

To: Bill Wallen and the Greater Altoona Jewish Federation

From: Brittany Friedman and the Juniata College Hillel

Alternative Spring Break Trip 2013: The Dominican Republic

This March, Juniata Hillel hosted a service trip to The Dominican Republic. In coordination with the Jewish Organization, *Repairing the World*, and the Dominican host group, *El Guanin*, approximately 15 Juniata students worked together in a Dominican community called La Piedra. La Piedra was a community founded and run by *El Guanin*. Unlike most other communities, the buildings were made of cinder blocks instead of tin and there was running water and electricity. There was a small school and a clinic open many days of the week. Juniata students worked to benefit different parts of the community each day.

At the school, we were able to play with the children, teach them words and games, and dance and interact with them! One day we blew up balloons and had balloon wars. The kids were so excited to see new people and play new games. They gave us fake tattoos, caught us geckos, and showed us how to dance like them. One day, when the weather was beautiful, all the girls from the school braided and put flowers in our hair! We had so much fun!

On a more serious note, we also worked in the clinic. Much of the work we did in the clinic was inventory. Juniata students helped to organize a system that would be easy for the doctor and community to use. However, it was also important that the system would be effective in keeping the medication and medical information organized and up to date. Our presence in the clinic gave the doctor time to help out with a health training session sponsored by the government. The training was to provide regular civilians basic health knowledge so, in times of need, they will have the ability to give basic help to their community members.

Working at the work site was more difficult. We hauled cinder blocks, laid foundation, and, at the end of it all, built an entire house. In our time in La Piedra we met the family who we were building the home for. It was absolutely amazing to meet the family whose life we were changing so drastically; everyone on the trip was touched.

In time outside of La Piedra, the Juniata Group explored the Dominican Republic. The first day we arrived we went white water rafting. It was so scary but everyone had a really great time. Some of us even jumped off a 35-foot cliff into the river! On two other days, we visited the beach. The water and sand were so beautiful and most of us got a little color! The warm weather was welcome compared to the Pennsylvania winter! We also went caving. Our tour guide Severino took us out into the woods and eventually we hit a cave! We explored the underground and enjoyed the cool air. More importantly, while at the community center in La Piedra we learned to dance and even played baseball! The Dominicans love baseball!

Overall, Juniata students were able to create connections with different people, learn and become a part of a different community, and help benefit a community in need. Every day we would debrief. Many of the discussions were focused and built around Jewish learning and the service aspect of Judaism. We were able to talk about the differences we felt like we were making and how, when we came back home, we would be able to continue to provide help and support to the Dominican community.

The Dominican Republic experience was life changing and difficult to put into words. The Juniata community was able to grow together through new experiences and hard work. We built relationships with new people and gained cultural understanding, perspective, and patience for the Dominican community, as well as our own interfaith and multicultural community. By teaching the Jewish belief in Tikkun Olam, Jewish and non-Jewish students alike were able to help a community in need.

We want to thank you for your help in making this trip a possibility for so many students. There were students who were able to attend this trip due solely to your donation. Thank you so much for your help! Attached is a file of pictures we hope you enjoy. I may also obtain a video shortly. Should I get ahold of that, I will be sure to mail you a copy! Thank you again!

