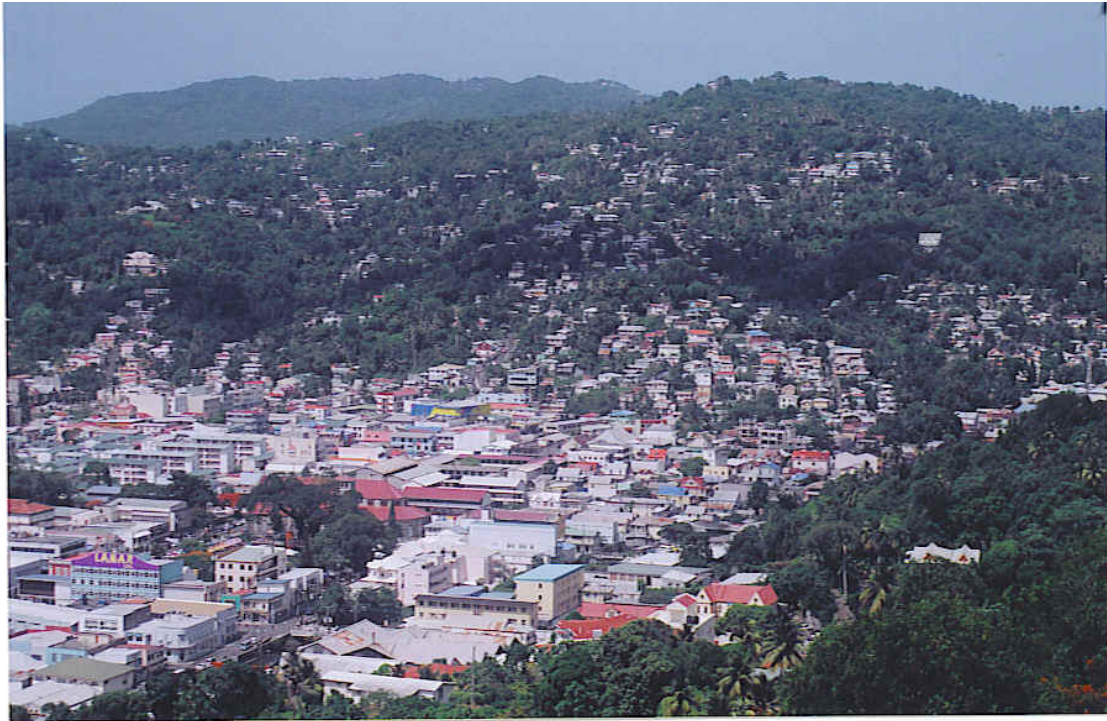


Adam Coleman, '05  
**St. Lucia, French Antilles**

Courtney and I had the pleasure of volunteering our summer of service in Castries, the capital of St. Lucia, where we worked at two different schools teaching a wide range of classes and activities.



An overview of Castries, the Capital of St.Lucia

We were able to stay in a community home run by a wonderful woman, Ms. Bertilia Jean Baptiste, just outside the city of Castries. Right from the beginning I knew that this trip was going to be different, but you can never understand it till you are actually there living in the culture. While our host family was amazingly kind and generous to us both throughout our stay, it was the experience of Castries itself that made me reflect on the many cultural differences between the U.S. and St. Lucia. The fast pace, impoverished and highly religious lifestyle of this small beautiful island culture was a bit of a shock at first, but not one without its benefits. While the experience of the Castries provided one aspect of the St. Lucian culture, it was the experience of the children we worked with throughout our stay that I will remember most.



This is one of the morning classes at the Dunnottar School where we would begin the day with songs and memory games for the under-developed younger children.

The first school we volunteered at each morning was the Dunnottar School, which was a government funded school for mentally challenged children. The school was run by Mrs. Archbold and had a wide range of mentally handicapped children in all levels of education. Courtney and I worked with children in three different classrooms including an afternoon session where we taught the children basic swimming lessons. At first it was a completely new and alien atmosphere because we were thrown into the situation of having to relate with these children right from the beginning. As the weeks progressed we really managed to find our place at Dunnottar teaching things like basic problem solving, elementary math, or simple recognition skills. I was and always will be awed by the simplest amount of joy that the children could take out of any simple task.



Tatianna (left) and Shaquim (right) both enjoying some afternoon activities at the Dunnottar School. Tatianna has been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy and Shaquim with Down Syndrome.

While we live in a society of infinite monetary possibilities and do nothing but complain about it, these children enjoy the simple pleasures of a puzzle or a story and seem completely satisfied. The enthusiasm that the children brought to the table each and every day made the experience at Dunnottar extremely rewarding, and while I would hope that I somehow improved their lives during my stay, I know they have changed mine in more ways than one.

The second school we worked at was the Upton Gardens Girl's Center, which was a school for troubled teenage girls, and run by Ms. Prisca St. Paul. Here we did a multitude of activities with the girls ranging from educational to dancing to sessions about medical safety. One activity I helped out with was teaching the girls some basic computer lessons because the school had recently received numerous new computers through a grant.



Teaching some basic computer lessons to the girls at Upton Gardens.

The girls were taught typing, internet skills, and other basic skills on the computers and it was my job to run classes with them twice a week. We also helped out in the kitchen helping the girls to learn basic cooking and nutritional skills. The teachers at Upton Gardens were wonderful in helping us adjust to our surroundings, especially in my case where I found myself as the only male in the work environment. While the girls were shy at first they really opened up to us in the end and we were able to take a lot away from our experience working at Upton Gardens.



Myself with some of the girls from the Upton's Center.

Looking back on my trip to St. Lucia I find myself taking away so much more than I could have ever hoped to give. It is an odd notion because ultimately we came down to volunteer our services to them, yet in the end I am convinced that I gained so much more. The children taught me to appreciate the simple things in life and gave me a sense of awareness about the greater world that exists outside of the U.S., and for this I can never give them enough thanks. To all those who crossed paths with us in our six weeks through St. Lucia, I thank you all for overwhelming kindness and compassion which you all selflessly gave to us, two complete strangers from a foreign land.



The girls and the teachers pose one final time for us before we leave on our last day at Upton Gardens.



This is a group picture of Courtney and the girls at the Upton's Center.



Courtney spending an afternoon working with Shane who was one of the few autistic children we worked with at the Dunnottar School.



Some more of the children and one of their teachers getting camera shy while doing arts and crafts at the Dunnottar School.