



## Winter 2014 Newsletter

Dear Friend,

Season's Greetings from Haiti where, despite growing political and economic uncertainty, HELP continues to thrive, inside the classroom and out. For the 2013/2014 school year, more than 40% of students made the Dean's List for at least one semester, and almost 25% made the HELP Honor Roll, which means they made the Dean's List at their university, AND averaged 80% or above in their HELP classes. This is a remarkable achievement, especially considering that our students have a heavier course load than their non-HELP classmates.

Academic success is necessary, but not sufficient, to achieve HELP's mission. Our greatest success occurs outside the classroom. Below you can read about Nephtaly Pierre-Louis' ('17) engagement in public policy, which brought him on his first ever trip abroad to Azerbaijan, and Daphnée Charles' ('13) work on launching an environmental awareness campaign with some of Haiti's most popular musicians. It is because of accomplishments like these that HELP is receiving powerful endorsements; New York Times' columnist Nicholas Kristof featured HELP in his recent column, "[The Gift of Education](#)."

We also give you a behind the scenes look at our ambitious project to develop "Bazla," our new student database, which made us realize the depth and complexity of HELP's daily operations.

Students, alumni, partners, volunteers, and supporters like you, are all essential ingredients to HELP's recipe. In this season of giving, and giving thanks, we are happy to announce that thanks to a generous donor, all gifts made before the end of the year will be matched, up to a total of \$50,000!

Thank you for your contributions to our collective success and Happy Holidays from all of us at HELP.

Conor

## Nephtaly Pierre's "Voice of Youth"

Having the fortune to be raised by a mother who emphasized the importance of education, Nephtaly Pierre-Louis (Economics 2017) seized every educational opportunity that came his way.

In primary and secondary school he excelled in all his classes, allowing him to attend the best schools in his home city of Jérémie on Haiti's south-western peninsula. But it was not until he was accepted to HELP and began the leadership class that he was able to fully appreciate the values of civic responsibility and social entrepreneurship and their potential to transform his country.

"Young people need to be made aware of how to engage with their community and the world of work," he says. "We currently lack the framework to develop our potential and are too much like robots. We should be striving to be job creators not just job seekers."

This interest in policy has lead Nephtaly to seek opportunities to precipitate change amongst his peers. Browsing the [Opportunity Desk](#) website this past June, Nephtaly came across a six month internship as a blogger for "Voices of Youth" founded by UNICEF in 1995, and after consulting with his HELP advisor he applied and was selected for the position. Nephtaly considers it a privilege to be the sole representative of Haiti amongst the 30 interns.

Inspired by his experiences from childhood and at HELP especially Nephtaly has submitted [20 articles](#) on a wide range of topics including education, community development, economics, equal rights, public health, and climate change. In these posts, he outlines the prevailing issues for Haitians and highlights the aspects particularly relevant to young people, often calling on his generation to become involved and



offering ideas, perspective, and solutions to Haitian leaders. This creative outlet for critical thinking and investigative writing has proven to be the perfect forum for debate, where Nephtaly has had the chance to learn from and inspire others. It has also allowed him to get to know himself better and given him the confidence to delve into complicated issues like the informal

economy, and the government's inaction on youth policy. His favorite post explored Haiti's political history and its influence on modern democratic elections.

When Nephtaly heard that the UN was to convene the first global forum on youth policies in Azerbaijan in October, he jumped at the chance to put himself forward as a delegate. It was a tough selection process, but Nephtaly was one of 200 delegates from 165 countries chosen from 4,700 applicants. Wrapped up in his first winter coat, flying for the first time on his first trip abroad, he set off with high hopes. He returned with a bounty of knowledge on how to monitor, evaluate and improve the status quo and ideas on how to transform the formulaic and staid education system in Haiti. He would like to see a dynamic curriculum

### All Gifts Matched!

HELP is excited to announce that we have received an end-of-year matching grant.

An anonymous donor is matching all gifts through the end of the year, up to a total of \$50,000.

[\*\*Renew your support now and your gift will have double the impact for students in Haiti.\*\*](#)

### Help HELP through AmazonSmile

HELP is now registered with AmazonSmile.

Go to [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) to select HELP as your preferred charity, and 0.5% of the price of eligible AmazonSmile purchases will go to support our students.

***Every penny makes a difference!***

and engaging teaching methods including volunteering programs and sports activities to inspire a love for home and country.

In November, along with fellow HELP students Witchelle Charles and Anne-Martine Augustin, Nephtaly attended the Elan Ayiti youth forum where he addressed the audience on his recent experience in Azerbaijan.

