

OASIS Helps Orphans

Premature Death of Haitian Child Spurs Sisters to Give Back to Homeland

By Marie-Jo Mont-Reynaud
Special to The Haitian Times

Luceanna Moore and her sister, Marie Charles, are but two among many who are tackling what seems to be a never-ending problem in Haiti: child poverty. Through an orphanage they set up in Beudet, about 30 miles from Port-au-Prince, they house, clothe, feed and educate nine Haitian youth, and hope to help more.

Founded in July 2003, the orphanage is nestled on the top floor of a Christian school, across from the Eglise Baptiste de Beudet, where the sisters' father is a Baptist pastor. Along with three women from town and a cook, the Rev. Lucanus Altino manages the day to day operations of the orphanage, from meals, to school books and sanitation.

Born in Haiti, the sisters arrived in the United States with their mother when they were young. Charles lives in Florida. Moore, a graduate who studied medical laboratory technology at Union County College, lives in New Jersey with her husband and four children.

Moore vividly remembers when the family first revisited Haiti when she was 16.

She enjoyed her trip and made friends with neighbors but was distraught by the poverty she saw.

A neighbor had three daughters whom Moore helped feed, bathe and clothe. She became attached to one young girl, Natasha.

"One of the little girls really took to me," Moore said. "I will never forget her face. She was 4 years old, severely malnourished and had sporadic fevers."

As they were returning to the United States, Natasha's mother begged Moore to take Natasha with her. Later, she heard the devastating news that Natasha had died of malnutrition and complications from an untreated cold.

"That broke my heart," Moore said. "I never forgot her. From then, on I always felt that God had a special work for me to do."

That experience at 16 motivates what Moore does today. She saved up money for four years and then returned to Haiti with her sister's family to start the orphanage.

According to their mission statement, the sisters hope to create a safe space for



New Jersey resident Luceanna Moore, of Haiti, holds an orphan at a facility in Beudet, Haiti. Moore spent years raising the funds to start the OASIS orphanage.

orphans children to grow.

"We are dedicated to saving the lives of the forgotten children of Haiti," their mission statement reads, "by providing a safe environment, health care, education, love and deep spiritual foundation in God. We are trying to provide a true 'OASIS' in a country surrounded by violence and despair." OASIS stands for "Our Attempt to Save Innocent Souls."

Gathering \$4,000 to open the orphan-

Orphans in Haiti

- An estimated 300,000 orphans live in Haiti.
- Five to 7 percent of Haitian children have already lost one or both parents.
- 25 percent of Haitian households include at least one nonbiologically related child.
- An estimated 200,000 children live full or part-time at facilities and with non-governmental organizations that provide community care.

Source: Family Health International

age, thanks to family, friends and local churches, was difficult. But it was nothing compared with the emotional weight of narrowing down the number of children they would accept.

"The hardest part was picking which children to take first and which to put on our waiting lists," Moore said. "I cried day

after day because we just did not have money and resources to take all of the children. Each case we heard was worse than the last."

Though they originally planned to make the orphanage all female, they ended up choosing eight girls and an 8-month-old boy.

The infant, who could not lift his own head, was so ill and weak that doctors said if they did not take him, he would die within three days, Moore says.

The children at the orphanage are well fed, tended to by doctors and educated at the Christian school next door, Moore says.

OASIS hopes to slowly increase the number of children in the home every year, and then seek U.S. families who will adopt them.

Increasing their capacity is difficult however while funding is scarce.

Despite hosting benefit concerts and the help of concerned churches, "donations have gone down drastically within the last year or so," Moore said.



Five-year-old Better is one of nine orphans who live at the OASIS orphanage in Beudet, Haiti, and attends the Baptist church and school nearby.

"Even the people who had committed to monthly donations have stopped giving."

The orphanage has 56 children on its waiting list. During one of Charles' visits, two desperate parents tried to leave their children at the orphanage.

OASIS works on an annual budget of \$10,000.

According to Moore, it takes \$20 a month to support a child in her orphanage.

OASIS was honored by the Roselle, New Jersey NAACP with the Branch's Humanitarian of the Year Award for 2005.



The nine orphans of OASIS wear their Sunday best.