ensure sustainable change, The Rural Haiti Project Inc. (RHP) (www.ruralhaitiproject.org) is seeking to motivate, empower and support young people in rural areas of Haiti to become leaders and builders of their communities by conducting youth workshops and implementing long-term programs.

Recently, Rural Haiti Project conducted a two week long workshop with 40 children ages 6 through 12 in the town of Terre Rouge, La Montagne, a mountainous area near the historic seaside city of Jacmel, in the south eastern region of Haiti. The workshops included programs such as sewing, painting, drawing, papier-mâché (children constructed objects such as masks using earth, cement bags and glue to construct mold frames and painted these frames), reading and writing, walking tours, presentations and discussions. Throughout the workshops the children were inspired by their accomplishments, by the power of their creativity, and by the bonds they started to

build with one another and their community. For example, during a discussion on environmental protection, the children were asked to come up with alternative uses for the discarded plastic bags of drinking water that so often litter the streets in Haiti. In response, one of the children came up with an innovative solution and folded her plastic bag into a planting pot with holes. The rest of the children, inspired by this idea, all started picking up plastic bags from the ground and turning them into planting pots.

RHP organizes its workshops as places where children and youths have the



Mission Statement: The Rural Haiti Project is a U.S. based youth leadership organization that aims to empower children to become leaders and builders of their communities by conducting programs for low-income at-risk children in rural areas of Haiti. The project fosters children's civic, social and intellectual development and promotes community engagement and development.

RHP presently works with the following communities in Haiti: (1) the town of Sibert, Plaine du Cul de Sac, located in the west near the capital of Haiti, Port-au-Prince and (2) the town of Terre Rouge, La Montagne, a mountainous town near Jacmel in south east Haiti. RHP returns to the same communities every year to conduct workshops and takes on additional work with new communities upon invitations and as means permit. To view past workshops please visit our web site at: www.ruralhaitiproject.org/blog.html.

freedom to imagine possibilities for change. It is a place of socialization where children who normally would not have the voice to say or to participate in the affairs of his/her community do so. The workshops are places where the children have fun and are also encouraged to be critical. There is no curriculum-like agenda, leaving room for spontaneity and creativity.



root in ideas developed during the workshops. For example, the sewing and the reading and writing programs from the summer's workshops were implemented as year long programs.

Fundamentally, the key idea behind RHP's commitment is "steadfast engagement": RHP integrates into the communities it works with and grows with these communities well into the future.

Approach

Teaching children about their everyday urban environment equips them to participate in the process of respecting and improving the city- Sir Richard Rogers, Cities for a Small Planet.

RHP wants to serve as a catalyst for the imaginations and advance community change through a process we like to call "Creative Collective Community-Based Youth Leadership". Although we have not found an official definition for this approach, we define it loosely as a process where children build trusting relationships around art, intellectual challenges and skills to activate community engagement. RHP focuses on collaboration and innovation so that these children may grow up to be positive forces for change and construct previously unimagined solutions for themselves and their communities.

Enlivening imaginations, building trust and skills however, can take a lifetime. As a result, our approach requires a long-term commitment and that is why RHP returns to the same communities each year to conduct workshops and implement year long programs that take



In addition to this steadfast commitment, we also understand that innovative change cannot come solely from the inside. Therefore, we seek to provide the children with a view of the world outside their communities, encourage diversity and intra-community exchanges. RHP seeks to engage the children about issues that not only affect them, their communities or even their country, but try to involve them in the global debate on environmental awareness and other issues that affect everyone across the planet. As



a matter of fact, as an organization RHP is a very diverse group. RHP is a United States based organization comprised of members and partners not only in Haiti but from diverse origins and backgrounds. Every year friends and members of RHP from around the world join the workshops in Haiti and the many RHP events (such as art exhibits to raise awareness) that take place in the United States, to exchange ideas, lend expertise and different

points of views.

The next RHP workshops will take place in December 2008 and they promise to be just as inspiring as the past workshops with the introduction of additional activities such as keeping daily journals and developing children community gardens. Through the workshops and other programs, RHP seeks to give children's imagination a voice, provide children a view of the world outside of their own communities and provide them with hands-on leadership experience through collaborative activities and the eventual application of these skills to real life problem-solving.

In the long term however, our goal is to not only to develop future leaders that imagine possibilities for their communities but also their country. This is why in the long run we would like to work with as many rural communities in Haiti as possible. Ultimately, as RHP evolves over time and integrates more and more into additional communities, our hope is that the collective spirit can advance across community and regional boundaries to reach new collective heights for sustainable change.

RHP is a U.S. based nonprofit incorporated in the State of New York. All contributions to RHP are tax deductible through our fiscal sponsor Fonkoze USA. Fonkoze USA works in partnership with Fonkoze Haiti's largest microfinance institution providing banking services for Haiti's poor. For more information about Fonkoze USA and Fonkoze, please visit their website at www.fonkoze.org/ or to donate to Rural Haiti Project, visit www.ruralhaitiproject.org/donate.html.