

Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Relief Mission to Puerto Rico Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, and Transformation of Trauma 17-30 December, 2017

Ani Kalayjian* and Lorraine Simmons

Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention, New York, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Ani Kalayjian, Founder and President of the Association for Trauma Outreach and Prevention, New York, USA.

Received: January 22, 2018; **Published:** March 08, 2018

The island of Puerto Rico and its people were ravished, naked and vulnerable in the wake of hurricane Irma first, and then unforgiving hurricane Maria on 20 September, 2017. The lush green vegetation was stripped from the island, only brown broken branches remained. The people were drenched in shock and disbelief, but there was no time to waste, they needed to survive.

Hurricane Maria wiped out the communication system, there was no electricity, no running water and many roads were impassable so that the entire island was paralyzed. People could not prepare adequately with provisions of food and water for the extended period of time that basic essentials would be unavailable. For the past 19 years Puerto Rico has been in the path of multiple hurricanes threatening to hit the island and each time they suddenly veered away, giving residents a false sense of protection. They thought their beautiful island was blessed, or at least secure. So, while they prepared by barricading their windows, battenning down the hatches so to speak, and bringing in food and water for 3 or 4 days, they could not have been prepared for the 225 mile an hour winds, and slashing rain that came upon them. For 3 sleepless days and nights, they fought back and did their best to protect themselves and their property.

Before the hurricane, the people of Puerto Rico were suffering from an identity crisis due to a long history of colonization and often treated as a step-child of the United States. The disaster response from the US government was frustratingly slow and inadequate and, the residents of Puerto Rico were frustrated by this, and in addition many are still trying to cope with the delayed response of their local government and institutions. Over 100 days after the hurricane, almost 75% are still without electricity, and many are without consistent communications and running water.

The devastation and destruction of hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico is multi-layered, and we have witnessed emotions of frustration, fear, worry, anxiety being repressed as Puerto Ricans soldier on with their remarkable resilience, and determination. We have seen professionals and community leaders, all working non-stop since the hurricane. They participated in our workshops to release, heal, and learn new tools; which was the first opportunity for self-care they have had since the hurricane.

Our established goals for this mission were; to promote emotional healing and well-being with the focus on the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model and flower essence and essential oils, to assess the level of trauma as well as forgiveness and meaning-making, to offer supportive and integrative interventions, to train professionals in the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model, to create a sense of empowerment and a sense of personal control, to transform Horizontal Violence, to establish Peace and Forgiveness Gardens for reflection and healing. To supplement these goals, we also purchased plants of rosemary and palm trees which are native to Puerto Rico.

We reached multi-stakeholders of the Island, had a holistic and comprehensive view of PR: Police department, Minister of Education, Health and Social Welfare, shopping malls, Scouts, schools, teachers, hospitals, morgues, Department of Housing, Women's shelter for domestic abuse, FEMA, Red Cross, churches, orphanages, and communities without homes. Although we had planned 10 workshops in 12 days, we actually conducted 18 workshops, 3 radio and 2 TV interviews and distributed 10 luggage of donations. We impacted 750 people directly, and 25,000 indirectly. We reached 300,000+ through radio, and 2 million through TV. Additional 15,000 through social media posts twice a day.

Citation: Ani Kalayjian and Lorraine Simmons. "Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Relief Mission to Puerto Rico Humanitarian Empowerment, Healing, and Transformation of Trauma 17-30 December, 2017". *EC Psychology and Psychiatry* 7.4 (2018): 160-161.

As a result, frustrations are extremely high, and people are feeling exhausted to live day by day with uncertainty, helplessness regarding not being able to provide for their families, despair and fear of the next hurricane season starting in May. Meaningfulworld programs were the first large scale workshops on the island to provide post trauma healing since the hurricane, especially for mental health providers, who were exhausted physically, emotionally and spiritually. Strengths are also numerous; Resilience, feeling united, helping one another, keeping the spirit of play, music and dance alive being the most prevalent.

We developed the following sustainable programs: Men's EQ groups to cope with domestic and GBV violence, Integrating Emotional Intelligence in Teacher Certification curriculums, Planting trees, Teaching the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model in Technical Institute, Intergenerational dialogue programs to enhance positive lessons and wisdom, Assertiveness training for women, Collaboration with UPR to train facilitators to teach the 7- step throughout PR, Begin a Meaningfulworld branch in Puerto Rico.

Some of the lessons-learned by survivors: be more prepared with water and non-perishable foods during, plant trees which are native to Puerto Rico because they have roots which grow deeper into the ground, install solar panels, store gasoline for generators, alert authorities to systemic problems as they appear and have disaster preparedness bags.

When participants were asked what they liked most about the program, responses were: "When Dr. Ani points out the political and social aspects of horizontal violence we deeply understand because we experience it a lot but didn't realize the psychological dynamics of it," "The relaxing aspect of it was great," "This was the (the experience of the workshop) best Christmas gift ever," "The information that I learned today, I can use for the rest of my life," "This program, this intervention was the first time it has ever happened in the history of the University of Puerto Rico." This reality was echoed in all the groups we have worked with; "processing doesn't typically happen at the University, for the fear of confrontation results in avoiding personal issues with others".

Volume 7 Issue 4 April 2018

©All rights reserved by Ani Kalayjian and Lorraine Simmons.