



HAITIAN EDUCATION & LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

From Poverty To Prosperity Through Education

HELP Update Winter 2007

Dear Friends,

I would like to introduce myself as the new Director of Development at the Haitian Education and Leadership Program; I'm pleased to have met some of you at the Haitian art auction in New York last month. If you were not able to join us, you can get a flavor of the event by viewing the [HaitianXchange video](#). You'll see some of the performances that captivated our 150 guests, including the dulcet tones of Manze Dayila and a special appearance by the dance and drumming troupe Ayiti Dans Ansam'm.

We are also delighted with the coverage in the Nov. 28 issue of *Caribbean Life*. This annual fundraiser generated a lot of enthusiasm and helped spread the word on HELP's valuable work. We are pleased to report that this event raised over \$24,000. On behalf of HELP and the entire Board, I would like to extend my appreciation to all who supported HELP's efforts to break the cycle of poverty in Haiti. A special thanks goes to the members of the committee who made it all happen.

Prior to the art auction, right after the start of the school year in Haiti, I visited HELP in action. Even though the day I arrived was a holiday celebrating former Emperor Jean Jacques Dessalines, both staff and students were busy at the HELP center in downtown Port-au-Prince. From the moment I walked in the reception area, passing by the walls covered with framed copies of students' honor-roll certificates, I was proud to be a part of HELP's effort to provide educational opportunities.

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Wall of honor at HELP Center



A rural school

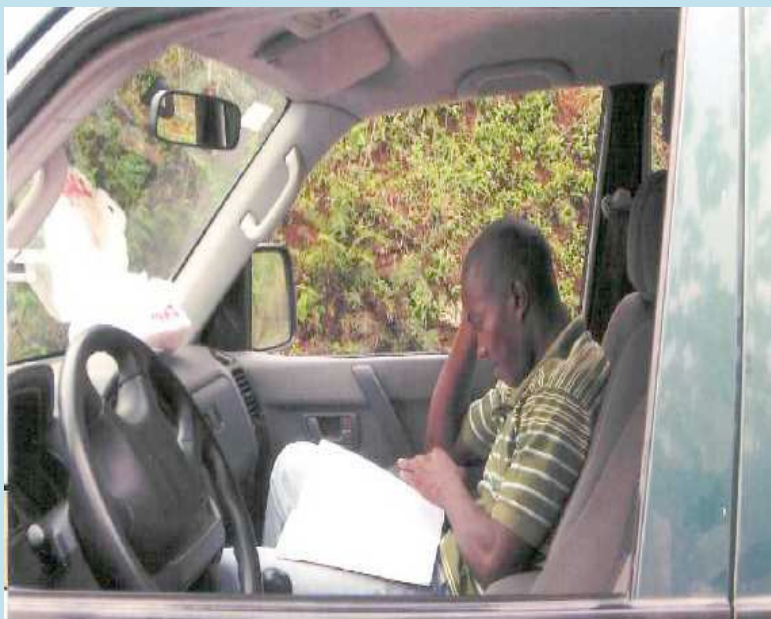
Students busily at work in the computer lab were honing their skills while a few more performed their volunteer service sweeping the floors and doing other tasks. At the same time, these highly motivated young people are all either learning or perfecting their third language at the center; since I was not able to converse with them in either French or Kreyol I relied on their English skills to hear their stories.

During my visit, Daphne Charles, a poised and articulate young woman studying agronomy in Les Cayes and whom many of you read about in the October update, was profiled in a recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education. With her stylish looks and cell phone ringing, at first glance she looked like she could easily fit in on an American university campus. But then as I heard her story and met her mother, who sells fish in the local market in Port-au-Prince and supports the family on perhaps \$60 a month in the informal economy, it became clear that for Daphne the HELP scholarship means the difference between a life of extremely limited means and the ability to fulfill her aspirations.

A real highlight of my trip was visiting the family of Elise Oreste out in the countryside. His hometown of Gris Gris is literally beyond the end of the road, about 50 miles southwest of Port-au-Prince, but so remote it took us about eight hours by car, with a final push on foot to get there. On the first leg of our journey, traffic ground to a standstill because of an overturned truck blocking both lanes. While the rest of our group made friends with local children at the side of the road or walked up to watch the truck being up righted, Elise sat alone in the car, poring over his open texts. He had just begun work on an engineering degree at Quisqueya University and he wanted to take advantage of the spare time. It is not surprising that HELP students recognize the importance of higher education and are motivated to make the most of every opportunity.

Engineering student Elise Oreste studying while stuck at the roadside

The previous day, when I learned that the university does not offer *any* programs or services beyond the classes, it became even clearer to me how important HELP is in the lives of our students. Without the HELP library, many of these students would not be in a position to obtain the books needed for their coursework. As most of you know, with no plumbing, electricity, or telephones, impoverished rural Haiti is truly a different world. For many, books are a sought-after luxury.



When we finally arrived at Elise's home, he received a hero's welcome from extended family and friends. HELP Director Garry Delice recalled that when he came out to recruit in this area, Elise's family did not know what a University was. But like all parents, they wanted the best for their son and sent him off to the city to build his future.

One of Elise's fellow freshman at HELP is Josée Pascal from Fort Liberty in Haiti's Northeast corner. Her mother is a grade school teacher and her father is a retired headmaster. Perhaps the family emphasis on educational accounts for the fact that Josée was as the top of her class throughout high school. The family's monthly income is \$300 which supports Josée and her four siblings. In her application essay Josée contrasted Fort Liberty's historic heritage -- the Haitian generals met there in late 2003 after a decisive victory over Napoleon's troops and decided to declare independence --with its modern, moribund economy and dependence on imports from the nearby Dominican Republic. Josée suggested that tourism could be the basis for local development, using the story of national independence to create economic independence. Josée's trip to HELP for the entrance interview was her first time ever in the capital. She is studying accounting and is eager to return to the northeast with HELP to recruit more students from her region.

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Elise with his family



Madame Oreste proud of her son

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We are also pleased to welcome new Board member, Grace Lang, to HELP. Grace brings 20 years of experience in university-level international educational exchange, education development and youth development. Grace has worked for a number of organizations including the World Bank, USAID, and the Girl Scout Council of the Nation's Capital. While living in Haiti, she developed and managed programs providing employability training to Haitian youth. She has also worked in Namibia and Malawi. Her knowledge and expertise in international development will bring a new dimension to our work.

HELP is seeking to increase the number of scholarships and deepen the leadership services we offer. If you have any suggestions or questions, please feel free to contact me directly at rstupel@haitianeducation.org.

Thanks to the generosity of friends like you, HELP is able to make a difference in the lives of top-performing Haitian students, their families, and their communities. With your continued support, HELP will continue to provide access to education for students like Daphne, Elise and Josée. **Please either make a donation directly on line, or send your check today to HELP, 136 Madison Avenue, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10016.** Your donation is tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Wishing you all the best for the New Year.