

ASF SIA Report
June 29, 2009

Title of Proposal: Topics in Special Education: Disabilities, Poverty, and Jamaican Culture
ASF Member: Nancy Dumke

This proposal was for a cross-departmental collaborative project with two Special Education Professors, Dr. Carol Long and Dr. Jeanne Danneker. This year's project was an exploratory trip from May 20 – 27, 2009. This was to investigate the possibility of a WSU travel study program which would focus on the needs of individuals with disabilities and the impact of poverty on learning in the context of a different culture.

Activities:

- Visited Robin's Nest Children's Home for children ages from birth to six years old, Salter's Hill, St. James, Jamaica
- Met with Sunbeam Children's Home Learning Centre teacher Sheryl Duffus to gain information on the instructional needs of students attending the residential school, Bushy Park, St. Catherine, Jamaica
- Spent time listening to the Learning Centre students read and reading to them
- Toured the Golden Age Retirement Community's cluster for persons with disabilities, Kingston
- Toured Mustard Seed Community, a not for profit center for children with physical and mental disabilities, Kingston
- Toured Marigold Orphanage for children from birth to six years old
- Spent a day in Ocho Rios at Dunn's Falls and beach
- Met Sunbeam Children's Home Superintendent, Alpha Smith
- Networked with Winsome Wilkins, Executive Director, United Way, Jamaica and Winston Wilkins, Cultural Leader, Bushy Park
- Researched Jamaican cultural literature for children and adults

Contacts:

- Sherry Bilgalke, Executive Director, Sunbeam Association in Mission
- Sheryl Duffus, Teacher, Sunbeam Learning Centre
- Randy Finnikin, Community Organizer
- Gerald Deane Hanno, Driver, Dean's Route Taxi
- Mel Harmon, Team Coordinator and Trainer
- Catherine Kong, Teams Director, Mustard Seed Community
- Dana Olson, WSU Grad 2008, Volunteer special education teacher at Robin's Nest
- Natalie Phillips, Sunbeam Office Assistant
- Alpha Smith, Superintendent, Sunbeam Children's Home
- Pooh and Marla Walker, Jamaican Tourism Board members, Ground Transportation
- Winsome Wilkins, Executive Director, United Way, Jamaica
- Winston Wilkins, Cultural Leader

Appraisal of Potential Travel Study Program:

Based on the information learned during the exploratory trip, the following pros and cons are listed for developing a travel study program for Special Education to Jamaica.

Pros:

- Jamaica is 30 – 40 years behind the U.S. in its provision of education and services for persons with disabilities. A travel study opportunity would help participants expand their worldview by being exposed to poverty and the limited services and resources.
- Costs would be low given the extremely inexpensive lodging in the dormitories and meals provided at the children's home
- Jamaicans would potentially benefit from the tutoring and other service projects provided by WSU students and faculty

Cons:

- Safety concern
- Culture shock
- Outdated service delivery model
- The travel study course would need to be configured in a way that is appropriate, applicable and desirable. Special Education students will not take this opportunity unless it is part of the program of study. Most students are double majors or earning multiple licensures so elective course work is not needed. Dr. Long summarized this as "the question is how to incorporate it as a required course with the option to take it without the travel study component."

Travel Study Program Arrangements

The following arrangements were developed during the exploratory trip:

Local transportation – Pooh Walker's bus service

Lodging – Sunbeam Children's Home, team dormitories

Service learning projects – Sunbeam Children's Home Learning Centre

Tours with possible service learning projects – Golden Age Center, Marigold Children's Home, Mustard Seed Community, Robin's Nest Children's Home

Content and Themes

The tentative plan is to offer SPED 430 Characteristics of Students with Disabilities as a travel study program during Spring Semester 2011. This required course is offered each semester so students could choose during the 2010-2011 academic year. Students can avoid the extra costs by taking it in the fall semester of 2010 or they can plan and save money if they chose the travel study option. The class would go to Jamaica over spring break in 2011 with class sessions before the trip to cover course content and to prepare for the trip and afterward to process and reflect on the experience.

The course content and themes would remain essentially the same with an added Jamaican context. Given Jamaica's 30 – 40 year delay in serving individuals with disabilities, there would be relevant objectives which would emphasize "emerging attitudes toward disability identification, service delivery, normalization, and inclusion." (Dr. Long, 2009)

As the logistics person, I am planning to continue working on this with the Special Education Department and I plan to attend at least the 2011 trip. I may end up co-teaching the course or at least being a guest lecturer, depending on departmental needs and resources.