Camp Claudine 2015
Gros Morne, Haiti

Your Camp Claudine children are a sea of blue tee shirts with a bird building her nest and the Haitian proverb, “Piti, piti zwazo fè niche li –little by little the bird builds her nest.” Above are the many 310 campers, who because of your generosity ate two meals each day, played sports, participated in arts and crafts, swam in the nearby river and benefitted from lectures on different topics given by Haitian counselors and community members. The children thrived in the safety of Camp Claudine where they got to be simply children for the month of July.

In this issue, we highlight Camp Claudine and the college-age volunteers who live 4-weeks, or even a year in Haiti, serving the Haitian people as they themselves, little by little, build Haiti into a nest strong enough to hold their children’s bright dreams for the future.

Youth Volunteer Experience

Aileen Reed (repeat volunteer)

“Kan Klodine” (Creole for Camp Claudine) is my favorite time of year. It is my third year in camp and a time that will always hold a place in my heart. There is another Creole word “alez”, meaning comfortable where you are. This year a friend told me "you are comfortable in Gros Morne". I’ve been blessed with amazing relationships with several children and adults and these relationships are based around love, presence, and being "alez". Without the love they show me, I would not have come back a second or third time. Sometimes I feel like I need them more than they need me. People in Gros Morne have taught me more about life and who I am, this is more than I could ever give them in return.
Muyan Zhan

As the first Chinese volunteer, all the children are very interesting. They say, "Chinwa, Chinwa!" (Chinese in Haitian), this sounds like Chinese “frog”. I will never forget being named a "Haitian frog".

In our camp, younger kids want me to hold them and older children keep asking me, if I know Jet Li or Jacky Chen? They ask me if I can play martial arts and want to learn it. The most moving feeling is that they always want to find the connection with me and want to know my world.

Some children are 7 years old but look 5 years old in height, because of their long-term malnutrition. However, compared with children who can’t come to our camp, they are lucky. Camp provides not only food for them, but also gives them love. River play and crafts class, children are laughing and happy every day. Marven, skinny and thin, is one child in my class. He likes holding my hand the whole day. His family has four children, so he is probably unappreciated at home. But, I believe staying in camp is his happiest moment.

Emily McMullen

Coming to Haiti was unlike anything I have ever done in my life. It was the first time I've been away from the everyday luxuries of the United States, first time I had been out of the country by myself, first time I've been thrown into a situation where I know nobody and I've been put into a culture shock situation. Yet, coming to Haiti was the best decision of my life.

Jean Duckworth

Haiti has always seemed to find me, even when I wasn't looking for it. I have visited Haiti twice already. It is the kind of place that will stay on your heart no matter how long you’re away.

Gros Morne is such a strange city. You take a bumpy gravel road in the middle of nowhere and then suddenly you are in an urban area, with concrete streets and lights. It was so strange taking motorcycles everywhere for a taxi, which only costs roughly $0.25 a ride, no matter where you go in the city. On my second moto ride, I burned myself on the exhaust pipe.

What surprised me though, is that motos are the smoothest form of transportation because they can go around the bumps in the roads unlike the bigger vehicles. We take motos to camp and back home almost every day.

We pass children in the morning, we wave and make funny faces at each other. In their enlarged stomachs, in their runny noses, in their dusty faces, I can see Christ. Each and every one of them has a story that can rip your heart apart, but you only see joy on their faces. They want to know your name, they want to play with you and be held by you. Even though I can’t speak Creole very well, just my presence makes them happy, knowing they are loved.

Katie Williams (year-long volunteer, again returning for 3 months this coming September)


The microfinance program is one of several projects I have worked on. There have been 15 women and one husband-wife couple in the 6 month program.

Loans start out at the equivalent of about $10 and grow each month so that the final loan is for about $40. If the loans have been repaid entirely, the participants receives a final larger lump sum in order to expand their business even more. There have been 5 women, typically the only income-earner in the household, who’ve successfully completed the program. They’ve now moved onto the second phase of the program, receiving education and money for a goat to further expand their income diversity.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Haiti has one of the highest population densities in the world, with about 380 persons per square mile, compared with 35 for the U.S.
- Haiti’s malnutrition prevalence (weight for age) of children under age 5 is 11.6%. The U.S. is .5%.
- Haitian life expectancy at birth is 62.7 years compared with 78.7 in the U.S.

(Most recent World Bank figures)
In their evaluations of the microfinance program, women replied that because of their participation, they now were able to feed their children, had more money in their pockets and were able to move from selling small goods like candy to larger items.

