

A Gift of Shoes Gives Hope for Haitian Children

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Club member Jim Belshaw, along with Dave Harrison, a Telus Community Ambassador, Louise Elliot, and Sandra Weening-Pauling, all from Kelowna, recently returned home from a trip to Haiti with the organization Soles4Souls. The team left on October 19th, arriving one day later; and then returned on October 26th.



While in Haiti, Jim enjoyed his time visiting orphanages and schools where he recognized how destitute the children were in Haiti and how much these children and their families needed our support. Jim appreciated that he was able to present US\$1000 through a sponsorship of the #barefoot4Them by BDO Canada to an orphanage; and US\$1500, funds raised by donations from members of the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise, Capri Insurance and small donations from friends and family, to a school. Some of the funds donated to the school were used to purchase lumber which was then used to construct student desks.



A message from Dave Harrison, reprinted below, provides an excellent overview of the experiences the team had while in Haiti.

I went to Haiti from October 20 – 24 with the Souls for Soles organization. It was definitely an eye opener! In the rainy season it's a country of beauty with a land full of exotic fruit, root vegetables, flowers and mountains. It's another story in the dry season.

Port au Prince, the capital city, with over 900,000 people still has 200,000 living in tents after the 2010 earthquake. The country has no real economy and 80% of the population is under 18 years of age. There appeared to be limited fresh running water and sanitation as I saw many people bathing in the rivers. People make their living by selling goods (tires, hardware, food, clothes) on the side of the road. There are very few stores or marketplaces to buy basic essentials. They have no transportation so they carry everything on their head (chairs, mattresses, bags of rice, etc.) The average income is only \$1 a day.

Many of the children are able to go to school but must have a uniform and shoes. When you look at their shoes they look great from the outside. However, when you look at the soles they are worn out and full of holes! This was very noticeable in the many orphanages we visited. These kids are abandoned by their parents because they can't take care of them.

On our first day in Haiti we went to the orphanage, Nos Petits Freres et Souers in Kenscoff, which is home to 700 children. I saw classrooms in a rough brick building with no doors. They have rustic benches and tables and only a chalkboard for the teacher. We fitted kids with over 448 pairs of shoes and 50 gifts that day. My greatest pleasure was seeing these children come in with sad faces and leave with a big smile on their face and a new pair of shoes.



On Day 2 we distributed 150 + shoes at the Haitian American Caucus school in Croix des Bouquets. On Day 3 we distributed 150 pairs and left 80 shoes, clothes and other supplies at My Father's House Orphanage.

At the last school when we entered the class area the children stood and sang "Welcome" in English even though their native language is Creole. We made them all animal balloons which were a big hit! We left several bags of clothing and school supplies.



I was overwhelmed with the poverty, lack of housing and sanitation on this trip. On the other hand I was impressed with their ability to survive with very limited resources. This trip helped me see how the other side of the world lives and I will continue to collect shoes here in Kelowna on their behalf.

More about Soles 4 Souls here - <http://soles4souls.org/>