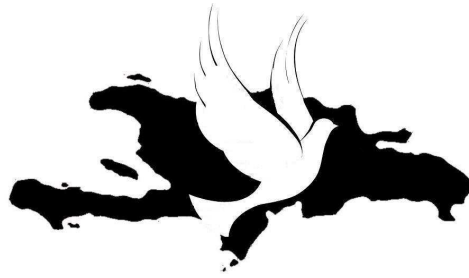


PROJECT



ESPERANZA

## Project Esperanza Grassroots Schools

### What is Project Esperanza?

Project Esperanza ([www.EsperanzaMeansHope.org](http://www.EsperanzaMeansHope.org)) is a non-profit that began as a Virginia Tech student organization. It connects the Blacksburg, Virginia and the Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic communities in order to create positive change and raise cultural awareness in both. The majority of our programs serve the Haitian immigrant community in Puerto Plata. In Puerto Plata we have a home, school, and program for Haitian immigrant boys that work the streets of Puerto Plata shining shoes or selling hard-boiled eggs or sweets. We support schools begun in Haitian churches for kids that face difficulties entering into the Dominican public schools. We also support other such efforts led by community members themselves.

### What is a Grassroots School?

Grassroots schools is the term Project Esperanza uses for schools the organization supports that began in Haitian churches throughout Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic in order to educate Haitian immigrant children living in the Dominican Republic. Because the Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti and, while still considered a developing country itself, is a wealthier country than Haiti with more work opportunities, there is a very high rate of both legal and illegal Haitian immigration. Haitians that immigrate to the Dominican Republic face many challenges including learning Spanish and facing discrimination from their neighboring country. While some do integrate their children into Dominican public schools, an act that increases as a family spends more time in the country, many Haitian immigrant children remain without schooling.



Haitian churches in communities with high populations of Haitian immigrants are recognizing this problem and have been attempting to begin schools in their churches. This is not easy as funding is hard to come by and teachers themselves face a difficult situation already, some having not yet achieved their high school diploma. However, we continue to find churches that are making the necessary sacrifices to educate children in their communities. Currently, all grassroots schools provide education at the pre-school and elementary level.

## History of Grassroots Schools

*Summer 2006* – The first group of Project Esperanza volunteers ran a street census on the streets of Puerto Plata, specifically focusing on learning more about the hundreds of boys walking around daily shining shoes, selling sweets, or hard-boiled eggs. They learned that the majority of the boys were Haitian immigrants that had spent little time in the Dominican Republic, were not in school, and lived in a ghetto called Padre Granero. Volunteers began a program at the house they were staying at in order to feed and educate these boys during the rest of their two month stay.

*November 2006* – Project Esperanza leaders returned to Puerto Plata and were introduced to Pastor Dieufils Milien and Wambert Tireus. Pastor Milien pastors a church in Padre Granero, as well as a church in another section of Puerto Plata called San Marcos. He began schools in both of the two churches in September 2006. At this point, Wambert, along with other teachers had been working to run the schools without receiving pay for almost three months, providing class Monday through Friday, 8am-12pm. They told Project Esperanza leaders that the schools' most greatest need was funding to pay the teachers so that the schools could continue to function. A meager budget was developed and Project Esperanza leaders returned to the U.S. to attempt to fundraise for teacher salaries on top of other responsibilities the organization had recently taken on.

*December 2006* – Project Esperanza began funding the two schools.

*January 2007* – The Project Esperanza Boys' Home opened and five of its residents began walking the mile to and from Padre Granero each day in order to attend the grassroots school.



*March 2007* – Project Esperanza leaders met with Pastor Milien and named the Padre Granero school "Grenn de Lespwa" which means "Seed of Hope" in Creole. They provided uniforms, bookbags, and tennis shoes to other boys in the program that began attending Grenn de Lespwa. Head Teacher Wambert Tireus handled a rowdy group of students with varying levels of school experience. Funding was also raised in order to purchase tables and chairs.

*April 2007* – Led by volunteer Carrie Ickes and her aunt, English professor Sara Crickenberger, the Virginia Tech English department raised \$1,000 toward Grenn de Lespwa by putting on a benefit poetry reading.

*April 2007* – Evantz Lafontant and Garry Jacques began contacting Project Esperanza director Caitlin McHale, asking for aid in beginning their own grassroots school in a separate section of Puerto Plata called Muñoz. Project Esperanza, unable to provide funds at the time,

provided paper, pencils, and other such materials. The United Brothers School of Muñoz began holding classes in both the morning and afternoon.

