Helping the World's Poor

Mardi Mileham
Linfield College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol4/iss1/6

This article is brought to you for free via open access, courtesy of DigitalCommons@Linfield. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@linfield.edu.
Helping the world's poor

A health organization run by Ruth (Musunu) Titi Manyaka ’69.
during a January Term class in Cameroon, working with
screenings, delivered babies, and treated typhoid and many other
diseases. Hallie Sudder-Rohman ’08 spent part of the class in a hospital
shadows the staff and helping take care of
patients. She observed surgeries and births in conditions
that would be considered unsanitary here.

“They do a great job with what they have, which isn’t
much,” she said. “We saw so much happiness in some hor-
rrible conditions, that it made me re-evaluate my life and
made me wonder if value material things too much.”

Communicating was a challenge. French is the dom-
inant language, so Linfield students were teamed up with
students from a Cameroon nursing school to assist with
translations.

As word spread that the students were there, many
from surrounding villages came each day, seeking treat-
ment. In many cases, the students had little to offer but
their kindness and ability to listen.

Six months after she returned, Michelle Gibson ’08,
is still haunted by the face of one severely deformed
child, desperate for medical attention. She continues
searching for an organization willing to help. When an
HIV-positive woman shared with Gibson, the mother of
three children, her desire to have another child, Gibson
realized she could not apply her Western values in meet-
ing the needs of her patient.

“That’s when I realized that the patient is the most
important thing,” she said. “In nursing, I am going to
come across many people who, for reasons based on reli-
gion or culture or society or economics, may choose a
different path than I. I didn’t realize how much I really do
embrace that until I met that woman.”

Jake Crevistan ’08 left a Cameroon boy listen to his heartbeat
during a health screening. Linfield students conducted health
screenings, delivered babies, and treated typhoid and many other
diseases. It was founded in 1999 by Ruth (Musunu) Tit Manyaka ’69, who invited
the Linfield students to help with the program. (See related story on page 26.)

Although the class was rewarding and challenging, it was also emotionally and physically draining. Students
saw poverty and disease in ways they had never before experienced.

The majority of the students were nursing or health
science majors from the Portland Campus, conducting health screenings
and much more for Women, Environment and Health (WEH), a non-governmental organization
dedicated to serving the needs of women, orphans and vulnerable children. It was founded in 1999 by Ruth (Musunu) Tit Manyaka ’69, who invited the Linfield students to help with the program. (See related story on page 26.)

The students conducted assessments on orphaned and vulnerable children in the local villages, taking tem-
peratures, blood pressures and pulse and heart rates, and
documenting the villagers’ vaccinations, diet and use of mosquito nets. The assessments established a database
for WEH to track the health of the local children.

But the students’ experiences went far beyond that.

“We delivered babies, treated typhoid, saw gangrene
and started IV treatments for patients suffering from
malaria,” said Joe Romero ’07.

They also observed or helped with emergency sur-
egeries, set a broken arm and gave away over-the-counter
medicines they carried to Cameroon in their luggage. In
many cases, they used their own money to help those
who were the sickest.

Rob Gardner, assistant professor of sociol-
ogy who is studying grassroots responses
to disasters, has traveled to Louisiana three
times since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
struck the Gulf Coast in 2005.

In 2005, millions of people
watched from afar as Hurricanes
Katrina and Rita turned the world
upside down for Gulf Coast residents.
Rob Gardner, Linfield College
assistant professor of sociology,
watched as well, with the eye of a
social scientist. Then he traveled
to Arabi, La., in January 2006 – the
first of three trips to study grass-
roots community involvement fol-
lowing natural disasters.

“You were there, and you realize how one can’t really exist
effectively without the other,” he said. “In nursing, I am going to
come across many people who, for reasons based on reli-
gion or culture or society or economics, may choose a
different path than I. I didn’t realize how much I really do
embrace that until I met that woman.”

Jake Crevistan ’08 said the experience crystallized for
him how closely education and health care are linked and
how one can’t really exist effectively without the other.

“I learned how to dig deep and question how our
actions actually affect another culture, another people,” he
said. “I think there is a fine balance between the two.”

The students came face-to-face with a culture that was
very different from their own, said David Groff, one of the
course professors and director of the Portland Campus.

“They were faced with how differently some people live
and the kinds of chances that they have,” he said.

“They related really well to the children and they showed
a high degree of professionalism and care for the children
and their patients.”

— Madi Milcheck

Digging into disaster relief

“It was an interesting subsection of the population,” said Gardner, who will present initial findings at the
American Sociological Association conference in New York City in August. He has also received a grant
from the Natural Hazards Research Center at the University of Colorado, funded by the National
Science Foundation, which will allow him immediate access to inves-
tigate the grassroots response in the event of a future disaster.

For Lee, who took part in both the Linfield alternative spring break and the January Term class, the
trips have been life changing. She came away with a love for the area and its people, but more than that, the
experience has focused her goals. She is interested in housing issues and hopes to bolster her experiences
with an internship next year.

Ironically, the most difficult part of the
trips for Lee was returning home.

“Seeing everything how it should be and remembering our
work made me wish I could go back and help more,” she said.

— Laura Davis

Thousands of volunteers staffed relief centers such as this Emergency Communities site in Waveland, Miss., after the hurricanes in 2005. Gardner, who spent a month at the
Made with Love Café in Arabi, La., in January 2006, returned in January 2007 with a group of Linfield students.