

Canadian Partners 4 Haiti Focuses on Changing the Lives of Destitute Women in Haiti

Story by Ed Kolybaba
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Beginning shortly after the 2010 Haiti earthquake, five women residing throughout British Columbia and Alberta visited Haiti on different occasions and learned firsthand about the devastation resulting from this earthquake and several others that followed, along with a number of hurricanes and tropical storms, and how the poverty in the country was affecting the health and education of the Haitians. The concerns for the people of Haiti moved these women profoundly to the point where they recognized that it was not enough to just sympathise; it was indeed necessary to take action to make a difference for the distraught Haitians. Energized with this focus, the women began to fundraise to support a number of specific causes, while several of the women visited Haiti to provide hands-on support through leadership, training and guidance. Under the leadership of Judy Douglas, an OR nurse from Vernon, Canadian Friends of OSAPO (Oganizasyon Sante Popilè) was formed as a society in 2013. The name was changed to Canadian Partners 4 Haiti – CP4H in 2018 to comply with CRA in attaining charitable status which was finally received in 2021.

The focus of CP4H is directed to support and care within a remote area of Haiti, two hours north of the capital in hill country, an area challenged by poor communication, dreadful roads, and currently with dangerous gangs. This support involves partnering with OSAPO, a medical facility which provides health care to over 70,000 people, providing supplies and a lunch program for a nearby school and training women at a sewing school at the clinic.

A manager of the OSAPO clinic oversees the program and provides the team with timesheets and receipts which the team pays. A very dedicated teacher who makes her way from Port au Prince twice a week provides the education and training, which must be done through the use of diagrams as seven of the ten women in the sewing program are illiterate. Unfortunately, the treadle machines from China are of poor quality and usually breaking down, yet another challenge for the program.



The challenge for CP4H now is to find ways for the trained women to earn money for their family's livelihood. Linda Frandsen, one of the team members and a Rotarian with the Rotary Club of Kelowna Sunrise recognizes that there is a need to find someone in Haiti to establish contracts with clothing production businesses or to establish a coop to enable the women to be self-employed.

The initial support from the women originated for the clinic when one of the women discovered the clinic during a visit to the country and then went back several times to teach OR nursing techniques. This led to an interest of the women in raising \$10,000 back in the Okanagan in 2016 to provide funds to create a sterilization area at the clinic. Another member of the team had begun to personally support the school with supplies and a lunch program during this period of time. Yet another member visited the school several times beginning in 2012 to help organize the clinic and the school. In 2017, a fourth team member visited OSAPO and then using funds generated by the team, involved the team in sponsoring three ladies at a sewing school in the town and then starting the sewing school at the clinic for ten local ladies. Linda visited the project herself in 2013 and then again in 2018 when she distributed 'Days for Girls' kits.

While the initial fundraising took place with donations from Rotarians and friends through a dinner and auction, selling a block for the new CSR at OSAPO and other events, the team started a unique fundraising activity in 2019, which unfortunately was set aside for 2020 because of the pandemic, but was resurrected just recently in 2021.

Back in 2019, the team rented a hall, gathered their friends, and made 250 pies which were sold at \$15 each, and which provide sufficient funds to support the school of another year. This year, with apples from the adopted trees from Rotary club member David Raye's orchard, donated boxes from Save-on-Foods, and a fantastic pastry chef who made all the pastry, two teams, one in Kelowna consisting of eight women, and another in Vernon, together made 320 apple pies, generating a net profit of \$5050, to pay for the salaries, rent, and some repairs for the next year.



Through the dedication and concern for those less fortunate, CP4H has made a great impact in changing the lives of women in Haiti in just such a short time. What a blessing these women, who each brought their strengths to the team, made in responding to the needs of those less fortunate.