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Mission: Haiti

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Mission: Haiti

Veronica Alicea '16 leads charitable effort to provide latrines to an impoverished village in Haiti, reducing preventable illnesses and deaths



Veronica Alicea '16 (center) poses for a picture with 900 Project members and children from the village of Tilory, Haiti. Image Credit: 900 Project

March 11, 2013 | Jenna Mulvey '13

Tilory, Haiti – Imagine traveling down a long, barren road in Haiti and suddenly coming across a dusty village of dilapidated shacks. Children run alongside your van, begging for money and anything else you can give them. As you traverse tree-less Tilory, the children shadow you and seek to hold your hand. Every arbor has been cut down for cooking or building materials for the small shacks, which become extremely hot from lack of insulation and are without amenities like indoor plumbing.

One first-year student says a scene like that changes a person who has grown up in more amenable settings, but never knew how good she had it. RWU freshman Veronica Alicea experienced that transformational moment when she visited Tilory with a missionary group from her Trumbull, Conn., church last year.

“Even though we might not consider ourselves rich, that’s because we’re comparing ourselves to everyone else around here,” says the freshman psychology major. “And when you go down there – and, you know, we drive a car, we have bathrooms in our house, indoor plumbing – we’re really rich compared to the rest of the world. And it really just made me a lot more humble.”

While touring Tilory and meeting its community members, the Black Rock Church missionary group discovered that only one in 10 households have a latrine, forcing most villagers to head into the open, with no privacy, for the most basic of biological functions. The lack of indoor plumbing has escalated health and safety hazards in the village, Alicea says.

For women – and particularly teenage girls – lack of privacy leaves them vulnerable to physical assault if they venture outside alone at night; lack of toilet facilities has also been linked to preventable diseases like cholera, from unsanitary water runoff flowing into drinking water. These diseases have killed many village children, the most vulnerable population, over the years.

Of the 1,000 village families, only 100 have some kind of waste facility; so while there are many needs in Tilory, the most pressing is latrines. To assist, Alicea and her fellow missionaries established the 900 Project, named for the number of families who lack this basic yet essential facility.

Via fundraisers and community outreach, the group's goal is to work with Tilory residents to provide the resources and tools necessary should they want a latrine on their property. The families themselves will help build the latrines, Alicea says; the 900 Project simply supplies the materials. When volunteers traveled back to Tilory with materials to build the first latrines, they discovered that the Haitians were ready and enthusiastic to get hands-on with this project.

"It creates a sense of ownership – 'Hey, I built this with my two hands,'" Alicea says.

Alicea, who is also a member of the women's softball team at Roger Williams, says the 900 Project team turned over the building materials and worked side-by-side with the villagers as they dug holes and erected the new facilities, as well as shared ideas about maintaining the latrines and healthy sanitation.

To date, Alicea and company have raised \$30,000 for the 900 Project and have been conducting community outreach in person and via promotional videos shot during their time in Haiti. Still, with each latrine costing about \$365 to construct, their goal is to raise an additional \$300,000 to ensure access for all of the villagers.

To learn more about the 900 Project, visit <http://www.the900project.org/>.

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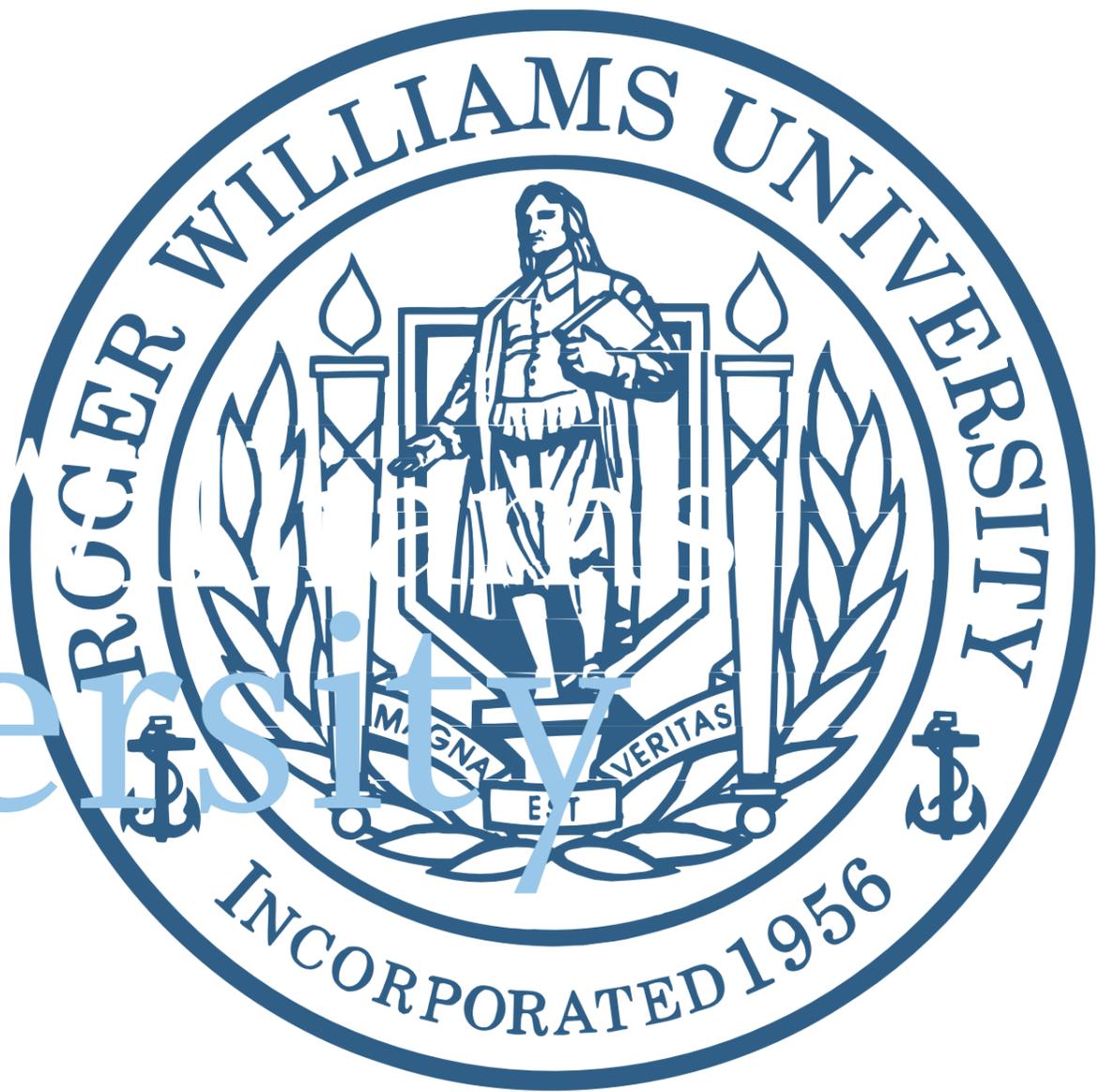
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