

The Need

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with an economy and environment battered by years of repressive politics, widespread corruption and mismanaged resources. As Haiti's infrastructure has suffered, so too have the Haitian people. Life expectancy at birth is 61 years, and nearly half the population over 15 is illiterate. Due to chronic unemployment, many families live in such dire poverty that they cannot feed their children. With little to no social services available, many families must seek alternative care for their children.

On January 12, 2010, a massive earthquake plunged Haiti into further turmoil. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced from their homes, including thousands of children, many of whom either lost their families or whose families could no longer provide for their care. Emergency response and relief efforts have restored some stability in the greater Port-au-Prince area. However, without sufficient resources to reconstruct homes, businesses and government buildings, true stability remains a distant prospect for the quarter million people who continue to live in tent cities around Port-au-Prince.

Holt's History in Haiti



In 2003, Holt began serving children in Haiti through a partnership with the Hope for Haiti Foundation, a humanitarian organization founded by Peter and Shay Fontana. The Fontanas also built the Children's Village near Montrouis, north of Port-au-Prince. Here, groups of ten children live in well-constructed, four-bedroom houses under the care of a housemother. Holt provided the support and expertise to develop a comprehensive child service

program centered at the village, now called the Holt Fontana Village. Holt also began processing international adoptions (ICA), first placing children with U.S. families in 2006.

Before pursuing alternative permanency solutions, Holt's first priority is to keep children in their birth families. Thus, while developing an ICA program, Holt also sought grant funding for a family preservation

program in the region surrounding the village. In 2007, Holt established Fanmi Ansanm, or "Family Together," through which families receive crisis counseling, emergency assistance and ongoing support as they strive for self-sufficiency. They also receive tuition for school fees, food and kitchen supply kits, weekly family wellness trainings and regular home visits by trained caseworkers. Ultimately, these services help stabilize families, ensuring a safe, structured home environment for at-risk children. Child sponsorship and donor funding sustain Holt's family preservation program in Haiti.

Through Fanmi Ansanm and the Holt Fontana Village, Holt succeeded in improving living conditions for thousands of children in Haiti. During the first years in operation, however, Holt's ICA program encountered numerous challenges. Lengthy processing delays and legal requirements resulted in an average ICA process of 28 months. In 2009, the Haitian government imposed additional requirements, further exacerbating – and lengthening – the ICA process. Political instability also confounded efforts in the region, creating travel difficulty for both Holt staff and adoptive families needing to complete the adoption process in country.

Although ICA fell to a near standstill, local programs for children and families continued to thrive. Holt staff directed greater energy and resources toward improving the quality of care at the Holt Fontana Village. In 2009, Holt donors enabled construction



of four new cottages, doubling the village's capacity from 30 to 60 children.

Current Projects

In January of 2010, Holt began emergency relief efforts for people affected by the earthquake. In the first two weeks following the disaster, Holt sent \$25,000 to the National Spiritual Council of Haitian Churches, which provided medical supplies, water and food for over 6,000 people. With Holt's support, this organization coordinated one of the most effective grassroots responses in Port-au-Prince.

Holt Fontana Village was not damaged in the quake, and all the children and staff were safe. Sadly, though, many staff members lost family living in Port-au-Prince, closer to the quake's epicenter.

To provide emergency care for children displaced by the disaster, Holt immediately readied the new cottages and hired additional staff to accommodate the influx. While 25 children came into temporary care, nearly the same number prepared to board planes for the U.S. Recognizing the urgency of the crisis, the U.S. Government granted humanitarian parole visas for 21 children whose adoptions were near completion when the quake hit. They are now home with their adoptive families. All 25 of the children in temporary care have since been reunited with their birth families.

Among families in Holt's Fanmi Ansanm program, the earthquake caused significant, added stress. Homes were destroyed or severely damaged. Many struggled with grief over the loss of family members. And households increased in size as those whose homes weathered the disaster took in displaced relatives. To accommodate growing households, Holt increased food distribution to the 100 current families in the family preservation program. Holt also built small houses for five vulnerable families.

The earthquake also rattled stronger foundations as once stable families suddenly became homeless, increasing the demand for Holt's family preservation services. In response, Holt expanded Fanmi Ansanm to another 100 families, including 300 children, in the city of Jacmel. Although Holt did not operate in Jacmel prior to the earthquake, emergency fundraising enabled Holt to broaden our reach to this devastated city, where approximately 10,000 people lost their homes. Holt is also offering grief and trauma counseling for families served here.

Strategic Directions

Crisis response continues. Since the earthquake, Fanmi Ansanm has expanded staffing in Jacmel, enabling Holt to serve another 100 families of the more than 1500 that requested support – essentially doubling Holt's outreach in 2011.

International adoption placements remain slow but consistent. Within months after the earthquake, the Haitian Senate passed a new adoption law that will reduce the time it takes to adopt internationally. Although a major step forward for adoption reform, the law is currently bogged down in Haitian legislation. The long process continues to make family recruitment a challenge for Holt's Haiti program.

Holt continually strives to better serve families and children in Haiti by not only meeting basic needs, but also finding avenues for families to achieve self-sufficiency. To this end, Holt plans to strengthen and broaden the package of services families receive. Through scholarships to vocational training schools, Holt-sponsored family members will be able to learn income-generating trades. Holt also hopes to establish a day care facility and well baby clinic to help ease the burden on impoverished families, enabling them to pursue education and other activities needed to achieve both independence and a better quality of life.

To reach these program goals, Holt plans to expand and diversify funding sources that include grants, child sponsorship and donor funding. Within three years, Holt hopes to grow the number of sponsored children from 250 to 1000. Emphasis on training and technical assistance at Holt partner sites will also help to ensure the success of Holt's ongoing services to children and families in Haiti.