With all the inspiring experiences he has had of late, Nephtaly reflects on how different life would be for him if it weren't for the lessons and opportunities he has been exposed to at HELP. As an only child growing up in sheltered surroundings he admits, "My eyes were closed. I was not exposed to the reality of life, so it was at first difficult to adapt. Now I am more open to people and the world thanks to HELP. The youth of today and tomorrow are Haiti's inevitable future; I hope my contribution will help pave the way for positive change that comes from within the Haitian population itself."

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## Alumna's Video Brings National Attention to Climate Change

"We're in danger...now is the time to act," the music urges as the camera pans above the Kenscoff mountains in a vibrant reminder of all that could be lost.



Led by Daphnée Charles (Agro-Economics 2013), Program Officer with Panos Caribbean, the "Nou An Danje' (We are in Danger) video launched in November as campaign to inspire citizens and political leaders to adapt to climate change, slow environmental degradation, and preserve the country's biodiversity.

The project began with the recruiting and training of 10 "Atis pou Anviwònman" or Artists for the Environment, including such popular Haitian singers as Bélo, Jean Jean

Roosevelt, BIC, Princess Eud, and Nathalie Jean. In July, after a workshop on climate change and biodiversity in Haiti, they worked on the draft lyrics proposed by Panos and created the melody and chorus. Daphnée and the artists then had two recording sessions and after a 13-hour day filming in the mountains of Kenscoff, the first phase of the project was complete.

At the official launch of the video, Daphnée and the participating artists received word of widespread flooding in the North of Haiti. When a Facebook follower sent shocking pictures of an inundated Cap Haitian with a brief note "Men Bagay la" (There it is), the truth of We are in Danger and the necessity of their initiative was clear. The flooding in the north served as an unfortunately compelling introduction of the Artists for the Environment project to the public. In less than 12 hours, the video had an unprecedented impact on the social networks as more than a hundred shares, Tweets, and words of encouragement and congratulation echoed across the country.

As HELP Country Director Garry Delice watched the video for the first time, he felt a deep sense of pride. He remembered the young Daphnée who almost wasn't offered a HELP scholarship because she did not have a phone to receive the call inviting her for an interview. "Since then," he notes proudly, "Daphnée has demonstrated a strong commitment to her community and to sharing her talents." As Garry points out, Haiti is ranked first among the most endangered on the 'Climate Change and Environmental Risk Atlas' and approximately 50% of the population is illiterate; the Panos Caribbean initiative is remarkable for using accessible language and culturally relevant material to disseminate a critical message.

American actress Connie Britton, UNDP goodwill ambassador, was so impressed by "Atis Pou Anviwonman" that she invited the artists to perform the song during her visit to Port-Au-Prince in December.

As a young environmental advocate, Daphnée believes firmly that “we need to protect what we have. Haiti is facing some difficult challenges but we still have richness and biodiversity that we need to preserve for ourselves and future generations.” As a HELP student, Daphnée interned with the Seguin Foundation where she worked with rural populations to slow the cutting of trees for charcoal, advising community members on cost efficient alternative fuels and educating them on the negative impacts of charcoal. She continued this work through her undergraduate thesis, which explored the use of sweet sorghum as a source of alternative energy.

Now, with Panos Caribbean and their partners, (the United Nations Programme for Development, the Marc Arthur Foundation, the Audubon Society Haiti, the Civil Society Platform on Climate Change and the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund, under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment) Daphnée hopes to continue educating Haitians on the importance of preserving biodiversity and encouraging behavior change. Panos Caribbean plans to organize environmental education programs and public concerts in all 10 of Haiti’s departments, ending with a closing ceremony in Port-au-Prince.

## BazLa: Improving the Way HELP Serves Students

In addition to our students’ latest activities and accomplishments month, we’d also like to tell you about a behind-the-scenes project that is coming to fruition after nearly two years of work. We talked to Eric Goldhagen of [Openflows Community Technology Cooperative](#) who told us about his experience building “BazLa,” HELP’s brand new, student database.

### How did the collaboration start?

**Eric:** My co-worker Mark Libkuman and I were in Haiti for the first ever Haiti Hackathon put on by Digital Democracy in January 2013 and the day after the Hackathon we sat down with (Executive Director) Conor and (Deputy Country Director) Amber; we had a long meeting to discuss the ins and outs of HELP and outline the project.

### What was the problem?

**Eric:** HELP had three or four separate systems and none of them were able to handle the complexity of the operations. A tool was needed that could assist staff in their work coordinating and keeping track of everything from student activities, to the support given to each student, and relationships with four separate universities – a tool that could grow as HELP continues to grow and expand.

