



Special Issue: Relief to Displaced People in Haiti

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Distribution and Relocation

Over the past month we have seen a shift in our emergency relief as some camps have emptied, with the people moving on to other areas of Port-au-Prince or, if they are able, to the provinces. Other camps have either grown or shrunk in size. Currently we are serving 11,440 displaced persons in 14 camps near our Bourdon Center. We are providing latrines, tarps, food, water, diapers, vitamins, clothes, and ongoing medical care to those most in need. In April and May 2010, eight of the camps are being forced to relocate due to the threat of flooding from the approaching rains. Currently our community organizers spend time each day meeting the camp leaders and the women, finding out what is most needed, what are the biggest concerns, and then translating this information into action as we find ways to help the people find solutions.



Children from the Sitron camp

The Sitron Camp

Sitron is one of 14 camps that AMURTEL supports. Many of the people in the camp had decent housing before the quake. Now they are living in very small spaces divided by metal and cotton sheets. Roofs leak, there is mud everywhere and preparing food is a huge challenge. But even within these grim conditions we see signs of hope – people laughing, women clustering around a new-born baby, small shops selling basic supplies and children playing soccer.

In a recent women's meeting led by our community organizers, 200 women were shown how to use new water filters that would help reduce the increasing number of intestinal problems our medical teams are treating. The women took turns speaking of their situation and almost all requested help in getting back to work. In fact, this was a common request from everyone in Haiti. No one wants to continue relying on outside aid. All are anxious to find a job or rebuild their own businesses that were lost in the earthquake.

Medical Camps

In March and April, AMURT and AMURTEL sent out mobile medical teams to the various tent villages we are working with. They treated not just earthquake-related injuries, but also illnesses and chronic conditions that for lack of proper medical care have gone untreated for years.

The need for ongoing medical care is great, with our teams treating an average of 100 people a day. The problems have shifted from crushed limbs to illnesses more associated with extreme poverty and cramped living conditions.

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AMURTEL medical team in the Bourdon valley

For more information on AMURTEL's work in Haiti please visit www.amurtelhaiti.org.

Child-Friendly Spaces in Haiti

Disruption in Young Lives

Michelene, a nine-year old girl now living with her mother and two siblings in a displaced-persons camp, smiles softly as she nudges her room monitor—a local teacher from the same camp—over to her table where she just finished painting a triangle tessellation. She beams a huge smile as the monitor holds it up, and her classmates look on approvingly. Michelene is just one of over 4000 children who currently attend integrated education programs facilitated by AMURT in Haiti at various camps and neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince.

Like over one million others, Michelene's home was destroyed in the January 12th earthquake. Tragically she lost two of her younger siblings when her family's home collapsed. Michelene, her mother, sister and brother survived the quake. Four days after, the family collected a few family treasures from the rubble, and moved to the camp where they continue to live in a small shelter built with sticks and tarps.

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Michelene attends AMURT's Child-Friendly Space program

Meeting the Children's Needs

Children continue to face hardships and on-going threats to their mental and physical well being with little respite. In the days immediately following the earthquake, it became clear that our efforts needed to focus on the most vulnerable population, the children, and our Child-Friendly Space program was born.



Team-building games foster joy and community

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"Child-Friendly Space", or CFS, is a term used in the international disaster relief community to describe a place where various types of support can be provided to children in a time of severe crisis. For the AMURT CFSs, we defined our goals in an integrated way, striving to address the whole child; that is, the educational, psycho-social, emotional and spiritual needs of those who experience hardship by providing safety, security and a transition to normalcy. Like all AMURT programs, our approach with these projects began with community engagement, carefully identifying needs, helping the community define their own goals and resources, and then providing integrated solutions that are principally implemented by the community itself.

Given the size and scope of the challenges faced in this disaster, our next step was to identify partners who share our goals and support our guiding principles. For this project, AMURT has partnered with two organizations—Catholic Relief Services, an AMURT partner on multiple past projects in Haiti, including the 2008 Gonaives disaster, and Kinder Not Hilfe, a German based NGO, that has worked with AMURT affiliates in Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis and in Indonesia in response to the 2005 tsunami. This history of collaboration provided a strong foundation for our current work.

Once these partnerships were fully established, our team of community organizers, trainers, coaches and monitors, all Haitian nationals and many of whom were significantly and often tragically impacted by the earthquake, could begin their work. It is this coordinated team, the backbone of the project, that implements the creation of the CFSs. The team begins and ends all decision making processes with community consultation, direction and involvement. All CFS staff are drawn from a pool of applicants identified by the community itself.

In mid-February, when we opened our first CFS at our AMURT base, the air filled with a rush of excitement. Well dressed monitors, in crisply ironed skirts and shirts arrived early to set up the space. Excited but tentative children arrived tightly clasping their parents' hands, and our training team scurried from tent to tent providing materials and coaching our monitors.

In just a few days, the Delmas schoolyard, which had become AMURT's disaster relief headquarters, was transformed from a drab dusty yard full of motorcycles, trucks, boxes and construction materials, into a colorful children's camp filled with energy, smiles, love and hope. In nearly every week since the first CFS opened, we have inaugurated an additional site. Working mostly in displaced-person camps throughout Port-au-Prince, as of May 1, 2010 we are running seven CFSs serving over 4000 children between ages 4 and 13.

