

## Mission trip to the Dominican Republic

Arm2arm is the agency that South Church supports as a Youth Mission Service Project.

It provides basic assistance to the underprivileged population of immigrant Haitian children and adults of the Bateyes in the Dominican Republic who currently have limited access to essential human services.

A Batey is like a shanty town, where the Haitians live.

Picture the slave living quarters that existed in the south.

Change the crop from cotton to sugarcane.

Five homes sit on a concrete slab that appear to have been constructed 50 years ago by the plantation owner, but with no maintenance.

The family living space is about 250 sq - feet.

Water is from a single hand pump located 200 feet from the nearest building.

Goats, chickens, pigs and dogs roam freely.

Many of the children and some of the adults go bare foot.

Parasites in the animal droppings can enter through the bare feet and cause all sorts of medical problems.

Most people walked as the primary mode of transportation, but a community horse was available.

The spoken language is Spanish or Creole (a mix of French and Spanish.)

Our youth have collected medical and personal care products for the last five years. Some items are: Aspirin, Tylenol, Multi-vitamins, Cough Syrup, Toothpaste/Toothbrushes, Combs, Tums, Coloring books, Crayons, etc.

The doctors came with prescription medicine, including medication to treat the parasites.

This year was the first year two of our students not only collected the items, but they wanted to distribute them. Thus, The trip for Jackie and I wouldn't have happened if it weren't for the involvement and the enthusiasm of Aaron Ritter (a Junior) and Erica Marano (a Senior.) And the fact that they neither one was 18. They needed an adult to be with them.

The "simple" solution would have been to have one or two of their parents go with them. But doing that, results in a "parent – child" trip.

Having a South Church member go with them made it like an official Youth Mission Trip.

Jackie and I heard about the need at the Adult Mission Trip meeting.

We were sitting at two different tables. Reverend Dolan made the announcement and while she was speaking Jackie and I were trying to get eye contact with each other from across the room. And when we finally did, we were both giving it thumbs up.

Arm2arm lists this trip as a Medical Mission Trip. We had a total of 20 people go on this trip. There were 16 medical professionals, plus the four of us from South Church. The doctors and nurses treated 674 patients over 5 days.

We went to one particular Batey that has a two room school and spent three days building three student desks, a teacher's desk and two 4' x 8' bookcases. We also sanded and painted the desks, and installed a door to a second classroom. The rest of the time we helped out at the clinics.

Monday, we all went to the clinic, because the wood for the desks wasn't ready. Aaron and Erica counted out and bagged a month supply of meds from 1000 pill containers. They acted as interpreters putting to good use the Spanish that they learned in school.

Jackie and I controlled the flow of patients into the clinic.

Tuesday and Wednesday the four of us worked at the school. The youth in the Batey gathered around us to see what we doing. We started out by taking inventory of the wood that was delivered. We put one of each kind, 2x4; 1x3; 2x2; etc into its own pile. Then all the youth from the Batey figured out what we were doing and they sorted it all out in a few minutes.

Next we needed to build two saw horses, so we would have something to work on. We didn't have electricity, so everything had to be cut with a hand saw. Aaron started to cut the first piece and suddenly 10 kids were holding the wood down for him. The next piece Aaron handed the saw off to one of the helpers and each took a turn cutting and holding. Aaron and Erica were "kid magnets." Whatever they did, the Batey kids wanted to do it too.

Jackie and I never cut a piece of wood. Aaron, Erica and the Batey did. Another example of "it takes a village" was when Jackie borrowed a broom to clean out the second classroom. There was no door on this room and two goats and one of their kids had lived in it for some time and the floor was covered with their droppings. The broom that Jackie was using was made from a branch with twigs tied to the end of it. Jackie started to sweep the second classroom, but one of the local girls intervened and took the broom away from Jackie and she started to sweep. Other girls spotted her sweeping and ran off. They showed up a couple of minutes later with their own brooms.

Each day at the school was like that. They helped hold the wood so it could be sawed. They sawed. They helped screw the pieces together. They helped sand the desks. They swept the floor. They helped in any way they could. They were invested and interested in the project as much as we were. And when we finished the first desk and brought in side the classroom they gathered their chairs and placed them around it as if they were ready for the first day of school.

Thursday Jackie and I finished painting the desks and installed the door to the second classroom while Aaron and Erica worked at one of the clinics as interpreters and handed out many of the supplies they had collected.

Friday we all worked at the clinic.

It was a joy to share our time and talent by extending a helping hand, but the wonderful reception and level of cooperation was completely unexpected.

We encountered a scarcity of worldly goods, and an abundance of smiles, helping hands and an enthusiastic community that worked together for the betterment of all. Everyone, not just the four of us, shared their time and talent.

The experience has empowered Jackie to become a board member of Arm2arm, so her time and talent will continue to have an impact.

Thank you.

Bob & Jackie Parente