

HAITI: Combining Humanitarian Aid with Sustainable Development

BY PIERRE BARBEAU
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Thank you very much and thank you to my sponsor.” This is the most frequent expression of gratitude and appreciation that we hear from the destitute seniors who benefit from the support of our Adopt-A-Gran sponsors. Most of the elderly people that I meet in developing countries ate once a day before they were sponsored, so you can just imagine how they feel about having nutritious meals three times a day. Many who are bedridden or confined to wheelchairs would not have survived on their own very long without your support. Their immediate families either could not afford to provide basic needs or simply abandoned them at the door of the local hospital or home for the aged, which in most cases are filled to capacity. The Adopt a Gran sponsorship therefore represented a life line for their survival and I thank all of you who are sponsors on their behalf.

In Haiti, we have been developing a pilot project funded by CIDA and Help the Aged
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Volunteer nurse Francine Courtemanche completing a blood pressure test.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Clean Drinking Water, Medical Supplies, Cataract Surgeries...

As illustrated in the photo below, rain water from a reservoir is gathered into pails, circulated through a filter and pumped into four liter jugs. This is all powered by a solar panel. The potable water is then stored in the jugs which are provided to each senior at the Bombardopolis nursing home every morning. The elderly are more susceptible to water born illnesses and Father Chólet, our local program co-ordinator in Bombardopolis observed that the use of this filter has greatly reduced intestinal

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In Bombardopolis, the water filter at right is used to purify water taken from a local 9,000 gallon reservoir constructed by Help the Aged.

Each senior receives a four liter jug of drinking water every morning.



HUMANITARIAN AID

Who Do You Feed When Everyone Is Hungry?

BY PIERRE BARBEAU

This was a question that greatly disturbed Help the Aged volunteer Marguerite Saint Louis and volunteer nurse H el ene Lafrance during their recent trips to Bonneau and Gaspard, Haiti. Marguerite and H el ene spent four weeks working in our health care project for needy seniors in these communities as well as developing our Adopt A Gran sponsorship program in these areas.

When meals were being prepared every day to feed our sponsored Grans, Marguerite, H el ene and several Haitian volunteers helped to carry the food across an open area to the home for destitute seniors that we support. There is a large population of desperately poor people near this home and hundreds could see and smell the food being carried to the seniors every day. Many would come to H el ene and Marguerite in rags and beg for food. “J’ai

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Thank you very much (continued from page 1)

donors to combine the humanitarian aspect of Adopt a Gran with long term development projects such as installing wells and reservoirs, planting thousands of fruit trees, recruiting and training local nurses to work with the elderly poor and sending Canadian volunteers for two to three months to assist our Haitian partners. This way, we can assist both the elderly who are bed ridden or in wheelchairs and cannot participate in income generating activities and those who are able bodied and able minded enough to plant fruit trees, maintain vegetable gardens and raise farm animals. This approach will benefit healthy and unhealthy destitute seniors in the ten communities we are supporting.

I returned to Bombardopolis (Haiti) last fall and am pleased to report that sixty sponsored seniors are now receiving tender loving care including three nutritious meals a day provided by local volunteers and staff at the Joseph Lambert Centre for Destitute Seniors. The Centre is also the headquarters for our primary health care program and our donated and purchased medications are all under lock and key under the able supervision of a local nurse paid through our CIDA project. **Only \$2,500 a year is needed to pay the salary of a full-time nurse in Haiti.** Two volunteer nurses from Mont Laurier, Micheline (seen in the photo below with nurse Franleine) and Francine Courtemanche (page one photo) recently spent five weeks in Bombardopolis to train and assist with the treatment of patients at the home and in the community. Also, the positive developments in the Bombardopolis area have attracted a volunteer Cuban doctor and nurse to the area resulting



Nurse Franleine (left) was hired by Help the Aged and is trained and assisted by Canadian volunteer, Micheline Courtemanche.

in a substantial increase in the level of medical care being provided (photo below).

