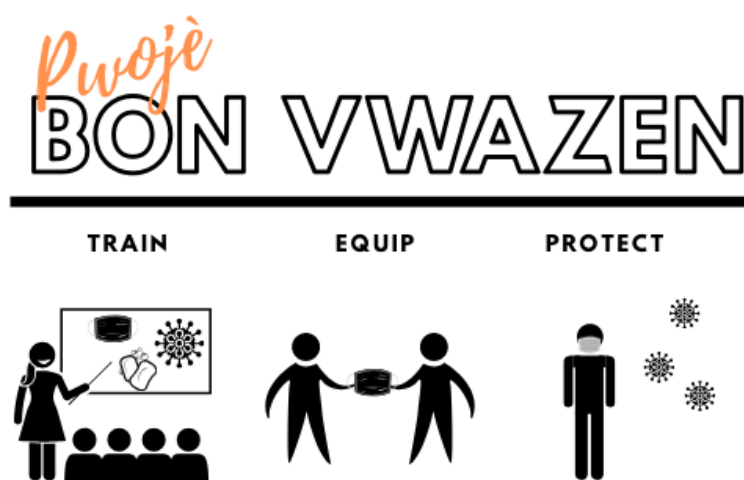


Pwojè Bon Vwazen (The Good Neighbor Project)

Selecting and Training Community Members to Respond to COVID-19 in Haiti



Introduction

Health workers play a critical role in promoting the health and well-being of their communities, especially during times of crises (WHO, 2021). However, despite the important role that these workers play in delivering essential healthcare services, there remains a global shortage of healthcare workers that is projected to increase to 18 million by 2030 (Schwartz, 2020). In Haiti for example, the estimated physician-patient ratio is 0.25:1000, which falls well below the WHO's recommended 1:1000 ratio for developing countries. This shortage has made it challenging for community members to access much needed health services during the pandemic. In response to this problem, [Lumen Vitae](#) and [Jesus Youth International](#) developed Pwojè Bon Vwazen, a community health worker (CHW) project that selected and trained trusted young adults in Haiti to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in their communities (Kunnumpurath, 2021).



Overview of Pwojè Bon Vwazen

Pwojè Bon Vwazen was implemented from May 2020 to September 2020 in and around Port-au-Prince, Haiti. In May 2020, Lumen Vitae staff selected 9 CHWs between the ages of 22 and 28 to participate in the project. The CHWs had all worked with Lumen Vitae in the past and had expressed an interest in giving back to their communities during the pandemic. CHWs were supervised by two project coordinators who were bilingual in Haitian Creole and English and supported them throughout the project. Over the course of four months, each CHW received a stable salary along with a stipend to cover transportation and food expenses while they were working.

At the beginning of the project, Lumen Vitae and the local health department in Croix-des-Bouquets provided each CHW with training on the basics of COVID-19 (e.g., how to limit the spread of the virus) and on how to communicate information regarding the prevention and spread of the virus to members of their community. In August 2020, CHWs participated in a second training that reiterated the basics of COVID-19 and provided them with information on how to manage their personal finances given the income they were earning during the project. Additionally, three CHWs received training on how to make three-layered masks with sewing machines, which were later distributed to families during home visits.

After receiving the initial training, all CHWs began working three days out of the week, typically on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. On Mondays and Wednesdays, they would carry out home visits, and on Fridays, they would convene with the project coordinators to share their experiences, challenges and successes of the week. In preparation for their home visits, each CHW received a backpack to carry materials, a form to keep track of which houses they had visited, a project T-shirt, flyers on COVID-19 prevention to distribute, and a personal cell phone. CHWs were also instructed to maintain a 6-feet distance during home visits and to sanitize their hands and wear a mask. During these visits, CHWs would:

- **Provide families with information on COVID-19**, highlighting prevention strategies that were appropriate for the communities in which they lived.
- **Distribute hygiene kits** that included masks, soaps, hand sanitizers, and bleach.
- **Monitor COVID-19 symptoms** using a simple questionnaire.
- **Perform basic healthcare services** such as temperature checks.

After carrying these visits, they would conduct in-person follow-ups at least once a month to determine the extent to which families were adhering to the prevention protocols they had been taught, such as using masks, hand sanitizers, and soaps to prevent the spread of the virus (Kunnumpurath, 2021).

Enablers and Barriers to Implementation

Between May and September 2020, Pwojè Bon Vwazen reached 1350 individuals (roughly 650 families) in Corail, Cessless, Canaan, and Meyer. CHWs indicated that the project had allowed them to gain a greater sense of responsibility for their communities, and that they

felt that they had contributed to the overall well-being of society. CHWs also indicated that the monthly salary they received allowed them to receive a stable income for the entire duration of the project, and that they had developed positive relationships with the families under their care. They also noted that they had gained experience in sharing information about COVID-19 to members of their community and that, during follow-up home visits, families indicated that they were using the masks, soaps, and hand sanitizers they had received to protect themselves from the virus. Lastly, the Friday meetings that CHWs and project coordinators participated in allowed them to grow in their relationships with one another and brainstorm any challenges they were facing in order to work more productively (Kunnumpurath, 2021).

One challenge that CHWs faced was distrust from certain families who either believed incorrect information about COVID-19 or did not believe in the virus at all (Philip, 2020). To address this issue, CHWs were encouraged to try to understand the concerns of families (instead of dismissing them) and highlight the fact that they were working with the local health department to carry out their home visits. Additionally, CHWs were provided with flyers that included COVID-19 information from the state health department to distribute to local households. Each CHW also worked within the community they came from and would visit and follow-up with the same families consistently which helped increase the levels of trust and confidence that families had in them (Kunnumpurath, 2021).

Pwojè Bon Vwazen's Impact

Pwojè Bon Vwazen provided an alternate way of ensuring that marginalized communities in Haiti could access basic healthcare services during COVID-19. By recruiting and training trusted young adults to bridge the gap between important health services and members of their community, the project organizers ensured that community members in resource-limited settings were protected during the pandemic. They also empowered the young adults involved to give back to their communities. Although this project only lasted four months, it reinforced the benefits of having trusted members of the community deliver basic healthcare services. In the future, Pwojè Bon Vwazen could serve as an example for other countries looking to provide accessible and affordable healthcare to marginalized communities during times of crises and beyond.

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