



**Aaron Roth - HOPE International - "A Parachute for All" - July 2012**

Hi everyone, this newsletter is about the Esperanza-Edify family camp we had in a school called "Colegio Bethesda" in La Romana, Dominican Republic in July. As I mentioned earlier, I'm planning to stay here in the DR until October 11th to help out with a HOPE event here before returning to the States this fall. Do please continue to support me through the fall if you feel led.

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My first experience with a parachute, thankfully, was not when I had to jump out of a plane. My mother had found an old Army parachute at a yard sale, and my siblings and neighbors and I played with it for hours during a summer in the early '90's. I distinctly remember talking with our resident engineer, my brother, how much time (in milliseconds) I would have to deploy the old, tattered, white parachute if I were to jump off the roof of our house. Luckily, our mother caught wind of our plans, and disabled access to the roof and scolded us enough to dissuade us from taking such a leap.



**(Kids are kids, everywhere you go.)**

What was your first experience with a parachute? My guess it was some form of summer camp when you and your friends stretched out around the edges of the colorful fabric and breathed life into the beast as you launched beach balls, water balloons, or maybe, just maybe, some young, lucky aspiring astronauts that your youth leaders deemed rugged enough to survive a few test orbit missions from your summer camp launch pad.

Two weeks ago was yet another reminder to me that kids are kids, and that all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are all precious in His sight.



**(Teaching colors using the game Twister.)**

In Microfinance, we don't usually do summer camps for kids. We stress the importance in giving people a hand up, not a hand out. We make loans

to those who live in economic poverty to help them start sustainable businesses to help them improve their economic situation on their own.



**(Every child should get to go to summer camp.)**

In the partnership with Esperanza-Edify, we make loans to small, low-cost private schools to build more classrooms and computer labs; initiatives that increase a school's income and improve the quality of teaching at an institution. We believe the best way to launch a child into success is with a solid education, but yes, for fun, on this particular occasion we did let the kids play with the parachute (but not physically

launching them, don't worry).

Colegio Bethesda is the economically poorest school of the 33 schools in our lending program in Esperanza-Edify. In the past 18 months we have lent over US \$300,000 to projects relating to construction of new classrooms, infrastructure improvements, and computer labs. (Note: Microloans are actively being paid back so that we can use



**(Playing kickball in the church courtyard.)**

this capital to lend to other schools. I love this aspect of how microfinance works!) We make loans with good interest rates and terms to projects that will help a school in providing a better education for the children of their community, and right now we have almost 7,000 children in our program of 33 schools.

Colegio Bethesda is a school that I've spoken about before in my newsletters and blogs; it's a largely Haitian community, and this community is considered the economically poorest in La Romana, a large city in the east of the Dominican Republic. It's a community where there is no regular access to water,

electricity, and just 2 months ago, they got their first paved road.

So to celebrate the progress over the past 12 months of Colegio Bethesda with Pastor Wisley Denis and his school administration team, and their three new classrooms they built from the loan we made last summer, we wanted to do something special. Something that we don't normally do.



**(Members of the church finishing classrooms.)**

With the 90 students, their parents and their community, we brought a summer camp full of activities of arts & crafts, English classes, and games. Within HOPE, Esperanza, and Edify, when we find an appropriate project to assist a school in a manner that is more donation based, we try to do it

in a way that empowers the community, instead of just a group of Americans coming and giving away large gifts. Pastor Denis found workers from his congregation that wanted to make an impact in the school in the community. He was looking for parents and workers that were invested in the importance of education, so local Haitian workers from the community finished the three classrooms during the camp.



**(Translators with the Pastor's family.)**

Pastor Wisley Denis said,

*"We are all very excited about this summer camp. For these children, they know that other kids get to go to camp, but they know they could never go. They simply cannot afford it.*

*By showing up, by being present here, we are showing them they deserve to be special."*

I was the leader of the older kids, "Los Campeones," (The Champions), pictured in the yellow shirts in various pictures above. Like most older kids, they were reserved, and a bit timid, just waiting for an excuse to run off some of their energy. So we passed from English and then onto crafts and finally to recreation. The chance to run and play had finally arrived. They were desperate to blow off some steam.

Sometimes I have a moment where it all clicks for me, and



when I find myself in an economically poor community, with parents struggling to make ends meet, the temptation of drugs, prostitution and crime, the sickness, grief and the pain, the need and the desire of the innocent trying to just be children, and then comes something that just covers the entire situation with a new face, a new hope:

*outstretched in the courtyard of the church was displayed the color-filled canvas pulled taut by the joyous hands of 30 screaming Haitian children.*

How beautiful.

The photo I captured here to the right reminds me of the spirit of joy found in children, no matter where they are from, or what color their skin is. They all just want an opportunity to play.

I believe that children deserve access to good education, a teacher that encourages them and cares about their future, an administration that promotes values and discipline, adequate facilities that promote their development, and an opportunity for higher education.



**(All the colors of the world.)**



**(They are precious in His sight.)**

And there, under the parachute was a common ground, a place where we could all laugh at the majesty of the colors of our make-shift tent. We all fit, we all deserved to be there, we were all special in the way we were made.

Red and yellow, black and white, they are all precious in His sight.

I think most of the time in America, we worry about how much resources we have to make sure that all children are covered in the schools, lamenting that we only have room for so many.

We cut programs that engender the creative prowess of our youth to make way for standardized tests and programs. Many times the kids that need it the most, don't fit under the parachute, and sit against the wall . . . and learn that their only place is by the wall while the rest of the world gets to be underneath the glowing tent of colors.

I've got an idea, let's find a way to make a bigger parachute.

Let's find ways to make solid education available for more children and youth in our communities locally and internationally. It doesn't have to be in a public school classroom, or a private school for that matter, it can take form in a church, even the courtyard of a church that's covered in dirt and rocks. It just matters that we show up, that we make ourselves present, and that we make our youth know they too deserve to be there. By making the investment in youth, we will see our communities grow and flourish, just like Colegio Bethesda in Villa Hermosa of La Romana.

*"Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it." (Proverbs 22:6)*

Blessings to you and your family,

-Aaron

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