SPRING 2011 NEWSLETTER
Designing a Better Future

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As we move beyond the one-year anniversary of the earthquake, we are beginning to realize exactly how much it has impacted us and how long it will take to truly "return to normal." For example, the medical school and the business school at the State University of Haiti just finished entrance exams in March (they had been closed since the earthquake), so students at these schools lost more than a full year. HELP students were luckier than most because we were able to place them in jobs and internships, but this has pushed back graduation for them and their classmates by at least a year. At the universities that were able to resume classes in 2010, many professors were unable to return after the quake so several schools continue to operate on a reduced schedule, which has made it difficult for students to take a full course load and will, in many cases, push back their graduation date.

In the midst of these difficulties, our students continue to make impressive strides. In March, senior James Paul oversaw the completion of what he tells us is Haiti's first suspension footbridge, agriculture student Daphnée Charles earned a very competitive internship with a French agricultural research institute, and four students recently graduated from NetHope Academy, a competitive certification program for IT students, where they made up more than 10% of the inaugural class! You can read more about James and other good news below.

Building Back Better: One Bridge at a Time

HELP student James Paul & Professor Brian Cloyd inaugurate the Ti-Peligre footbridge on March 6, 2011.

Former Haitian Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis recently told a conference audience that in 2008, when the government was planning recovery efforts following a series of hurricanes and floods, she could not find a single engineer qualified to oversee the task of rebuilding the country's destroyed bridges that connect Haitians to supplies, healthcare, and schools. Thanks to HELP and our great partners, this is now changing. Read more

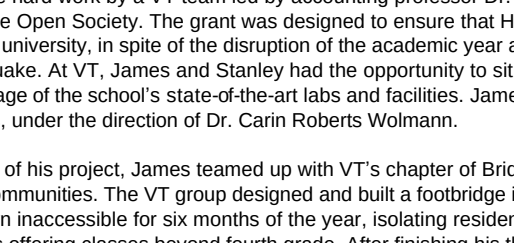
FOKAL & HELP Team Up to Support Haiti's University System

UP Director Josiane Hudicourt-Barnes

In the wake of the 2010 earthquake that weakened Haiti's already fragile higher education system, HELP teamed up with the Fondation Connaissance et Liberte (FOKAL) to create the University Partnerships office (UP), designed to organize and facilitate working relationships between Haitian universities and institutions abroad.

The generous post-quake outpouring of support by higher education institutions in the US and other countries was welcome but the lack of coordination threatened to overwhelm a devastated system. Read more

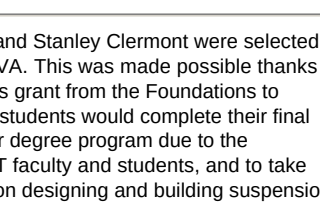
Voilà Strengthens Commitment to HELP



For the 2010-2011 school year, 20 HELP students are attending university in Haiti thanks to the generous support of Haitian cell carrier Voilà. In November 2010, the Voilà Foundation held a press conference to highlight the latest chapter in their longstanding partnership with HELP. Read more

My Freshman Year

By Cathy J. Sharp; HELP Director of Development



My "freshman" year at HELP was unlike any job or, for that matter, any experience I have ever had. After phone interviews for the position of Development Director, I met Conor Bohan, HELP's founder and Executive Director, for the first time on Saturday, January 9, 2010. I accepted the position that day, looking forward to my start date of February 1, to be followed shortly thereafter by my first trip to Haiti. When we shook hands and parted, neither one of us could have known how the world would change for HELP and Haiti just three days later on January 12. Read more

Voilà Foundation Helps HELP, Cont'd : Robin Padberg, the CEO of Voila, presented HELP's Country Director, Garry Delice, with a check for $100,000 for the HELP student sponsorships. The event was attended by all Voilà sponsored students, including Marie-Michelle Montout, a fourth-year education student, who spoke about the impact of her HELP scholarship and the importance of doing well in school.

Marie-Michelle chose to study education because she wants to improve Haiti's education system from the ground up. After she graduates from Quisqueya University, her long-term goal is to create a network of kindergartens in rural areas. "Rural areas are most afflicted by illiteracy, because many kids never get to school," explains the ambitious student, who believes a good education must start "at the base." Making ends meet has always been difficult for Marie-Michelle and her family; her father is dead and her mother can no longer tend their land due to illness, often making Marie-Michelle's HELP stipend the only source of steady income for her family. Marie-Michelle is determined to succeed so she studies "all the time," managing only five or six hours of sleep a night. "Of course it's a lot of work," she says, but she knows that what she's doing is essential to Haiti's future. (Check out more HELP student profiles.)

