

Children's Nutrition Program of Haiti
Haiti Trip Report
July 22-August 12, 2005

I arrived in Port-au-Prince on July 22, and due to dangerous conditions and political instability in the capital city, I flew directly from there to Jacmel on the southern side of island. When I arrived in PAP, a taxi picked me up at the international airport and drove me to the small national airport down the street, where I waited in the unrelenting heat for the Jacmel flight. The departure times are approximate, and the waiting area is packed with people sitting atop piles of luggage and boxes. Two local airlines fly to Jacmel, Tortuga Air and Caribintair, and both have stringent luggage limits. Your "checked" bag can weigh no more than 50 lbs, and the total of all bags (checked and carry-on) cannot exceed 70lbs. When you see the plane, you will be grateful for the weight limits. The plane is tiny, containing 9 seats of which only half have seatbelts. Watch your head! The ceiling is only high enough to allow headroom in a seated position. The pilot is Cuban, able to speak some English but no Creole, so I was asked to translate his welcome and explain the functioning of the optional seatbelts. The flight was well worth my initial apprehension. It is a beautiful 10 minute ride, with extraordinary views of Port-au-Prince, the coast, and Haiti's mountainous interior, and without the stress of driving through Carrefour. Advance reservations for the Jacmel flight are not required, but you can reserve a seat on the Caribintair flight by e-mailing the director at laurenceoriol@yahoo.com.

The CNP driver, Jn. Claude, picked me up in Jacmel and brought me to Leogane. There, I spent the majority of the next 3 weeks working with CNP staff on our in-patient program, in addition to supervising Hearth programs, meeting with our monitrices, and assisting with the rehabilitation of 3 water pumps.

The hospital pediatric ward was very full, with 5-8 severely malnourished children enrolled in our in-patient program at all times and many more treated daily in the outpatient clinic. The CNP staff, comprised of Mme. Gerald Paul, Evelyne Laguerre, Felicia Jn. Baptiste, and Yva Aristyl, continues to do a remarkable job assisting families with navigating the hospital system and providing the children in our program with medications and supplies. Evelyne now oversees the in-patient Hearth program, and each day prepares a meal with mothers of malnourished children in the hospital while educating them about nutrition and child health. The group of mothers I observed on this visit was particularly active, and I felt fortunate to be able to spend time getting to know them and their children.

I had time to visit only one of our Hearth programs, in the community of Kafou Fourmi approximately 1 ½ hours from Leogane. Chantale Joseph, our monitrice there, has been working with our program since November 2001, and never ceases to put her heart and effort into making the program succeed. In addition to conducting the Hearth program, she led me to the homes of a few children from previous Hearth programs that had been particularly severe, and I was very pleased to see how beautifully the children have progressed over the years. No longer malnourished, the children are now in school and

have vibrant and charming personalities. It is always rewarding to visit children who have graduated from our program, and the experience reinforces the positive impact that the CNP has had on the lives of children throughout Leogane. Working in Haiti has its many hardships, but the determination and resiliency of the children and the faith of their parents forever inspires me.

As part of the Living Waters International/Children's Nutrition Program collaboration, I worked with Albert Point-du-Jour (Hospital Ste. Croix facilities manager) and Gerald (a UNICEF-trained local water pump mechanic) to rehabilitate water pumps in 3 communities: Guerin, Singe, and Michel. Two of the wells had not worked at all in years (in fact, the pump at Singe had been converted to a meeting point for local young men to play dominoes), and the communities came out in full force to watch and assist with the well repair. All parts had been purchased in advance in Les Cayes by Gerald, and reports were filled out per LWI requirements at the conclusion of each repair. I was pleased to see that Gerald and Albert worked very well together, and feel confident that they can continue to carry out program activities on their own until the political situation calms and LWI teams can resume trips to Haiti.

In the months preceding my trip, news in the U.S. about Haiti was full of horrible stories of kidnappings, political uprisings, torture and violence. Fortunately, immediately prior to my departure the situation began to calm somewhat and continued to do so over the course of my visit. The UN appears to be taking a more aggressive stance against the various gangs, and I understand that there is a new chief of the Haiti National Police who is also reported to be much more proactive in arresting those responsible for the violence. I drove in to PAP twice over the 3 weeks, once to purchase medications for the program and once to get to the airport, and on both occasions had no difficulty. There are certainly areas that are very dangerous, and I would still not recommend travel in and around PAP until after the elections this fall, but it appears that there may be light at the end of the tunnel. Everyone that I spoke with had registered to vote (despite the media's report of low turnout at the registration centers) and was anxious to learn more about presidential candidates to better inform their vote in November. Local elections, originally scheduled for October, have been postponed to mid December, and presidential elections have been moved up a week to November 7, with run-off elections if necessary in early December.

Unfortunately, the instability has taken a toll on Haiti's economic state, and prices have skyrocketed. I conducted a market survey with our monitrices and discovered that prices have doubled since our last monitrice training in July 2003 and are almost three times what they were when the Hearth program started in November 2001. Gas prices are steadily rising in Haiti as they are elsewhere around the world, increasing the cost of local transportation and further stressing the already limited financial resources of the Haitian populace. The value of the gourde has declined, and the exchange rate while I was there was approximately 41-42 gourdes to the U.S. dollar. In order to accommodate its change in food prices and devaluation of the gourdes, the CNP was forced to increase the amount of money given to monitrices as our contribution to the Hearth meal from 6 gourdes per child per day to 10 gourdes per child per day. As per the Hearth model protocol, all

participants continue to contribute food items to the meal to make up the remaining cost difference.

Overall, it was a positive and encouraging trip, and I left feeling a great deal of confidence in the ability of the CNP to maintain its programs in the face of challenge. Our monitrices remain dedicated and reliable, and the generosity of our donors has enabled us to meet increased demands. I plan to return to Haiti again in mid-October to conduct further training for our monitrices and supervise our programs.

Submitted by: Catherine Dorvil
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