

Good News Media Release

Bishop Smith & St. Joseph's High School Students take on the 2023 Dominican Republic Experience

February 27th, 2023

After a year of fundraising and planning, the annual Dominican Republic Experience trip took place from February 15th - February 22nd, with grade 11 and 12 students from Bishop Smith Catholic High School and St. Joseph's High School!

Throughout the year leading up to the trip, students and staff dedicate their time to creating exciting fundraisers for the Dominican Republic Experience. This year, these fundraisers included but were not limited to: selling handmaid candles from JP Waxington, DRE Hat Day, selling maple syrup, cake auctions, a chilli dinner, pizza lunches, and the DRE Dance, held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in January. The time and effort put into these fundraising events has been truly incredible.

On February 15th, five staff and fifteen students travelled to Yamasa, Monte Plata, Dominican Republic. The group visited three high schools- Saint Martin De Porres, Brigido Nolasco High School, and Polytecnico Parroquial Sor Susana Daly; and one elementary school- Fray Pedro de Córdoba Elementary School. While visiting the schools, students and staff played volleyball, basketball, danced, entertained and were entertained, and had a Q&A period in classes. Students love visits from the DRE team!

In addition to visiting the schools, staff and students painted homes and poured concrete floors with the Floors for Families Adult Group based out of Deep River. The families in Yamasa are always thrilled to have their houses painted. The team also cleaned up the Ozama River and ended up gathering 17 garbage bags of waste.

In 2019, the students and staff that went to Yamasa built a home for a woman named Julia. This year, they went to visit her home and although she wasn't there, she came to see the DRE team at one of the host family's homes one morning during their daily activity. She shared her utmost gratitude to them for building her home and was so happy to see some familiar faces from the staff members.

The group also visited Bloque Cacaotero, a cocoa bean processing plant, Santo Domingo and had a tour of the walled city, Fortaleza (Fort) Ozama, the Monument of the Founding Fathers of the Dominican (Altar de la Patria, the mausoleum, at Parque Independencia), Juan Dolio Beach on the Caribbean Sea, they visited the Guillén Brothers to learn about Taiano culture and pottery making, and bartered in Colonial City for a few souvenirs.

During the trip, the team held a Celebration of Life for Roger Perry, a former teacher at Bishop Smith Catholic High School. Roger Perry founded the RCCDSB Dominican Republic Experience in the 1980s, as well as Friends for Life International, a non-profit charity dedicated to improving the lives of residents in Yamasa, Dominican Republic. He joined the DRE team every year that he was able to. To honour him and his selfless dedication, Friends for Life International will change its name to Roger Médico.

After donating the money at the end of the trip, Ana De La Cruz picked up a bed, pillow and bed sheets and dropped them off that day for a woman who didn't have a bed. Her home had a concrete floor poured and her house was just painted the day before.

Ana De Le Cruz then mentioned something that touched the hearts of all staff and students. She said, "We don't need your pity, but rather your love and friendship. Every day we wake up with smiles on our faces." A beautiful way to show gratitude towards the DRE team and their friendship.

Additionally, every year, the women at the Margueritte Center make 300 handmade and embroidered bags for the EOCCC Conference held in April. The team brings these bags back and compensates the women for their amazing work!

The Dominican Republic Experience would not be possible without Sister Noelia Hernandez, local Dominican friends Ana De La Cruz, Wilton Manzueta, and all of the host families that welcomed RCCDSB staff and students into their homes for the week. Sister Noelia Hernandez, a Dominican native, has connections to Pembroke as a member of the Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception (GSIC), with Sisters in the Dominican as well as right here in Pembroke. Sister Noelia visits her sisters in Pembroke as much as she is able to, building connections with her Dominican and Canadian Sisters.

Overall, an amazing, eye-opening experience for students, staff, and those in the Dominican Republic community. The DRE team is thankful to the Yamasa community for providing such a warm and welcoming experience.

As the trip has come to an end, the fundraising has not! The maple syrup fundraiser is currently on until March 24th. The whole DRE 2023 team is also planning a DR student dance at Bishop Smith once the DRE 2024 team is selected, and Dominican music will be played! Just one of the many fundraisers to look forward to from the 2024 DRE team.



Celebration of Life for Roger Perry



Working on painting homes and pouring concrete floors

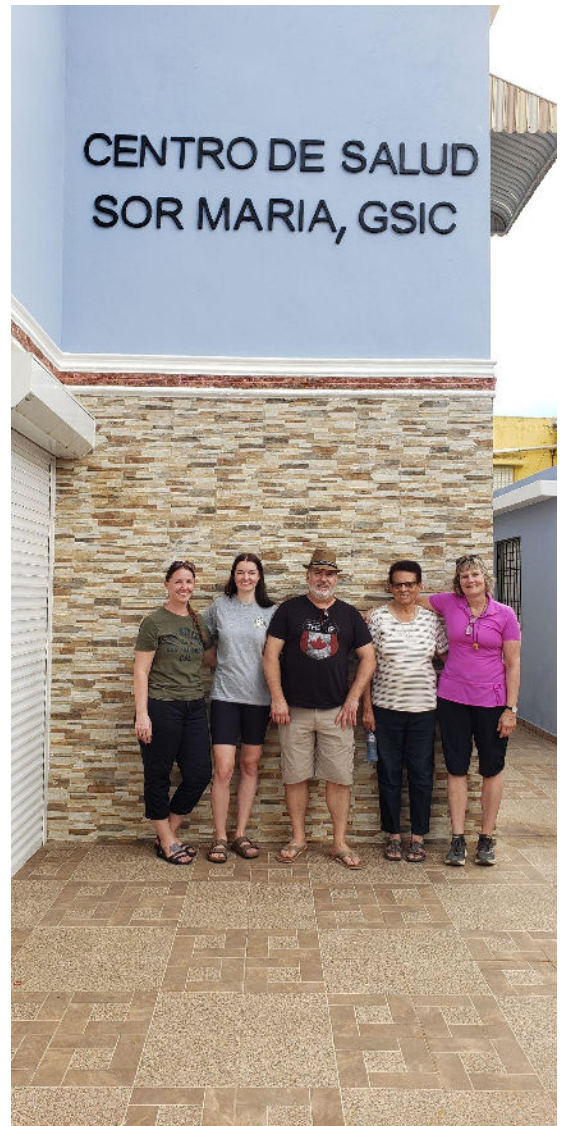




Julia with RCCDSB teacher, Tara Crossman









Cleaning the Ozama River



Bags for the EOCCC



Bags for the EOCCC



Painting houses

