



Project Talibé
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This summer, the non-profit another Penn Student and I founded (Kids of Dakar) entered into a partnership with the Senegalese NGO ALEFS to put together a Health and Hygiene Promotion Program. The project itself was designed as a multipronged approach to address health issues of street children who as part of a century old phenomenon are known specifically as Talibés. These children between the ages of 7 and 18 are sent by their families to boarding Qur'anic schools where they are to spend the greater portion of their childhood learning about the Qur'an. What is precarious about this arrangement is that the children end up living in the most hazardous and most debilitating conditions that serve to hamper both their physical health and personhood. Their living and hygiene conditions make them more prone to low BMIs because of malnutrition and diseases such as scabies. In order to effectively approach these issues, we planned on intervening for 250 children through five different aspects of the project. The first being negotiations with the wary marabouts (Qur'anic school teachers) by communicating with them about the intent of the project in effort to gain their trust. The second aspect was health screenings conducted to assess the kids health conditions from their BMIs to their dental cavities in effort to tailor our interventions to what is most urgently needed. Then we proceeded to designing programs and curriculums to address corporal and environmental hygiene, all while providing supplies and materials to the Qur'anic school to promote cleanliness. We also build them new latrines and bathrooms. More amazing details can be found on the project's blog @ www.Projectalefs.com.

This experience has exceeded all kinds of expectations. Starting and operating a non-profit organization is not an easy task, but the most gratifying part of it all is seeing your hard work come to fruition. I have learned and experienced firsthand what it is like to be operating on the ground, which can tremendously differ from one's initial conceptions and perspectives. We were able to complete half of a meaningful and impactful project and the latter half, which will prove to be the most critical, is yet to follow. Now that everything necessary to the success of this health project has been set in place, the challenge now is to make sure that our initial efforts do in fact ensure and promote sustainability. In terms of that, I am more than confident that we have prepared beyond what is necessary to ensure that the children continually benefit from the courses, the

materials, and the people they have encountered who care about their well-being. Since we worked within a controversial and sensitive situation, I am more than proud of our successful approach to intervention, which first and foremost emphasizes the importance of trust building. It took us close to a month and a half to complete negotiations and contract signing. That to me was an indication of how important it was that we took out time and really understood what and who we were about to work with. This initial approach on building relations with the locals is what really set us apart from everything and everyone else who made previous attempts at tackling the Talibé phenomenon. Furthermore, in addressing their health issues, we were also able gain a wider yet more focused perspective on what is most critically needed in order for these children to have a chance at a decent future. In light of that we have been working on developing a new project that will follow and employ the successful strategies of the health project as a segue to something larger and more meaningful. Stay tuned!