The Centre has a night watchman to help the elderly during the night and to protect the food and medical supplies. Forty women occupy the main section of the building and twenty men the new addition. A covered area links the two sections of the building and is a recreation room and meal room for the seniors. It is breezy, comfortable and pleasant for the elderly. Volunteer Joseph Lambert who travelled to Haiti with me brought several hand-crank radios for entertainment and the three Catholic nuns who live close by organize recreational activities for the seniors. **For example, school children came to see the seniors while I was there to offer a “flute concert” with donated flutes shipped there on our last container** (photo below).



The Cuban doctor and nurse in this photo are assisting us with medical care of the elderly. Our project ships donated medical supplies from Canada and provides funds to also purchase medical supplies locally.

An added bonus is the home for seniors being just across the street from the Saint Francis of Assisi church which is visited regularly by most seniors. The elderly are living in safety within a huge, fenced property which will soon be covered with all types of fruit trees we have planted with your support (and grants from the Quebec Ministry of International Relations and CIDA) as well as a vegetable garden.

Clean Drinking Water, Medical Supplies, Cataract Surgeries ... (continued from page 1)

faim" (I am hungry) was heard over and over again. Unfortunately, they only had enough food to feed our seniors. Several times, they were afraid that they would be attacked and the food stolen by desperate Haitians eager to feed themselves and their families. **Hélène and Marguerite's emotions ranged from elation at seeing the seniors enjoying three meals a day to depression because so many others could not be fed.**

Many other adversities that we would never think about in Canada are part of life for our volunteers in Haiti. For example, Hélène and Marguerite were returning to Bonneau in a four wheel drive full of food for our seniors purchased in nearby Port de Paix. They had to cross four river beds in the vehicle to return to Bonneau and the average depth of the water was four feet. Their vehicle overturned when they were crossing one of the rivers but fortunately they were not injured. Local Haitians told Hélène and Marguerite that they would carry them to shore on their shoulders. However, all of the food was lost. The vehicle owned by local Catholic nuns, was later towed out of the water and needed repairs.

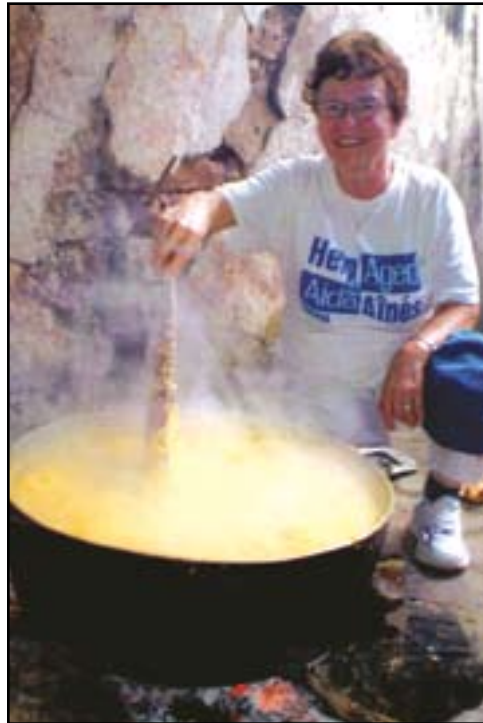
Despite these types of problems, challenges and frustrations, the great majority of our volunteers want to return to Haiti to continue

assisting and providing support to our local partners. The extreme poverty we encounter cannot be described accurately to someone who has not experienced it. Also, we cannot precisely describe the strong feelings and emotions of charity, love and care that motivates us to return and do whatever we can with whatever skills, financial resources and other support that we can offer. As Hélène noted in her report:

"Upon my return, my heart and spirit were still in Haiti. I really enjoyed my experience despite all of these problems. It was a challenge but so enriching

to me. For example, the first time I heard our seniors sing a prayer of thanks for the food we had provided on behalf of their Adopt A Gran sponsors, was very touching. I am saddened to have left. **It is hard to understand but all of the comforts we have here do not make us any happier than they are.** I received a lot of love during my stay and I am ready to go back. As Raymond Levesque says in his song "When all people live of love, there will be no misery."