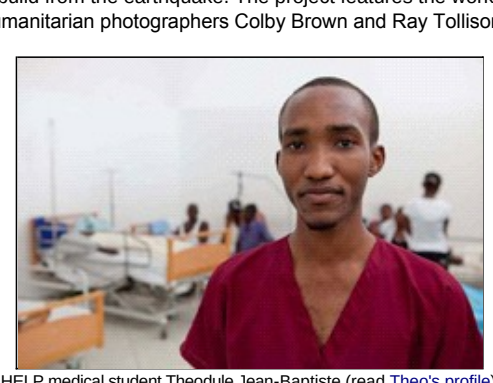
The Voilà Foundation is HELP's largest corporate scholarship sponsor. Voilà Foundation President Bernard Fils-Aimé says he considers university education to be "essential to bring Haiti out of poverty and into the 21st century." HELP is grateful for the Foundation's investment in the future leaders of Haiti.

Faces of Haiti: Through Art and Photography

May 6 - June 11, 2011

Calling all HELP friends in or around Denver, Colorado (or if you have friends or family nearby)! Please mark your calendars to support the upcoming photography exhibition at EventGallery 910Arts, including images of HELP students at work and play.

Faces of Haiti is designed to raise awareness and funds for small non-governmental organizations working to recover and rebuild from the earthquake. The project features the work of humanitarian photographers Colby Brown and Ray Tollison.



HELP medical student Theodule Jean-Baptiste (read Theo's profile); photo by Colby Brown.

Both Colby and Ray have contributed their work to the newly revamped HELP website: www.uhelp.net.

EVENTGALLERY 910ARTS: 910 SANTA FE DRIVE DENVER, CO 80204 / 303.815.1779

Building Back Better, Cont'd : This past August, HELP engineering students James Paul and Stanley Clermont were selected to complete their senior thesis projects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute (VT) in Blacksburg, VA. This was made possible thanks to some hard work by a VT team led by accounting professor Dr. Brian Cloyd and a generous grant from the Foundations to Promote Open Society. The grant was designed to ensure that HELP's fourth- and fifth-year students would complete their final year of university, in spite of the disruption of the academic year and forced extension of their degree program due to the earthquake. At VT, James and Stanley had the opportunity to sit in on classes, work with VT faculty and students, and to take advantage of the school's state-of-the-art labs and facilities. James's thesis project focused on designing and building suspension bridges, under the direction of Dr. Carin Roberts Wolmann.

As part of his project, James teamed up with VT's chapter of Bridges to Prosperity, an organization that builds bridges in isolated rural communities. The VT group designed and built a footbridge in Ti-Peligre in Haiti's Central Plateau, where heavy rains make the town inaccessible for six months of the year, isolating residents from medical care, the region's central marketplace, and schools offering classes beyond fourth grade. After finishing his thesis in December, James returned to Haiti and worked on the ground in Ti-Peligre. James had done experiments with various cement mixes at VT and so he became the person responsible for making sure the construction supervisor followed engineering specifications on the bridge. In January, the VT team left Haiti to return to school and James was the only engineer on site; the project was completed under his supervision in February. Professor Cloyd said that James was a "lynchpin for communication and supervision" for the project.

"It was a great experience for me," says James. "It is really exciting to see something on paper become reality. Now, I am more efficient in planning and managing a jobsite." James tells us that the Ti-Peligre bridge is the first suspended footbridge in all of Haiti. James is now talking about establishing a chapter of Bridges to Prosperity at Quisqueya University and Bridges to Prosperity is looking at ways they can continue to benefit from James's newfound expertise for three additional bridges they are planning to build in the region.

Today, HELP supports 33 engineering students. Thanks to you, the expertise required for these and other important projects is now homegrown and will be accessible for decades to come. This is true sustainability.

The children of Ti-Peligre now have year-round access to school.

Click here to see a slideshow of the Bridges to Prosperity project: http://www.bridgestoprosperity.org/See-Our-Work/haiti/project087-ti-peligre-suspended-bridge/project087.htm

Featured HELP Student: Josée-Narlie Pascal

Field of Study: agro-environment
University: Quisqueya
Class of: 2012
Hometown: Port-au-Prince
Sponsor: Haitian Timoun Foundation

Josée-Narlie admits that "living and studying in Haiti became more and more difficult" this year, but she has risen to the challenge. Following the earthquake, Josée-Narlie moved into one of HELP's student houses. "We lived together, ate together, and shared everything," she says. "It was a very important communal experience that I'll never forget."

