



WILLIAM JAMES
COLLEGE

Center for
Multicultural & Global
Mental Health



***“Poto Mitan”:
Change Agents that Promote Well-Being
in the Haitian Community***

**Bi-Annual Conference on Haitian Mental Health
8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.**

**William James College
1 Wells Avenue
Newton, Massachusetts**

ABSTRACTS

(Arranged in alphabetical order by title)

“ALL HEALTH IS MENTAL HEALTH”: TOWARDS IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY AND ACHIEVING GLOBAL EQUITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

Wingdie “Didi” Bertrand, MA, DEA, DESS

Collaboration and innovation are critical to improving service delivery and achieving equity in mental health. In this talk, Mrs. Bertrand will present an intervention of **The Women and Girls Initiative**, a movement which aims to empower adolescent girls and young women from post-disaster and conflict contexts—in Rwanda and Haiti, helping them to tackle associated trauma and stress. The initiative collaborates with Partners In Health and other local organizations serving 400 girls. The global burden of mental disorders is truly alarming. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one-third of the world’s population is affected by mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, addiction, schizophrenia and other neurological problems, accounting for about 13% of the global burden of disease. Over the past few years, mental health has become of major importance to the global health agenda. Despite greater advocacy for improved programming and policy reforms, the wealth gap in care, services and research persists. This gap remains high worldwide with great disparities between high and low resource communities and between high, low and middle--income countries. A broad range of risk factors contributes to the development of mental health problems and illnesses, e.g., structural barriers and inequalities (education, gender, living

environment, access to resources, community, and culture) and other life adverse events (war and disaster). Several comprehensive solutions have been proposed, *e.g.*, integrated care models, novel targeted interventions, and development programs accompanied by research that measures their impact. In all groups affected, mental health issues coexist and are informed by other medical and social matters. There is an urgent need for better engagement and collaboration between countries' health sector and their other development sectors and communities, as well as among their health system's programs and providers, to privilege the voice of the client as a "The Team Captain". This presentation will describe some useful innovations in addressing psychosocial and socio-economic factors, forming part of a holistic package for the transformation of the mental healthcare experience in the target populations.

ART BEARING WITNESS TO HAITIAN RESILIENCY

Charlot Lucien, Founder & Director, Haitian Artists Assembly of Massachusetts

Mr. Charlot Lucien will discuss the role of art as a "Poto Mitan" in many Haitian communities and bearing witness to active Haitian resiliency, especially in the aftermath of disasters and how it has been used to heal and bring communities together. He will also provide an overview of the partnership between New England Haitian artists and artists based in Jacmel, Haiti which has been supported by the Haitian Mental Health Network and William James College over the past five years. He will present the latest project of the group, the coffee table book "*Migrating Colors: Haitian Art in New England*", which features 30 Haitian artists and their artworks and highlight or acknowledge their partnership with Jacmel, Haiti.

BICULTURAL AND BILINGUAL SCHOOL ALLIES AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: INSPIRING TRUST, HOPE AND PEACE OF MIND

Yolette Ibokette, M.Ed., M.A., C.A.G.S., Doctoral Candidate; Rose N. Dorgilus, BA, MA; & Kenelle Presume, RN

Parents, school district leaders and states are holding schools accountable for ensuring that all students including English Language Learners are achieving at high academic levels. Research and practice have shown that parental engagement is essential to academic achievement. Indeed, schools that value meaningful parent engagement tend to experience higher levels of student achievement, better school attendance, higher graduation rates as well as improved rates of enrollment in higher education and positive attitudes about school. Specifically, the 2002 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation mandates that schools "*ensure effective involvement of parents and support a partnership among the school, parents and the community to improve student academic achievement.*" This is all well and good, but frustrated teachers and administrators are discovering that many immigrant families are rejecting these efforts and complaining that the mainstream model for family engagement is not relevant to their lives and cultures. Many immigrant families charge that they are being forced to adopt a mainstream model of family engagement that is foreign to them. In their 2011 article titled, "*R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Find out What it Means to Immigrant Families,*" Fabienne Doucet and Rose Vukovic describe this mainstream model as being "embodied by white, middle and upper-