I’m looking forward to having the rest of the participants complete the program, so we will be able to take on the women who are on the waiting list.

Elizabeth Ratke (repeat year-long volunteer)
Facebook: RJM-Haiti
Blog: http://40ratke.blogspot.com/
Instagram: ratke_attack

I started going to Haiti in 2012 with the Quest program and I instantly fell in love. I went back in 2013 and did the camp again. I graduated college in 2014, then decided to put my masters on hold, start Creole lessons and to go to Haiti for the year. I was beyond excited to head back to my second home!

I decided to make a playground for the children - a place they could finally call their own - a place they could go and just be a kid and have fun.

The outpouring from people was amazing and over 2,000 dollars was raised!

We started building the playground the end of April and it took us two weeks. It went so fast because the whole Haitian community was involved, working every minute.

The best feeling in the world was seeing the children play on it for the first time. They were so happy, and loving life! Then when they came up and thanked me, I just cried I was so overwhelmed with emotion.

I want to thank all the donors who have given to the Haitian community in Gros-Morne! I hope you all know how much you have done for the people of Gros-Morne! Your help and support does not go unseen, and we appreciate it every day.

Corinne Paul

I was so excited about this opportunity to come to Haiti because it allows me to be immersed into the county my parents grew up in, practice a new language, and to make some difference in the lives of children who have very little.

The first thing I noticed about Gros Morne were the little, quiet signs of poverty. Roads are rarely paved, and even the ones that are, tend to be littered with potholes. Piles of trash burn on the sides of the road because there aren’t garbage disposal services. People's clothes are clean, but a closer look may reveal tears and holes at the seams, making it obvious that they don't own other options - a humble reminder that most of the problems my friends and I experience in the U.S., aren't nearly as serious as we make them out to be.
Francesca Singleton (year-long volunteer)
Facebook: Maison Bon Samaritain
Blog: Myyearingrosmorne.blogspot.com
Instagram: @frankiemae0321

As a Quest Volunteer, I serve the most vulnerable individuals in my community, those at Maison Bon Samaritain, or House of the Good Samaritan.

This facility provides the most basic needs to 21 elderly and disabled individuals who were cast out of their homes and greater local community because of their disabilities.

I’ve learned about their quiet suffering and their daily internal reminders of all the things they cannot do. But my faith taught me that each person has potential, regardless of any physical or mental ailment.

I developed a plan to improve the quality of their lives by renovating an unused space, to provide a community room where they can learn, practice new skills and engage in community with each other.

The plan included hiring a local craftswoman to teach the residents new skills and continue to provide quality activities for them after my year of service is complete.

The goal was to raise $1500 and $1,670 was received!

I bought furniture/supplies for the room which includes 36 new chairs, two long tables, 1 game table (because I can’t even begin to describe how much these men love their dominoes!), a TV and a DVD player. The rest of the money will be spent on materials and craftswoman Madam Deny’s salary for at least 6 months.

The community room was used even before the final coat of yellow paint was put on the patched walls.

Residents watched a movie on a bed sheet taped to the wall and with refreshments on a table in front.

Sometimes you think you’re not doing enough for the people you serve, questioning if what you’re doing really matters. Yet, I’ve begun to entertain a entirely different perspective - perhaps it isn’t about the big things at all - perhaps it’s about the little things.

Haiti Mission Fund donations are tax-deductible.

Donations can be made online at: www.rjm-us.org, click on “contribute to RJM” in blue box, then click the “Donate Now” button and specify “RJM Haiti Fund”.

Donations can be mailed to:
Haiti Mission Fund
Religious of Jesus and Mary
821 Varnum Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017

We look forward to updating you in our Winter issue on the impact your donations have had on these other programs of the Haiti Mission Fund:
- Acadien Primary School
- Agricultural and Reforestation Projects
- Alma Mater Hospital (Facebook: Alma Mater Hospital)
- Arts and Crafts Workshop for Young Women
- Arts and Crafts Worship for Young Men
- Atelier Sewing Workshop
- Dental and Eye Clinic
- Mobile Clinic
- Jesus-Mary School and Chacho Annex
- Prostheses Center for Amputees

But, if you prefer to be removed from the mailing, please contact Molly at (202) 526-3203 or mshakeri@rjmusa.org. For questions about Camp Claudine or year-long volunteering, please contact Sr. Rita Ricker, RJM at rricker@rjmusa.org.