

# Guyana Immersion Program

*Each year, William James College students and faculty take part in international service learning and cultural immersion initiatives in low and middle-income countries. These programs are designed to give students and faculty an opportunity to volunteer at various clinics, hospitals, and social service agencies that serve historically marginalized communities. Immersion programs are currently offered in Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti and Kenya.*

On July 25-27, 2018, in partnership with the Guyana Foundation, a team of six psychology and mental health counseling graduate students (**Marie Berthonia Antoine, Cydney Victoria Branch, April Dawn Clayton, Sohenga C. Depestre, Damon A. Pryor, and Arianna Lynn Slotnick**) and **Dr. Natalie Cort**



conducted a 3-day suicide gatekeeper training workshop for 52 attendees. Team members were trained in the empirically supported emergency mental health intervention for suicidal persons — *Question, Persuade and Refer* — created in 1995 by Paul Quinnett.

The ***Understanding and Preventing Suicide in Guyana: A Gatekeeper Training Workshop*** is designed to increase community leaders' (i.e., educators, law-enforcement officials, clergy, and medical personnel) ability to effectively respond to, intervene, and support suicidal individuals. The objectives of the workshop, informed by extant empirical research, were to:

- 1) increase knowledge about suicide, major depression, and resources available for at-risk individuals;
- 2) address beliefs and attitudes about suicide prevention;
- 3) reduce stigma of mental illness and reluctance to intervene; and
- 4) increase self-efficacy to intervene with a person at risk of suicide.



The workshop also covered practical and effective problem-solving and stress management methods, adapted from Interpersonal Psychotherapy for Depression and music therapy. This highly interactive and participatory workshop involved mini-lectures, facilitated discussions, group work, and expressive arts activities. Additionally, on July 31, 2018, the team conducted a 3-hour ***Empowering Children Workshop*** designed to provide basic parenting skills and methods to effectively encourage children's self-confidence and identify children's evolving character strengths.

# Haiti Immersion Program

On July 21-30, 2018, six WJC students (**Nina Campanile, Fatuma Dzilala, Alexis Leca, Carol Rannie, Patrick Sviokla, and Christina Wilbar**) and two faculty members (**Drs. Jill Bloom and Gemima St. Louis**) took part in a 10-day immersion experience in Vallue, Petit-Goâve. The *Haiti Service Learning & Cultural Immersion Program* is a joint partnership between William James College and the Association des Paysans de Vallue, a non-governmental organization that engages students in cross-cultural exchange and capacity-building collaborations with schools, grassroots agencies and social services organizations.



The focus of the 2018 summer program was on **Mental Health Literacy**. A group-based curriculum, developed by Kutcher and Wei (2018) and implemented in culturally-diverse settings, was used to enhance the mental health literacy of teachers and youth in the community of Vallue. In this context, the term *mental health literacy* is defined as having four components: (1) understanding mental disorders and their treatments; (2) decreasing stigma; (3) optimizing and maintaining good mental health; and (4) enhancing help-seeking efficacy.

**Four group workshops were conducted with 60 adolescents and young adults as well as 25 teachers** to enhance their knowledge of the signs and symptoms of different types of mental illnesses, promote awareness of how stigma acts as a barrier to accessing mental health care, and discuss culturally-appropriate treatments and interventions.

The team also **organized a summer camp program and facilitated various social-recreational and expressive arts programming for 70 children**. During the immersion experience, the group visited historical sites in Port-au-Prince and took part in social cultural activities within the host community.





# Kenya Immersion Program



The Kenya Immersion Program is designed to provide students with a lens into global mental health through development work and partnership with local communities. Four WJC students (**Donicka Suprice, Juliana Rezende, Melissa Garboski, and Sade Callwood**) and two faculty members (**Drs. Claire Fialkov and David Haddad**) spent two weeks in Thika and Nairobi, Kenya during the 2018 Cultural Immersion experience. Students engaged in follow-up work on a project supported by the non-profit P&G Children's Safe Drinking Water Program that provides clean drinking water to children and families in need around the world.

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> year of a three-year project, students worked with primary school students and teachers in rural communities, reinforcing the ***Kenya Education and Empowerment Project (KEEP)*** curriculum that was initiated in 2015. The curriculum is a collaborative effort between a Kenyan NGO and Drs. Fialkov and Haddad, and is designed to increase protective hygiene practices through a strength-based curriculum.



This year, the immersion experience added a new partnership with the ***Always Keeping Girls in School*** program. The Always program is designed to address the challenge that girls from low resourced communities face when they miss school during their menstrual period due to a lack of sanitary products and health education. The Always program reaches about 150,000 girls annually, providing puberty education and free sanitary products. During the 2018 immersion, students had the opportunity to collaborate with Always staff about development work and help integrate the Kenyan Empowerment and Education Curriculum (KEEP) into the existing Always program.

# Ecuador Immersion Program

In the summer of 2018, eight students (**Samantha Diaz, Nicole Drost, Marissa Faas, Rachel Kanen, Styliani Munroe, Juan Rosario, Nicole Sampredo, and Ana Zuniga**) traveled to Guayaquil, Ecuador for four weeks.

This year, the **Director of the Latino Mental Health Program, Dr. Mari Carmen Bennasar and WJC President, Dr. Nicholas Covino accompanied the group for a week.** They participated in a series of activities culminating with a press conference celebrating the Academic Collaboration Agreement signed by William James College and La Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil with the objective of promoting academic, research, and cultural exchange programs for students and faculty.



Dr. Mari Carmen Bennasar (2nd from left), the director of La Junta de Beneficencia, Ingeniero Ernesto Noboa Bajarano (3rd from left) and Dr. Nicholas Covino (4th from left) took part in the historic signing of the Academic Collaboration Agreement between William James College and La Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil.

Dr. Bennasar led a well-received presentation on the role of psychology during emergencies and disasters (*Psicología en Emergencias y Desastres*) for some 120 attendees. Dr. Covino engaged in consultation and collaboration with different local agencies and exchanged ideas regarding future collaborations.

Students had the opportunity to learn, work and collaborate with The **Instituto de Neurociencias (INC) de la Junta de Beneficencia de Guayaquil.** They worked in four different departments within INC: Center for Integral Rehabilitation, Center for Addictions, Outpatient Hospital, and Residencies. Side by side with local psychologists, **students conducted intakes, facilitated groups, administered neuropsychological and projective assessments, assisted in writing reports, participated in clinical discussions, observed psychoeducational workshops, and worked with family members.** Furthermore, students co-facilitated activities at the Center for Integral Rehabilitation, which included music groups, gardening, physical therapy, dance, yoga, tai chi, and art groups.



In addition to learning and training opportunities related to psychological practice and systems, WJC students were able to learn about the local culture and improve their Spanish skills by attending advanced Spanish classes, residing with local families, and touring beautiful Guayaquil and its surrounding cities. We are very grateful to our partners in Ecuador for their professionalism and warmth!