Typical Day at a Child-Friendly Space

A typical day at one of our CFSs starts with children gathering in their "home" space for the "Circle of Love", a special time that starts with a guided breathing exercise, and continues with community building activities such as learning new songs, sharing a news item, a greeting or a personal thought. A "class" has 25 children supervised by three monitors. The children travel with their class, rotating through four tents housing different activities where they gain a balanced exposure to various types of learning. Our primary goal is to provide the children with a feeling of safety and security. This is achieved in part through team-building games, partner sharing, quiet reflection and open discussion.



Children create new songs and dances with their monitors

As the CFSs have progressed over time, and in order to prepare the children to a return to regular school in the months ahead, we have begun to introduce more literacy and numeracy skills through a variety of play activities. For example, children read stories together, then create play-dough characters, and finally perform a skit with the characters to extend the story. A typical numeracy activity allows children to string colorful beads for friendship bracelets to learn about counting and patterns. Each day children also pause from the energetic activities to do some relaxing yoga posture. Monitors have been trained to teach basic individual and partner poses to stimulate the child's inner strength. Children finish their day with another round of snacks and group sharing. Often they do not want to leave at the end of the session, pleading to have another round of activity.

An integral component of a successful and transformational program is ongoing professional development. Our team has been providing ample opportunities for professional growth through rigorous training for all monitors and support staff of the CFSs. The program allows time for monitors to work collaboratively to create activity plans for different age groups that involve psychosocial, educational, and creative activities. Monitors receive regular support as on-site trainers circulate throughout the camp sites to model best practices and do side-by-side coaching. They also receive weekly training on topics such as activity planning, positive discipline, self-care, safe touch, active listening, group norms, and play therapy. Our goal is to infuse the curriculum with loving and healing child-centered and experiential activities.

Hopefully, the children who participate in the AMURT CFSs will look back at these past months and remember experiences and feelings that were positive and filled with light and love, and perhaps the scars of the loss and struggles they faced will begin to heal.

For more information on AMURT's work in Haiti please visit www.amurthaiti.org.

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Gifts can transform lives of desperation into lives of hope

Addressing Post Traumatic Stress in Haiti

On March 13, the AMURTEL team went to the Sitron camp as part of an ongoing program to help people with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms). Many are experiencing PTSD, due in part to the many aftershocks that rocked Port-au-Prince regularly for months after the earthquake. On this day, the camp committee announced a women's gathering and the women quickly began spreading large grey tarps on the bare ground. The AMURTEL team had planned deep relaxation exercises and yoga, as well as stress debriefing which was organized by Gretchen from Global Grassroots, who facilitated women's trauma recovery for the survivors of the Rwandan genocide. At first it seemed there would be plenty of room for everyone to spread out. But soon the space on the tarps was completely packed with at least 150 women and girls of all ages. Even the men in the camp had gathered around in interest.



Women in camps learn breath awareness and other de-stress techniques

We opened the gathering by explaining the normal reactions to a stressful event such as the earthquake. We described common experiences, such as trembling, difficulties with sleep, racing heartbeat, over-sensitivity to certain sounds, hyper-alertness etc. The women began nodding empathically and eagerly joined in the discussion; sharing their own experiences vividly. They all expressed great relief at discovering that they were not sick, but rather having a normal reaction to an abnormal event. They listened with keen interest as we described how the stress-regulating system in our bodies, intended to help us survive trauma, can remain active in ways that become unhealthy. We then led the group in a series of breathing exercises, followed by some loosening stretches and yoga exercises. This was followed by a session of relaxation, with slow, regular, timed breathing designed to awaken a relaxation response and turn the stress system "off". The women were elated to share how they felt lighter and rested and hopeful that they would be able to return to normal again. They had learnt techniques they could practice on their own, which were simple and easy to remember. The session ended with singing on a joyful, uplifting note. The singing continued, echoing from the hills even as we walked out of the camp.

Homeopathy in Rural Haiti

The earthquake in Port-au-Prince Haiti has rightfully attracted the attention of the world opinion. But even before the earthquake, the economy was in shambles. There was widespread poverty and Haitians were left to manage their lives with little, if any, government support. This is especially true in remote rural areas and especially in the field of health care.

Therefore AMURT seeks to create a community-based network of homeopathic caregivers; trained in selecting homeopathic remedies specifically useful in common health conditions in rural areas. A pilot project was recently started in Source Chaudé which is located about two hours drive north of Gonaïves. Theoretical training was given to Arnold Isma, a local volunteer, along with hands-on experience through daily clinics conducted in several villages. Arnold Isma, is an example of countless bright Haitian youth, often unable to receive higher education for lack of sufficient government schools and economic resources to attend private colleges. He was orphaned in his early childhood and hasn't yet completed his education. Yet he managed to learn English well by reading whatever books he could get his hands on and listening to English songs.



Arnold (left) at a clinic in Fige

Through the program more than six hundred patients have already been treated, often with speedy results and great satisfaction. Senatus Sentival, a seventy year old woman from Larobe was suffering from chronic lumbar pains, headaches, stomach pain and poor vision due to constant lacrimation. Within two weeks of treatment she reported a remarkable improvement in all her symptoms and no more lacrimation.



APPEAL: Our work to rebuild Haiti continues. Please make a donation to our offices or online.

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