

Working to educate the impoverished in a troubled land

Two retired principals from Abbotsford lend their time and skills to bringing educational opportunities to students in Haiti.

by Bruce Nicholson and Stan Petersen



It was a sweltering 43 degrees when we stepped onto the tarmac at Toussaint Louverture International Airport in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti. This was our first trip back to Haiti since the devastating January 2010 earthquake that ravaged most of the country and left more than 300,000 people dead. The oppressive heat, while typical for a July 7th, was not the most noticeable part of our

trip from the airport to the city of Grande Goave about 70 kilometers away. Standing on the open deck of a truck rolling along almost impassable roads, the scenes of destruction were hard to comprehend. How could buildings still be leaning; why were there still piles of rubble on the streets; and why was the new looking machinery, that filled a football sized parking lot, sitting idle behind locked

fences? The fact was, more than six months after the earthquake, only 5% of the rubble had been cleared and damaged buildings were still tilting dangerously over crowded streets.

Just as noticeable as the destruction were the fields of tent cities that lined the highway along our route. Thousands of blue tents were now the new homes of more than a million Haitians.

Even before all these crisis Haiti was the most impoverished country in the western hemisphere. Add in a fierce storm that has recently hit the country, political unrest arising from a troubled election, and a cholera epidemic that still rages through the population and it is hard to believe that people can endure such hardship in such a short time. So what is the answer to the troubles in this impoverished and troubled land? It is the same as the answer that has led to positive change in our world since the start of civilization; that answer; education.

Since retiring we have been busy as volunteers for Heart to Heart Haiti. Heart to Heart Haiti is an

Abbotsford-based registered charity that since 1993 has operated a school, church and children's home in the community of Grand Goave, Haiti. Besides the many people who contribute monthly to Heart to Heart, key assistance has come from the Abbotsford School District 34, the Mission School District 75, and the Schmidt Family Foundation. Along with these groups many administrators, family members and friends have helped out. The Heart to Heart school has just over 500 students with about 100 students living in the children's home.

Over the past several years our focus has been in providing teacher development programs for staff each summer and school supplies for every student each September. Since the earthquake we have also provided input on school reconstruction and expansion.



The Heart to Heart school, church, and children's home were destroyed by the earthquake. Students now sit on recovered church benches under tarps with classrooms divided by recycled blackboards. For most students the midday meal provided by the school will be their only food for the day and the school uniforms provided are the only 'nice' clothes they own.

We continue to be amazed by the resolve of the children and teachers at Heart to Heart School. They continue

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all stakeholders that our shared goal of wanting the best public education system possible is never in dispute. The road to getting there often is however.

The BCPVPA is evolving, as all organizations must. There are major shifts occurring in our workforce and this has us examining how we go about doing our business. As of this fall, 50% of our members will have been in their roles less than five years. This type of significant change is occurring in other sectors as well and we are noticing that in our work with our key partners.

The Association is undertaking exciting work following the direction of members and we are excited about the possibilities as we begin the work of enhancing the understanding

of the role of the principal and vice-principal, continue to revamp our operational structures to best meet the needs of today's members and work on programs to support members in their current roles.

Our biggest challenge is how to stay connected with you when we know how incredibly busy all of you are. We want to connect with each of you to hear about the issues facing you and the things we can do to help.

This fall promises to bring some change and disruption to your daily work. We are preparing a variety of tools to help guide you through the potential troubled waters ahead. Please remember we are just a call or email away. Our job is to support you, please allow us to serve you when you need us. 

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is delivered in French. We thank Joanne Neveux, Principal at École Sandy Hill in Abbotsford, and Dr. Ron Dufault, former District Administrator, for helping with the delivery of our program.

your students to help our students and other students in the community.

If you would like to collect supplies here are the needed materials:

- lined paper, notebooks/ scribblers, duo tangs, pencils, erasers, individual sharpeners and pens;
- calculators, French children's literature; and
- geometry sets and rulers.

to see education as the means to help themselves and to help their country.

In July of 2011 we will present the third of five Teacher Development Modules to the Heart to Heart staff. Also this July, as a result of an innovative partnership with the Ministry of Education, we will present Module One to a new group of teachers from the region. Our goal is to expand the program and have teachers who eventually complete all five develop modules become the program presenters.


The Teacher Development Program

How you can help:

We only send new, newish or slightly used school supplies. We want the students at Heart to Heart School to have good supplies, so we can ensure maximum use of the supplies we do send. Over the last four years we have collected unused supplies at the end of June in Abbotsford and Mission schools and processed and shipped them to Haiti.

Students at many Haitian schools have never had supplies before this program started. Helping with supplies is an easy way for you and

Because of shipping costs we do not need textbooks or binders. We ask that supplies are sorted, boxed, weighed, and labeled.

To donate school supplies or make a financial contribution go to the Heart to Heart website at: <http://www.hearttohearthaiti.com/> 

For more information or if you have any questions, email Stan at stan_petersen@sd34.bc.ca or call Bruce at 604-852-3184.

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