*Summer 2007* – Evantz Lafontant and Gary Jacques persistently visited the Project Esperanza Boys' Home and volunteer facilities in order to interact with the program and to request aid to leaders and volunteers on behalf of their school that had yet to receive funding. Volunteer Krista Roop returned home and advocated for the school. Gayton Baptist Church in Richmond, VA raised funds to pay the teachers for three months.

*September 2007* – Project Esperanza was able to squeeze the United Brothers School of Muñoz into its budget and began providing monthly teacher salaries.

*2008, 2009* – Pastors and members of churches in several other Puerto Plata communities contacted Project Esperanza in hopes of being included as a grassroots school. The economic recession caused the three already funded schools to face difficulties with teachers receiving partial pay some months. Nonetheless, all three schools continued despite the challenges and were strengthened through the process. Small businesses to support each school, foster self-sustainability, and create more independence from US funds are in the planning and preparatory phases.

## **Current Grassroots Schools**

School Name: Grenn de Lespwa  
Mother Church & Denomination: Iglesia Biblica  
Renacer  
Location: Padre Granero, Puerto Plata  
Founders: Pastor Dieufils Milien & Wambert Tireus  
Director: TBD  
No. of teachers & aids: 6  
No. of students: 60  
2008/2009 Monthly Budget: \$26,900 RD, \$769 USD



School Name: TBD  
Mother Church & Denomination:  
Location: San Marcos, Puerto Plata  
Founder: Pastor Dieufils Milien  
Director: TBD  
No. of teachers & aids: 2  
No. of students: 25  
2008/2009 Monthly Budget: \$3,500 RD, \$100 USD

School Name: The United Brothers School of Muñoz  
Mother Church & Denomination: Seventh Day Adventist

Location: Muñoz, Puerto Plata  
Founders: Evantz Lafontant & Garry Jacques  
Director: Evantz Lafontant  
No. of teachers & aids: 6  
No. of students: 80  
2008/2009 Monthly Budget: \$25,000 RD, \$715 USD

### **Hopeful Grassroots Schools**

School Name: TBD  
Mother Church & Denomination: Pentecostal  
Location: Saman, Montellano, Puerto Plata  
Founder: Pastor Feliciano Martinez  
Director: Pastor Feliciano Martinez  
No. of teachers & aids: 4  
No. of students: 45  
2009/2010 Hopeful Monthly Budget: \$15,200 RD, \$435 USD



School Name: TBD  
Mother Church & Denomination: The Christian Body of Christ Church  
Location: Javillar, Puerto Plata  
Founder: Pastor Jean Davidson  
Director: Pastor Jean Davidson  
No. of teachers & aids: 2  
No. of students: 18  
2009/2010 Hopeful Monthly Budget: \$7,000 RD, \$200 USD

School Name: Colegio Eben-Ezer  
Mother Church & Denomination:  
Location: Banega de Villa Gonzalez, Santiago  
Founder: Pastor Francisco Garabito Santana  
Director: Pastor Francisco Garabito Santana  
No. of teachers & aids: 4  
No. of students: 40  
2009/2010 Hopeful Monthly Budget: \$14,500 RD, \$415 USD

School Name: TBD  
Mother Church & Denomination: Church of Christ – non-denominational  
Location: El Mayor, Cofresi, Puerto Plata  
Founder: Pastor Claude Agoutine  
Director: Pastor Claude Agoutine  
No. of teachers & aids: 2

No. of students: 20

2009/2010 Hopeful Monthly Budget: \$7000 RD, \$200 USD

School Name: Ecole Nouvele Esperance de Don Pedro Santiago – Grenn de Lespwa

Mother Church & Denomination:

Location: Don Pedro, Santiago

Founder: Renel Olivier

Director: Renel Olivier

No. of teachers & aids: 2

No. of students: 29

2009/2010 Hopeful Monthly Budget: \$7000 RD, \$200 USD

### **What support does Project Esperanza provide Grassroots Schools?**

Project Esperanza provides the following support for grassroots schools when resources are available:

1. funding to pay teachers, directors, and other staff
2. funding to pay rent when necessary
3. funding to buy books, chairs, chalkboards, and other materials
4. teacher materials such as a planning books and attendance sheets
5. administrative materials and accountability such as sign in/sign out books for teachers, rules as to how many free days teachers have without losing pay, etc.
6. aid in creating a specific mission, vision, and values for each school

Project Esperanza is working on providing:

1. teacher training
2. aid in creating a specific curriculum for the school
3. a pathway to accreditation with the Dominican government
4. the purchase of land and building of school buildings for each school
5. sister school relationships between grassroots schools in Puerto Plata and elementary schools in Blacksburg, Virginia.

