UNIVERSITY- A Look at Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities in Cusco, Peru
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Peru

- Location: western coast of South America
- Population: > 30 million people
- Official language: Spanish
- Quechua and Aymara are common aboriginal languages spoken
- Over 40 languages are spoken in the Peruvian Amazon
- “In Peru, 70% of the population does not know what mental health means” and only ¾ of the people who need mental health care get attention (Fraser, 2007)
- A national mental health plan was initiated in 2006 that called for mental health to be seen as a fundamental right and called for universal access to community-based mental-health care (Fraser, 2007)

Cusco

- Located in southeastern Peru in the Andes mountains
- Cusco was the capital and geographic center of the Incan empire
- Cusco means “navel of the world” in Quechua, the language of the people native to the Andes
- Population of about 427,218. Elevation of 3,400 meters (11,200 ft)

Project Description

- Global special studies incorporated with SW 683 evaluation course
- Volunteered at and carried out evaluations tasks with agency called Manos Unidas
- Tasks included:
  - Key informant interviews with agency leaders and staff
  - Assisted in conducting focus group to evaluate effectiveness of agency
  - Participated in meetings to evaluate and improve upon effectiveness of volunteer program
  - Conducted observational studies of school and programs
  - Assisted teachers in the classroom setting with a functional skills group for youth with intellectual disabilities between the ages of 18-25

Lessons Learned

- Importance of introducing practices that have been found to be evidence-based in the United States into global communities in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate
- That building relationships and getting to know people, who they are, and their stories are key to development work

Advice

- Approach situations with a mindset of curiosity and willingness to learn
- Be open to trying new things. Put yourself out there, even thought it may not be easy

SWOT

Strengths

- Is the only school in Cusco that has successfully helped students gain employment
- The only program in Cusco that allows students with disabilities to be placed in public schools to learn with typically developing peers
- Provides access to educational, functional, and vocational skills training for youth with disabilities
- Offers workshops to educate community members and another myths and stereotypes
- Offers affordable education by accepting payments on sliding scale

Threats

- Miss and microaggressions held by Peruvians about people with disabilities
- Peru does not offer degrees for teachers to specialize or become trained in special education
- Only half of children with disabilities are enrolled in schools
- Facilities and education personnel are not equipped, prepared, or trained to work with children with disabilities

Opportunities

- In 2015, the Ministry of Health implemented new policies to support youth with disabilities to make them more of a priority
- Peru maintains an inclusion policy for youth with disabilities
- Enrollments for youth with disabilities into specialized schools has increased in recent years

Weaknesses

- Lack of specialized trainings required to provide safe, quality education and care
- Lack of communication between teachers and agency leaders regarding volunteer roles and responsibilities
- Lack of training for volunteers, interns, and educators from other countries to enhance practices that are culturally competent and reflect cultural humility
- Challenges in integrating evidence-based practices with cultural differences
- Funding sources and volunteer program aren’t sustainable

“I got to know each child little by little. I learned that it is important to know how to work with each child. Some kids need more care, love, and patience than others.” Fabiola, lead teacher with Pharawispa program

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