



Blue Mountain Project – Newsletter

February 1, 2005 • Volume 1, Issue 1

SPRING TERM IN JAMAICA! See Service Learning Program (below)

The Blue Mountain Project is a nonprofit organization working together with the people of Hagley Gap, Jamaica, to help them meet their basic needs. Currently the Project is working to build a Clinic to provide for the unmet need of basic health care and we are setting up a Service Learning Program, which invites volunteers to work and learn side by side with the people of the village.

Accomplishments to Date

- January 2005** Distributed toothbrushes and crayons at Minto School
- January 2005** Hosted volunteer group from Manchester College
- January 2005** 501 c 3 (tax deductible status) application filed with IRS
- December 2004** International Board of Directors established
- November 2004** Applied for Jamaican Government Social Investment Funds grant to fund rehabilitation of clinic building
- November 2004** Executive Director Denise Cagley-Jefferson moves to Jamaica
- November 2004** Hurricane Ivan relief effort, distributed 300 lbs. of high protein food, medical supplies, and rebuilt two homes
- September 2004** First Annual fund raising event
- August 2004** Development Committee formed
- August 2004** Web Site Established
- August 2004** Formal Partnership with Hagley Gap community organization
- July 2004** Blue Mountain Project chartered as a nonprofit corporation
- June 2004** Mission Toothbrush, educating 150 children on dental Care and distributed 1000 toothbrushes in village
- June 2004** Ran a Health Fair in Hagley Gap, educating on five Major topics including AIDS, distributed hygiene Products to 200 people
- June 2004** Clinic Site Secured, building made available for the clinic
- October 2003** Blue Mountain Project founded

Service Learning Program

One of our goals is to give volunteers from the global north an opportunity to volunteer in the village of Hagley Gap, Jamaica, working on various projects such as tutoring, road repair, providing basic health care, and other projects. Volunteers may stay with a host family, camp, or live in the Community Center. They will receive 3 Jamaican style meals per day and will have the opportunity to go on day trips to the Blue Mountain peak or the Bob Marley birthplace museum, or the beach, and other locales of interest. The cost is \$49.00 per day of stay and stays can be from 1 week to 6 months. Students are especially encouraged to come for Spring Break. To apply, go to the website: bluemountainproject.org

What's Ongoing and What's Next?

- February 05** Researching and applying to foundations for support for Phase II of the Clinic Project
- February 05** Individual Donor Campaign
- February 05** Exploring volunteer opportunities with health care professionals
- March 05** Establishing the Service Learning Program
- June 05** Ribbon Cutting for the start-up of the construction phase of the Clinic

Funding

We are a nonprofit organization chartered in the United States and registered in Jamaica. Funding comes from individuals, foundations, and from fees charged for the Service Learning Program. Contributions may be sent to Blue Mountain Project, 417 Baltimore St., Waterloo, Iowa 50701

U.S. Office: Blue Mountain Project • 417 Baltimore Street • Waterloo, IA 50701 • 319-226-4141

Jamaican Office: Blue Mountain Project • 8 Riverside Heights • Gordon Town Post Office • St. Andrew • Jamaica, West Indies • 876-474-6519
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Sarah's Dream

[Editor's Note: Sarah Beamer is a founding board member of BMP. These are brief excerpts from her "Reflections" written after the first BMP visit to Jamaica to begin laying the groundwork for the primary health care Clinic.]

When I was nine years old I had a dream. I stood as a grown woman in clinic in a developing nation. I had a stethoscope wrapped around my neck and when I looked out the door I could see a goat grazing. I was the only white person for miles around. I told my parents about this dream, "I think that I am going join the Peace Corps when I grow up," I shared with them. They laughed at me. My step-father is a burly Irish fisherman. He replied with, "You're not tough enough for that, you'd be better learning how to iron a shirt properly." He had a point. I was very skinny girl with braces that got sea sick even when the waters of the ocean were still enough to see your reflection. I was much too dreamy to get very good grades in school and I was also painfully shy. But that dream stuck with me, in fact it would not let me go. My life in rural Jamaica often feels like a river rushing down a mountain. I couldn't stop it if I tried and believe me, at the times when it has becomes very inconvenient, I have tried. To live with a strong vision for social change is a blessing and a curse. It has the power to bring the purest joy and the deepest sorrow. It continuous work to be open and humble in a cynical world. I had to shed the racist attitudes that have passed down through my family and be willing to redefine what it means to be a woman. I have to be willing to carry my own water.

