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Statement Regarding Seraphin Bernard

The World Learning community is deeply saddened by the recent drowning incident in South Africa involving Seraphin Bernard, of Miami, who was co-leading a group of 18 high school students on a five-week trip for The Experiment in International Living. Our thoughts and prayers are with Seraphin's family during this difficult time. Seraphin had been a valued member of the World Learning family since 2004, when he attended a high school program with us in South Africa. This summer, he decided to give back to our organization by taking responsibility for leading a group of high school students on the same program in which he had participated.

World Learning has been investigating the apparent drowning of Seraphin Bernard, and has shared the following information with his family:

A group of 18 Experimenters, along with two adult Group Leaders, including Seraphin Bernard, were visiting an indigenous arts and culture community in the Transkei region of the Eastern Cape Coast of South Africa. The itinerary included a walk along the shore the morning of Sunday 13 July to visit a large shipwreck.

Sixteen members of the group, the two adult Group Leaders, approximately 10 adult members of the arts and culture community, and a representative of our local program partner, made the 1.5-hour walk along the coast to the shipwreck. Shortly upon arriving at the site, Seraphin and a number of participants entered the water. While the details are still emerging, it appears that within minutes, several of the participants and Seraphin were having trouble after being caught in a very strong current. While all of the Experiment participants made it out of the water, Seraphin was swept the furthest away by the currents and eventually disappeared from sight.

One of the Experiment participants immediately called land and sea rescue on a cell phone. Rescuers were on site in vehicles in about 40 minutes; a helicopter joined the search within about an hour. The land and sea rescue unit searched the area throughout the week. To date, Seraphin's body has not been recovered.

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Upon learning of this tragic situation, a crisis response team was put into place to ensure the health and safety of the remaining Experiment group members and Seraphin's co-leader. The team included staff at our headquarters in Vermont and the Experiment co-directors in France and New Jersey.

On the ground, World Learning immediately made a crisis/grief counselor available to meet with the group. On July 13, the day of the incident, we notified Seraphin's family as well as the parents of all South Africa Experiment participants. Early the next morning, we flew in our Regional Manager for Southern Africa from Durban, South Africa, to provide support to the group.

Seraphin's mother and father flew to South Africa on Wednesday, July 16, accompanied by the co-director of the Experiment. World Learning covered their expenses, provided logistical support, and helped maintain spiritual counseling for them in South Africa as they made this difficult journey. While in South Africa, we arranged for the Bernards to be taken to the site of the incident and to speak with representatives of the local community, meet with search and rescue personnel, meet local law enforcement staff, and speak with four eyewitnesses who were on the beach that day.

About World Learning

World Learning, a global non-profit based in Vermont (www.worldlearning.org), has been focused for 75 years on bridging cultures and transforming lives. Today, World Learning runs study abroad and international development programs in 77 countries, directly impacting the lives of thousands of people each year. Since 1932, when the first group of students traveled abroad, more than 100,000 people have participated in World Learning programs.

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