

NIAGARA *this* WEEK

St. Catharines EDITION

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 20, 2010

Vol. 6, Issue 15 | www.niagarathisweek.com | circ. 42,500

Telling Haitians 'they're not alone

BY MIKE ZETTEL
STAFF

When Haiti Missions of Canada first set up in the impoverished Caribbean country in 1995, just after the trade embargo was lifted, conditions on the ground were rough.

The roads were in disrepair, there was virtually no market economy and communication to Canada was reduced to once a month and involved venturing from their base of operations in Leogane to Port-au-Prince to wait in line at a phone booth.

But as bad as that was, charity co-founder Joy Jones said it's even worse now.

"It's devastated now," said Jones, executive program coordinator for the St. Catharines-based charity.

When Tuesday's massive magnitude 7.0 earthquake rocked the country, already the most destitute in the entire Western Hemisphere, it left incredible devastation in its wake, killing untold thousands of people and destroying scores of buildings, including critical government infrastructure.

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NOBODY TO SOMEBODY

Connaught Public School Grade 6 student Kaitlin Blanchfield and Grade 5 student Camryn Asham both did research projects based on the Nobody doll project as part of their character education class. See story, Page 2.

MIKE ZETTEL/STAFF PHOTO

LOCAL NEWS

HAITI

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Since its founding 15 years ago, the local Christian-based charity has built five national churches, which run feeding programs, two primary schools serving 600 children, a small medical clinic, a homeless shelter and an orphanage. The earthquake destroyed most of them and left the rest damaged so bad they will have to be demolished.

Also destroyed was a trade school finished just last December, from which the agency planned to teach 1,000 students a year.

"We're going to have to start from scratch all over again," Jones said.

She first learned of the tragedy after receiving a call Tuesday afternoon from someone watching the news. Jones said she desperately tried to reach some of the 49 Haitians employed by the charity without success, only receiving the first crackly call from the island nation at 2 a.m. Wednesday.

"Just hearing his voice was a relief, knowing we had some kind of communication," she said.

Since then word has continued to trickle in, and the scope of the devastation became clearer.

Setting up a command centre in her east St. Catharines apartment and working with her daughter, Julie Mok, Jones has continued to try to reach contacts in the country. She has also received requests from other organizations based in the same area which have been unable to contact their people. Jones said her workers have gone out on motorcycles trying to find these people, so she can provide a definitive answer.

Currently, the charity, which was supposed to leave for a monthly



Communication from Haiti to Haiti Missions of Canada based in St. Catharines is sporadic but is improving every day. Agency executive program coordinator Joy Jones recently received some photographs via e-mail, including this one showing its Haitian employees left homeless and sleeping in tents.

visit to Haiti on Jan. 28, is preparing for a major aid mission and is raising funds. Jones has been sending out e-mail blasts to supporters across the country, many of them churches, with some based in the region.

She's also been reassuring her employees and the people they serve, they are doing everything they can to help.

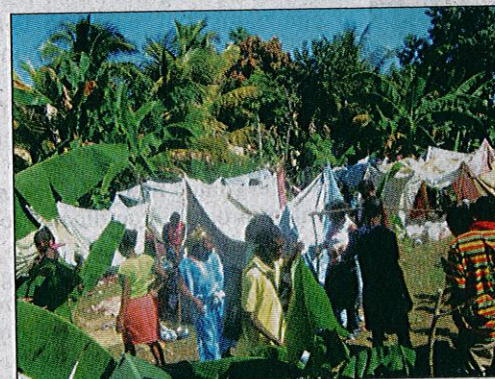
"We're letting them know they're not alone," she said. "We told them we're never giving up on them."

For more information or to donate to the organization, visit www.lovehaiti.com or call 905-

984-4230.

The Canadian government has committed \$5 million in immediate disaster relief and announced on Thursday it will match donations to the country, dollar for dollar, providing up to \$50 million in relief.