class stay-at-home mothers.” Immigrant families resent that school staffs assume they do not care about their children’s academic success because they do not participate in school events or volunteer. Equating a lack of presence at school with a lack of interest in children’s education fails to consider that in most other countries around the world, parents are not expected to participate in school life—in fact, such involvement would be viewed as strange. These families contend that teachers and administrators do not respect their way of engaging in their children’s education. This is where bilingual and bicultural school allies play a crucial role. This presentation will highlight how these individuals are making a major difference in the lives of Haitian families and students by helping them overcome economic, cultural and linguistic barriers. These allies also provide emotional support, access to comprehensible information about the U.S. school system and help them create social networks.

COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES AS “POTO MITAN”: SERVING YOUTH, FAMILIES AND ELDERS; AND PROMOTING SOCIAL JUSTICE & ADVOCACY

Lionel Lucien, Youth & Family Enrichment Services; Joel Piton, MD, M.Ed., Sant Belvi Haitian Adult Day Health Care; & Keke Fleurissaint, Haitian-Americans United, Inc.

This panel will describe the work of three community-based agencies in Massachusetts whose primary mission is (1) to address the social-emotional needs of Haitian children, youth and families (i.e., *Youth & Family Enrichment Services*); (2) to promote the health and well-being of Haitian elders (*Sant Belvi Haitian Adult Day Health Care*); and (3) to engage in social activism and social advocacy on behalf of the local Haitian community (i.e., *Haitian-Americans United*).

THE HAITI SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM: ADDRESSING GLOBAL MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS WHILE BUILDING MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Darryl Sweeper Jr., MA; Adetutu Ajibose, MA; & Nathalie Alexis, MA

The World Health Organization (2011) estimates that there are approximately 450 million individuals who suffer from mental illnesses around the world. Yet, between 76% and 85% of people with a severe mental illness in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) do not receive mental health services. Inequalities in global mental health care have garnered the attention of health care providers over the past few decades. In response, many academic institutions have begun to offer international service learning programs (ISLPs) to build capacity in LMICs and provide psychoeducational trainings to enhance the local mental health workforce. ISLPs offer a myriad of benefits to students, faculty and host communities that allow them to develop leadership, communication, and teamwork skills; enhance their flexibility, maturity, values, and spiritual beliefs; and promote their ability to analyze and appreciate culturally-diverse contexts, traditions, customs and practices. This presentation will highlight the significance of ISLPs through the partnership that has been developed between the Association des Paysans de Vallée (APV) and William James College (WJC). The *Haiti Service Learning Program* focuses on increasing individuals’ sensitivity to diversity and difference, promoting learning and sharing of cross-cultural experiences, and expanding the global perspectives of program participants. The panelists will address how ISLPs can serve as a resource to graduate programs and community-based partners, and as a contributing factor in reducing the global burden of mental illnesses.

VALUE: A SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY MODEL THAT PROMOTES THE WELL-BEING OF ITS CITIZENS

Abner Septembre, M.A.

This Keynote Address will focus on the Association des Paysans de Vallue (APV), a nonprofit organization that was established in 1987 to respond to the complex social, economic, educational, and health needs of its local citizens. Located in the rural town of Vallue in Petit-Goâve, Haiti, APV has grown into a well-established and well-respected organization comprising of 60 grassroots groups and more than 5,000 members. Its primary goal is to create opportunities for individuals and families to build sustainable wealth, allowing them to enhance their lifestyle, making good use of their environment, and becoming respected and responsible citizens in their country. Over the past 31 years, APV has successfully developed and implemented a self-sustaining, capacity-building and community empowerment model. During this presentation, Mr. Abner Septembre, Founding Member of APV, will describe the mission, vision, and Five Pillars of APV (e.g., Behavior Change, Material Reorientation, Infrastructure, Environmental Governance, and Social Management), which have been instrumental in guiding community-led actions in the domains of education, health, agriculture, environment, agro-business, organization, infrastructure, and tourism. He will discuss the successes and most important accomplishments of APV along with systemic challenges and lessons learned. Today, Vallue is a community that is well-known at both national and international levels, and APV has received numerous awards for its leadership as a recognizable “Poto Mitan” in the Haitian community.