Cream of corn is a popular meal in Bonneau and volunteer Marguerite Saint Louis was pleased to help prepare it for the destitute seniors we support.



21 Years of Support from Air Canada!

Every year since 1988, Help the Aged has benefitted from six complimentary tickets from Air Canada to support our projects. Most of these tickets have been used to transport Help the Aged volunteers to developing countries in order to assist with our programs. Air Canada has approved six free tickets for 2009 and we are very appreciative since their support reduces our project management costs and allows us to send more volunteers overseas. Thank You for the 126 complimentary tickets for Help the Aged.

AIR CANADA 

Major Gifts from the August Foundation

We wish to thank Donna Mae Moore, Stella Lair and the August Foundation for the tremendous financial support provided for our projects in Haiti and Kenya as well as assisting 32 destitute seniors in Haiti as part of our Adopt-A-Gran Sponsorship Program. Their ongoing support is provided as part of the James A. and Donna-Mae Moore Endowment for Humanity. One of the major projects in Haiti that has greatly benefitted from their support is the construction of the Bombardopolis shelter for destitute seniors which now houses and cares for 60 of the poorest elderly people in north-west Haiti.

Thank you on their behalf!

Who Do You Feed When Everyone Is Hungry? (continued from page 1)

problems leading to diarrhoea and dehydration. I drank this water every day during my visit and didn't experience stomach problems proving the effectiveness of this system.

Thanks to your support and the substantial financial gift that we receive from CIDA (\$3 for every \$1 you donate to our Haiti project), we are able to hire local nurses, construct wells and reservoirs, ship donated medical supplies, complete cataract surgeries and dental care and repair buildings for seniors (leaking roofs, kitchen facilities, showers, latrines).

Our medical staff urgently need medical supplies for their patients and we provide mostly donated medications and vitamins that we receive free of charge from Collaboration Santé International in Quebec City and Health Partners International in Montreal. These supplies are taken to Haiti in donated suitcases by our volunteers or shipped in 40 foot containers with wheelchairs, crutches, walkers and other much needed materials and equipment. We also purchase medications in Haiti to supplement the donated supplies.

During my recent visit to Haiti, volunteer Joseph Lambert and I carried over one hundred pounds of vitamin mineral tablets to Bombardopolis for the nurse to distribute to destitute seniors in the community who were not yet sponsored through the Adopt-A-Gran program. These tablets often result in major health benefits since these elderly people are severely malnourished and quite frail. The vitamins were donated to us by a priest, Father Marc Richer from Mont Laurier. Volunteers packed them into large plastic bags so that as many vitamins as possible would be included in our suitcases. One of these bags is held up by our Bombardopolis nurse, Franleine seen in the photo next to me.

Canadian Volunteers are also a key to success:

We regularly describe the fantastic work being done in Haiti by our 24 dedicated volunteers who travel for one to three month periods in order to maximize the work of the local charitable organizations we work



Pierre and Franleine with donated vitamins and mineral supplements for the elderly.

with. This greatly reduces overhead expenses since the payment of salaries here and overseas would substantially lower the amount of money available for the poor.

During this trip, volunteer Joseph Lambert, was very surprised to find out that the recently opened home for destitute seniors was named in his honour and that his name was imbedded in cement at the entrance of the building

in Bombardopolis. He deserves this honour since he originally provided financial support and the building would not have been constructed without his participation and the generous funding provided by the James A and Donna Mae Moore Endowment for Humanity and the Léandre Lachance Foundation. Joseph has been traveling to Haiti every year since 1989 to provide assistance to the poor. At 80 years of age, he is still hoping to continue his travels for many years to come. ***Congratulations!***

Christmas in February?

Volunteers Hélène Lachance and Joël Chery (centre) celebrated a belated Christmas in late February with sponsored seniors in Bonneau, Haiti. André Pierre was part of the fortunate group of seniors who greatly enjoyed this event.



Your generous gifts to support our work in Haiti will be tripled by matching grants from CIDA.