A release from MP Rick Dykstra's office provided the Canada Revenue Agency information, the phone number 1-800-267-2384 and website, www.cra-arc.gc.ca/whtsnw/tms/rthqk-haiti-eng.html, where Canadians can ensure the charity they give to is registered.



Joy Jones, executive program coordinator of Haiti Missions of Canada, and her daughter, Julie Mok, have turned her east St. Catharines home into a command centre, from which they try to maintain contact with Haiti and send out word to supporters in Canada about how to help.

KIDS MAKE SOMEBODY OUT OF NOBODY DOLL

MIKE ZETTEL
STAFF

Late last year, students in character education classes at Connaught Public School received a mystery package.

It came in the form of a box resembling a well-travelled piece of luggage. On it was a cryptic message: To Everybody. From Nobody.

If that wasn't intriguing enough, inside was something which got the Grade 4 to 6 kids' creative juices flowing.

It was Nobody, a blue denim doll. He (or she) had no name, no personality and no interests, and it was up to the students to provide them, to turn Nobody into somebody.

The students do this by taking on research projects. Given freedom to choose what interests them, the students are asked to pick from the categories of people, animals or the environment.

Along with learning about their subject on their own and presenting their findings to their class, the students find ways to make a difference through volunteering or fundraising.

Grade 6 student Kaitlin Blanchfield wanted to teach her classmates about neurofibromatosis (NF), a genetic disorder that afflicts her five-year-old sister Lexie.

Kaitlin said it is the most common genetic disorder but is not fatal, which is why most people have never heard of it. In her sister, it results in the appearance of spots, known as cafe-au-lait macules, as well as behavioural problems.

"Not many people are familiar with it, so I wanted more people to be aware of it," she said.

Kaitlin said even she learned a few

things she didn't know and has a better appreciation of what her sister is going through.

"Sometimes when she does something, she doesn't know why she's doing it," she said. "It helps me to understand her more."

To cap off the project, Kaitlin pinned a daisy, the official NF flower, to Nobody's chest.

Nobody has a few other three-dimensional attachments, including animal ears and a bracelet — all related to kids' projects and all added to give the doll character.

Character education teacher Jennifer Jinks said she was impressed by how flexible the program was. After watching three short instructional programs on a DVD, the kids were free to learn about what they wanted.

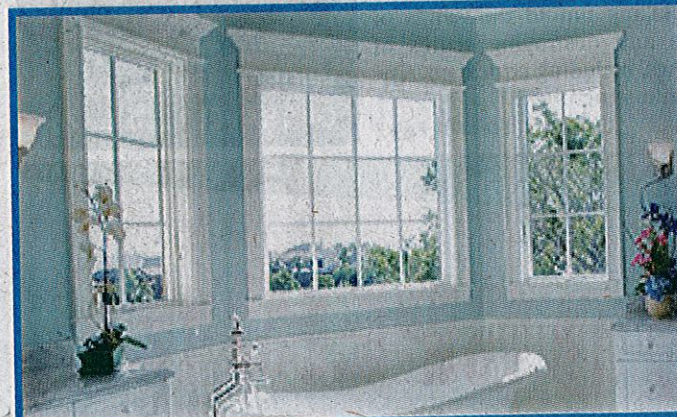
"There's such a variety in what the kids have done," she said, explaining one did a presentation on an animal rescue group, while another did one on an orphanage in Tanzania for which a local 19-year-old woman is an active volunteer.

While she could have assigned the projects without the doll, there is just something about Nobody which really gets the kids motivated, Jinks said.

"It brings in excitement," she said. "They love that they are doing such good, that they're teaching Nobody."

Nobody was created by Toronto teacher Kelly Clark, who grew up in Niagara and said she wanted to find non-superficial interests for her students to focus their energy on instead of simply the latest toys, electronics or clothes.

The program has been in classrooms for three years and is supported by the Rotary Club, which donated thousands to schools across Ontario.



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