Finally touching down in Jamaica for the first time, the airplane looks like it will land in the ocean because of the position of the landing strip in Montego Bay. I hold Denise Cagley- Jefferson's hand and tears stream down my face. She had the same dream of operating a clinic at the age of nine. "We are making it happen!" She says before she lets out a hoot! All the tourist sit with puzzled looks on their faces, this was a bit more then they bargained for, all they wanted was a pina colada on the beach. Denise and I have learned that heart that seeks peace and justice is often considered an oddity, so we do not let the looks pull us down.

After the eight-hour ride from the airport to Hagley Gap and a night of rest, I sit in the yard of the house that I am staying and wonder what is the best way to connect to this community? A question that soon answers itself. **Basil the Madman wanders up the path.** He has on a dirty red suit jacket and pants that look like they might stand up on their own if he took them off. He wants me to fix his finger, which looks like he had tried to chop off the tip of it and had not finished the job. He wants me to do that for him. I wince. This is my first client in at the Blue Mountain Project Clinic. The clinic consists of two lawn chairs that are set up in the courtyard and a backpack full of medical supplies. This small dirt patch over looks the Blue Mountains of Jamaica, an awesome sight that has the ability to bring a seasoned traveler to tears. He is the first one willing to try my medicine. The word spreads of how I cleaned and wrapped his finger and soon I am overwhelmed with requests for help. Many older and handicapped people cannot hike the mountain switch-backs so I swing on my back pack and find them. This is tedious work, stopping and asking anyone that is willing to tell me where I might be able to find the sick. My slow ear to their Patois makes the process even more grinding.

I thought that I was well prepared for the poverty that I would meet in Hagley Gap. Still it manages to shock me. Sitting in the town square with my friend Nedroy, he asks me "What were those things on your face?" My glasses. I stopped to look around the hustle and bustle of the square. No one wears glasses, it is simply not a priority in the grand scheme of things. Little Josh visits the clinic with open puss-oozing sores that cover his legs, "Where is his mother?" I ask indignantly, there is a certain limit to my patience and a dirty child with oozing sores crosses that line. Being poor is one thing, but being neglectful to a child is unacceptable. She is gone, so is Kwarisha's. **This smiley little girl spends the day crawling around on all fours, something is wrong with her legs but her extended family does not have the resources to correct it. I cough up \$25 to have the local carpenter make her a pair of crutches. A small price for a little dignity.**

Kwarisha sits in my lap and tells me her woes. I cannot save her from every heart break. I cannot save myself from that dreadful ache either.

The next morning I am determined to carry water. I am not here to make life more difficult for the women in the village, so I must pull my own share. I grab a five gallon bucket and hike down the road a quarter of a mile and then climb down a steep rocky embankment to fill it. I spill half of it trying to get up to the house. The villagers laugh as they watch me try to balance the bucket on my head. I turn red and sweaty from the work Daphne tells me to sit down and sends a nine year old to finish the job. I could avoid this embarrassment all together. After all, I go to a good university in the States. I am supposed to be in the top one percent of the world population. I could view this work as something that is beneath me. I could just throw some money at the people that regularly carry water to compensate them for their time. However, all the laughing turns into proud smiles. Auntie Gat even brags to passers-by about how hard I worked that morning. I have earned their respect. They see that I am trying. They have enough water to flush the toilet for the next couple of days and I gained the knowledge of the work that it takes to live in a third world country. Spending the morning hauling water keeps me from cracking open a book or following up on important phone calls that seem to keep life moving at a steady pace. There is no way out when you must work so hard to meet your own basic needs. I understand this perfectly now. Being part of changing the social problems of the world means that I must always be willing to have an open heart and refrain from judgment. It means that I must be willing to be a humble student all of my days on this earth. **It also means that I must get better at carrying my own water.**

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