### **Accreditation**

In July 2008, Project Esperanza leaders Caitlin McHale and Kristin Preve met with Cristy Apataño from the Secretary of Education's office in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic. After hearing about the grassroots schools, Cristy said that she believes the grassroots schools can become accredited private schools, (called





“colegios”), by the Dominican government with a curriculum that follows the government standards, but also have an integrated curriculum that is specific for Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. She provided the appropriate contact information for Region 11 which is Puerto Plata’s district, and also explained the standards that need to be met in order to become accredited. Therefore, Project Esperanza staff and volunteers continue to work together to fully develop the appropriate curriculum and to reach the standards required by the Secretary of Education for accreditation. When everything is prepared, Region 11 will be contacted in order to do site visits and investigate the grassroots schools.

One irony that appears to come up often in this line of work is that the grassroots schools will be eligible for potential government funding once they are accredited. However, a large barrier that keeps the schools from reaching the appropriate standards to achieve accreditation depend on funds. Therefore, in the meantime, the grassroots schools are financially dependent on funds raised by Project Esperanza in the U.S. As previously stated, efforts are also being made to begin small, self-sustainable businesses in the grassroots schools’ communities in order to support each school.

## **Sister School Relationships**



Sister school relationships are relationships pairing Blacksburg, Virginia elementary schools with grassroots schools in Puerto Plata. The goal is to engage faculty, staff, students, and parents in a deep cultural exchange where both parties learn about the lives of the other. We believe that this will provide a rich educational experience for everyone involved and raise children that are sensitive to and accurately informed about their sister school and its community. This exchange takes place by Project Esperanza staff and volunteers holding regular lessons and information sessions in classrooms which teach teachers and children about their sister school and the lives of those involved. The relationship also includes exchanges of letters, stories, drawings, and other such work. It will eventually include visitors from the sister community to their sister school where students and teachers can conduct interviews in order to learn first-hand about life in their sister community.

The first sister school relationship began at the beginning of the 2008/2009 school year between Kipps Elementary School in Blacksburg and Grenn de Lespwa School in Padre Granero, Puerto Plata. Due to the lack of both human and financial resources during the time, the relationship has had a slow start. Nonetheless, students from sister schools have still exchanged letters, books, and Kipps Elementary has donated school supplies to Grenn de Lespwa. Project Esperanza continues to work together with Virginia Tech faculty and students, as well as Blacksburg elementary schools in order to grow this program.

## Ways you can help

- *Sister Schools:* If you are a Blacksburg elementary school faculty or staff member, parent, or student, a Virginia Tech faculty or student, or a member of the Blacksburg community and would like to volunteer with our sister school program or become involved in any way, please e-mail [Schools@EsperanzaMeansHope.org](mailto:Schools@EsperanzaMeansHope.org).

*Other ways to support Project Esperanza:*

1. Make an online donation at [www.EsperanzaMeansHope.org](http://www.EsperanzaMeansHope.org) or send in a check to:  
Project Esperanza  
1291 Valley Mill Rd.  
Winchester, VA 22602
2. Buy Project Esperanza t-shirts or other merchandise including Haitian artwork. E-mail [T-shirts@EsperanzaMeansHope.org](mailto:T-shirts@EsperanzaMeansHope.org).
3. Search the Internet using goodsearch.com with Project Esperanza (Winchester, VA) as your benefiting charity. Project Esperanza receives 1 penny for every search.
4. Become a monthly sponsor. E-mail [Sponsor@EsperanzaMeansHope.org](mailto:Sponsor@EsperanzaMeansHope.org).
5. Share this document and the Project Esperanza website with others that may be interested in getting involved.

For more information about Project Esperanza's additional operational areas, please search the website or e-mail [CaitlinMcHale@EsperanzaMeansHope.org](mailto:CaitlinMcHale@EsperanzaMeansHope.org) for more literature.