

Puerto Rico Mental Health Mission Trip

Andrews group to provide mental health training sessions

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A group of Andrews University faculty, staff, students and an alumna will travel to Puerto Rico to provide mental health training sessions in local churches and the community (Photo by Troy Homenchuk)

By: Gillian Sanner, media communications manager, IMC

A group of 20 Andrews University faculty, staff, students and an alumna will travel to Puerto Rico from March 15–25, 2018, to provide mental health training sessions in local churches and the community.

As Puerto Rico recovers from Hurricane Maria, approximately 20 percent of the island is still without power, and there are threats of required water rationing. Companies are closing weekly, and homicides and suicides happen daily.

Melissa Ponce-Rodas, who is coordinating the trip and serves as assistant professor of psychology in the Andrews University Department of Behavioral Sciences, says, “Currently, rates of depression and suicide have at least doubled on the island, which is why the trip is targeting mental health. For Hispanics, mental health stigma is high, and these are not topics

people usually talk about. With hurricane season starting again in June, we are afraid that those stats will continue to increase and that rates of anxiety and PTSD will also continue to rise.”

The mission trip team has partnered with Antillean University and the Puerto Rican Conference of Seventh-day Adventists to provide culturally-specific approaches to crisis intervention and psychoeducation for children and adults. Programming includes presentations in Aguadilla, at Antillean University and at a community outreach event where the team will lead workshops on fostering resilience; addictions after disaster; depression, anxiety and suicide; and kids and emotions.

The trip is co-sponsored by the Andrews University Department of Behavioral Sciences and the Lake Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. Funds are still needed to sponsor programming and to help individuals pay their way. For more information, and for updates throughout the trip, visit the mission team’s Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Puerto-Rico-Mental-Health-Mission-Trip-425002771274330/>. To contribute financially, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/puerto-rico-mental-health-mission>.