### Where did you begin?

**Eric:** The first step was to compile a comprehensive list of the existing open source software for Student Information Systems (SIS) but it turned out that none of the existing products were flexible enough to handle the wide range of services offered by HELP so we turned to creating our own system. We began with a combination of Open Source/Free Software tools; CiviCRM (a relationship manager commonly used by non-profits & NGOs) and Drupal (a content management system or CMS), which we customized to meet HELP’s organizational structure and processes. This forms the core of what we call BazLa in Creole, or The Base. The next step was to integrate additional software tools suited to some of HELP’s other activities. For example, Moodle courseware manages all of HELP’s academic offerings including the four-year ESL and Leadership programs as well as the two-year IT curriculum, and KOHA is an Integrated Library System that monitors HELP’s books and resources as they are loaned out to students.

### Students Named to Top 10 Young Haitians List

Out of more than 400 applicants, two HELP students made the list of 10 Outstanding Young Haitians 2014 by the Haiti chapter of Junior Chamber International.

**Congratulations Anne Martine Augustine and Daniel Tilius!**



**Do all these systems work seamlessly with each other?**

**Eric:** Not yet. Right now, there is communication from BazLa to Moodle and KOHA so that student information and accounts exist across the platforms and don't need to be re-entered or duplicated. We are working on having KOHA also send information back to BazLa so that the systems are fully integrated.

**This sounds really complicated.**

**Eric:** It is. It's probably the most wide reaching project we've ever done and seeing it installed, used by HELP, and working the way it we hoped it would is very exciting. It's why we do this.

**What was the process like?**

**Eric:** At Openflows, we operate on a user-centric building process where we involve the costumers and the users from the very beginning. For BazLa, we put together a working prototype even in the development stage so that the HELP staff could provide feedback and collaborate on ideas at each step. We worked through failures and missteps together that helped lead to a stronger end result. Together we designed this system that could handle all the various transactions and records that HELP staff manages every day and we even improved some HELP procedures to make them more efficient. In January 2014 we went to Haiti and built the BazLa server and a battery backup system and we returned in July to train the staff and work out any kinks before new students arrived. We will be back again in January 2015 for some follow-up training.

**What were some of the major challenges you encountered?**

**Eric:** The system as a whole was a challenge. Trying to create something that would work and would be usable by staff was very difficult. We also wanted to have a finished product that was sustainable, that could be maintained by HELP's IT department and expanded for increased student body and additional programs added in the future. By far the most difficult piece of this project was the class scheduling software. The HELP Academic department asked if we could build a tool that would compare students' university schedules and find common availabilities when they could attend their English, Leadership, and IT classes. The math necessary for that is amazing and I wasn't sure it would work. But it did! And now HELP is able to have fewer sections of each class with more students in each for a more complete and dynamic experience.

**Where is the project headed from here?**

**Eric:** Phase I, primarily concerned with managing the advisor-student relationships, is finished. Phase II, which involves linking the academic department, the library, and other student requests is nearly complete. Looking ahead, Phase III will focus on coordinating and tracking HELP's extensive recruitment process and after that we will turn our attention to HELP alumni, building them their own "dashboard" where they can submit updates on their jobs and other projects as well as find job openings that HELP has heard about.

**Has your experience at HELP changed your view of Haiti?**

**Eric:** Absolutely. I had very little experience with Haiti before I began this project but now ... it's hard to put into words but I suppose the best way to put it is this: every time I go to Haiti now, I try to bring more and more people so they can experience Haiti too. I brought a team to run the 1<sup>st</sup> annual Haiti Marathon last January and we'll run again in January 2015!

**Volunteer Profile:  
Lydia Peyton Jones**

As soon as I heard of HELP's mission I realized that volunteering my time would undoubtedly be a valuable experience.

When I first encountered the talented staff and inspirational students, committed to the vision of a better future for Haiti, it quickly became clear just how special the next 13 weeks were going to be!

HELP's mission is, in short, incredible. With the rare benefit of insight from both international and grassroots influences, I have seen how it has been possible to make a tangible difference to so many worthy young Haitians. The enthusiasm, attitudes and academic results of the students speak volumes. Their love of life, despite all the hardship they have faced, is truly admirable; their positivity infectious.

Adapting to the hustle and bustle of Port-au-Prince was exciting and challenging in equal measure, but with the help from a lot of friendly faces I was able to traverse linguistic and cultural boundaries.

I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity to contribute and I intend to go out to spread the good word of HELP to whatever corner of the world I find myself in next.