In addition to her academic courses, Josée-Narlie also participated in ESL, Spanish and leadership classes at HELP, which she credits with helping her to learn how to make better decisions and get more involved in her schoolwork. After graduation, Josée-Narlie wants to work to protect Haiti's environment, combating deforestation and pollution, and improving waste management. She feels that real progress can be made by increasing public awareness around resource management through media campaigns, and applying modern strategies and technologies to Haiti's conservation issues.

My Freshman Year, Cont'd : Conor left New York 36 hours later. During his absence, I assisted with as much as I could and focused on getting up to speed as quickly as possible. I approached it with a "just point me in the right direction" attitude, but it was truly learn-as-you-go by necessity.

When my father learned of the organization's mission to provide university education to disadvantaged Haitian students, he was not just excited for me but began enthusiastically reading everything he could about Haiti and the earthquake. At the age of 88, my dad was fairly proficient on his computer but he never quite got the hang of attaching or sending news articles via email, so I think I received a news clipping about Haiti in the mail two to three times a week through the first half of the year at least.

Every time we talked on the phone, he would ask about Haiti, the students, or schools. I really began to believe I had not had any other job in my fundraising career. To be quite honest, at first I was a little baffled by how excited he was about this position. I expressed this once to my sister who reminded me that our dad had attended college thanks to scholarship support, so he had something in common with HELP students. The more I thought about it, I realized something pretty incredible: like so many HELP students, my dad was at the top of his high school class, and he was the first in his family to go to college, which would not have been possible without assistance from others.

In a holiday email at the end of 2010, I told my HELP colleagues about my dad, saying it was amazing what a young man from rural West Virginia had in common with the bright, talented students of HELP. My father passed away on October 2, but both he and the mission of HELP remain daily inspirations to me. Education opened a new world for him and, thanks to you, our readers and donors, it will open new worlds for HELP students and for Haiti as well.

I hope you will consider making a gift in honor or memory of a loved one today.

FOKAL & HELP Team Up, Cont'd : This month, HELP sat down with Josiane Hudicourt-Barnes, who was selected in January as the first UP Director, to talk about the UP's work and her role.

HELP: What inspired you to take on the position as Director of the UP?
Josiane Hudicourt-Barnes: I have to say that FOKAL and HELP attracted me - I respect their work. The earthquake has shown how poorly prepared we were in terms of construction, and it made more evident many other problems of competency. Haiti has a lack of sufficiently educated professionals, and a more educated population will be more demanding of the government. I felt that my ability to communicate well in both cultures, and my 35-year professional career in the field of education made me a good fit. My life goal has always been to improve education for Haitian youth both, in Haiti and abroad.

HELP: How do you view the role of the University Partnerships?
JHB: Many people talk about the larger problems - issues of governance and administration in Haitian education - many organizations come to Haiti with missions that are too large or not defined. My primary role is to help them be realistic. For example, many Haitian universities are just focused on getting a building - some are still operating in temporary plywood shelters. Construction is much harder than destruction. A university in the US cannot offer a building, but several US universities do want to be involved deeply - my job is to help them define their involvement in ways that can be effective.

HELP: Can you give us an example of success to date?
JHP: Recently, we were contacted by a hotel manager who was looking for help providing English language instruction for students who had been admitted to a training program run by the Caribbean Hotel Association. We contacted the Haitian American Institute and found someone to test and train the students to get them ready in time for classes in September. That's an example of a low cost, high impact partnership. The tourism field is poorly served by higher education; there are only two programs in Haiti, and neither provides the kind of hands-on experience that's needed in the field - the training is more theoretical and based on upper management. Our office is working with a university in New York and Haiti Tech [a local trade school] to reframe the curriculum so it's more practical and provides the kind of experience students need.

HELP: Looking forward, what are the changes you see happening within the higher education system in Haiti? What do you hope to see?
JHB: There are a handful of institutions working on reform in the fields of nursing and teacher training that are very encouraging. The current training in both fields is a three-year program that does not award nurses or teachers a Bachelor's degree, which means they are not able to go on for a Master's. That needs to change. I also think that right now there's a kind of expectation that comes from the fact that there will be a new government in the next few months. There has to be change, but that will depend on how demanding we are of our government. We are all hoping that in the next six months, there will be a new way to do things.

As more and more students graduate, we begin to see the seeds of change being planted. Not only in the desperately needed technical skills that they bring to Haiti, but also in their commitment to citizenship. Witness James Paul's desire to continue to bring bridges in isolated rural communities. As the Haitian proverb tells us, "straw by straw the bird builds its nest." Seed by seed the farmer plants the field, and student by student HELP contributes to a better Haiti. Your contributions are essential to our efforts. The math is simple: more contributions = more students = greater change.

Thank you for helping us plant these seeds, and please consider a donation as we continue to grow opportunity together.

Conor