



YALE ALUMNI SERVICE CORPS

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Community(s):	Cantera, Residencial Luis Llorens
Partner:	Instituto Nueva Escuela (INE), Yale Child Study Center
Projects:	Athletics, construction, education, environmental, murals, and public health
# Volunteers:	2020 (51) Trip Producer: Elena Labrada '86 2023 (46) Trip Producer: Andrew Burgie '87

Working alongside our ground partner INE, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving Puerto Rican students' academic and socio-emotional outcomes through the implementation of Montessori education in the public-school setting, YASC organized two service trips to the communities of Residencial Luis Llorens in 2020 and Cantera in 2023 with a goal of improving their educational and public health activities. In 2020 YASC organized projects in athletics, construction, education, and public health, which took place at the two schools that children from the community of Residencial Luis Llorens attend: Escuela Luis Llorens Torres (pre-K–6) and Escuela Republica de Peru (7-9 grades). In March 2023, YASC organized similar projects, but expanded its offerings to include environmental and painting of murals projects, which took place at the Escuela Manuel Elzaburu y Vizcarrondo, a pre-k through 8th grade, public elementary school located in the heart of Cantera. The school was badly damaged by Hurricane Maria and the earthquake in 2020, but it has been recently renovated. Projects included the organization of sensory sport activities, jump rope, soccer, and basketball, the painting of murals, education covering a wide array of subjects such as anthropology, arts, coding, English, journalism, mathematics, music, and science, an environmental project to build and improve an existing community garden, and public/mental health including the development and implementation of an anti-bullying campaign, mental health, self-esteem, appropriate boundaries in social media and other topics, domestic preparedness, community resilience around natural disasters, COVID, and vaccinations among others.

YASC has continued the successful partnership with INE and the schools we have served through virtual online programming. Following the success of the public health project of the first service trip in 2020, there was a series of online virtual sessions focused on public/mental health with the local schools and parents. The purpose of this project was to help each school further develop their expertise in socio-emotional wellness teaching by sharing several general strategies, information and tools that are based on child development norms to promote social and emotional learning and increasing emotional regulation across classroom settings. Activities included working directly with approximately 3 classes in each school comprised of 2-3 pre-identified Public Health Team members each focusing on 1) Social and Emotional Wellness, 2) Sensory/Motor Integration/Mindfulness and 3) Empathy Building/Conflict Resolution. Building on the success of the public health team's efforts, which impacted an entire disenfranchised school system, we are delighted to report that Yale Professor Frometa recently received approval for ongoing collaboration with the Escuela Manuel Elzaburu y Vizcarrondo and the Yale Child Study Center – Center for Emotional Intelligence to partner for a one year pilot study that will assist the school in sustaining some of the activities that our public health team brought to them on a larger scale. In 2022, there was a pilot virtual book club for kindergartners from Escuela Montessori Bernarda Robles de Hevia,

an elementary school in an under-served community in San Juan. Classes were conducted in Spanish involving animal stories.

About the community(s):

2020 – Community of Residencial Luis Llorens Torres, located in Isla Verde, 10 minutes from Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport. Opened in 1953, this is the largest housing project in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, with almost 3,000 people. Over half the population lives below the poverty line; the median income hovers around 20,000 USD. Like many housing projects in the US, Residencial Luis Llorens Torres is mired with psycho-social problems associated with chronic, multigenerational poverty.

Our service trip focused on the two schools that children from the community attend. Both schools were affected by Hurricane Maria and were in recovery mode at the time of our trip. Escuela Luis Llorens Torres, founded in 1954 (and with INE since 2008) has 354 students, spanning ages 3-12 years old, in grades pre-K to 6th. Escuela Republica de Peru has 247 students, ages 13-15 years old, attending 7th-9th grade. Their students come from multiple housing projects in the San Juan metro area. INE has worked with them for 10 years. Both schools struggle with adequate funding, as most public schools in Puerto Rico. The decade-long recession in the Island resulted in multiple school closures in the last few years.

2023 - Community of Cantera, a marginalized, impoverished, densely populated neighborhood located in San Juan, Puerto Rico, with an estimated population of 8,800 residents divided into sixteen sectors. It is also one of the poorest. Surrounded by bodies of water to the north, south and east, Cantera is a peninsula that stretches out into the contiguous San José and Corozos lagoons. The community was heavily damaged by Hurricane Maria in 2017 and earthquake in 2020, but the government has made significant strides to rebuild many areas. All projects took place at the Escuela Manuel Elzaburu y Vizcarrondo, a pre-k through 8th grade, public elementary school located in the heart of Cantera.