

In June of 2010, with the inspiration of her late husband (my uncle) Russell, Julie Menendez Villarini established the nonprofit organization **Here For Them**. The organization provides aid to children under the age of 18 who have been abandoned, orphaned, disadvantaged, abused, threatened, or are in high risk situations. Life on the streets and in poor villages forces children to resort to horrible living conditions, drug use, and even prostitution. The organization provides funds for food, housing, health care and education, as well as donations of clothing, arts and crafts supplies, toys and games, and educational materials. Currently, the organization solely provides aid to two struggling but inspirational orphanages in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic named Doña Chucha and Altagracia.



Left: Russ Villarini Right: The tenements of Santo Domingo



Courtland Palmer and the orphans of Santo Domingo

Julie and her organization have made it their goal to give these girls an opportunity to overcome the challenges they are faced with each and every day. I, Courtland Palmer, have been personally inspired by the spirit and potential of these girls. I realized that by choosing this very deserving cause for my high school's senior service project, using my passion and drive, I can really make a difference in the lives of these girls, who are undoubtedly less fortunate than most. I have been touched by the strength and perseverance of the girls, and have had my eyes opened to an entirely new perspective of the world.



My Aunt Julie and I traveled to Santo Domingo in late April of this year to visit the two orphanages, and it has changed my life. Not only was it the best experience of my short 17 year old life, but it showed me the truth of a hidden reality. In this country, girls just don't have the same opportunities as boys when it comes to education, survival on the streets and finding a job. In the past, there has been a considerable amount of philanthropic aid given to the Dominican Republic. Unfortunately, because of the cultural difference (which has a lot to do with the development of talented male baseball players), girls in the Dominican Republic have not received an equal amount of aid. After meeting these wonderful girls, and their caregivers and educators, my passion of trying to help them knows no bounds. I truly believe that these girls deserve a chance to better their lives.



Typical home and kitchen in poverty stricken Santo Domingo



After visiting the orphanages I wanted to help. So I decided to start the **Russ's Kitchen Bread For Life Project** by building a state of the art panadería (kitchen/bakery) for Altagracia, which is the orphanage for the older girls who usually come from Doña Chucha, which houses the younger girls. The condition of the old kitchen at the orphanage is unsatisfactory and struggles to provide enough food for all the girls. The girls will benefit greatly from the addition of this facility. The panadería will provide the girls with food to survive, bread to sell and a potential vocation.



The orphanage plans to use the bakery to bake surpluses of bread that they would use to sell back to their community at an affordable price. This way, the orphanage would be able to bring in a steady revenue, as well as help the struggling community that surrounds it. Most importantly, they will have the opportunity to be educated in the culinary arts. In the Dominican Republic, tourism provides employment for 1 in every 7 of the total jobs in the country. A high percentage of the jobs in the tourism business involve food, whether it is in the production, preparation, or service. This will open up future employment and decent wages for a needed skill in the local economy. Russ's Kitchen Bread For Life Project will supply the orphanage with what they need to become self sustainable. What is required now are the resources to build the kitchen and purchase new equipment to start their endeavor.



I have set a personal goal to raise a total of \$85,000. This represents the budget to build, equip, supply labor and raise the panadería to appropriate standards. I am truly grateful that two major corporations, MetLife and Orange France, a subsidiary of France Télécom, and The John and Bettina Fruth Family Foundation have supported my efforts with substantial contributions.

No donation is too big or too small. Please help me in giving these girls bread for life.