

## **Update from Dr. George Rhoades – GAIN's Trauma Counselor**

Tuesday, May 11, 2010

Haiti

Today we arrived just in time for the morning break at the Chambrun school, which is sponsored by Nehemiah Vision Ministries. As we waited for the children to line up for their classes, Melinda, a Trauma Counselor with GAIN's medical team, and I were surrounded by children. Many of them held our hands, asked us our names, and expressed a lot of joy with us for being there. We were able to do art therapy with 122 children that were either first-grade students or higher.

The children drew pictures of what happened to them during the earthquake. Melinda and Sharon, a member from GAIN USA, both helped me, along with our interpreters, to talk with the children. They spoke about house after house that had been destroyed, blocks that had fallen down and even walls that fallen down around them. Many pictures had the name of Jesus written on them, illustrating that they were calling out to Jesus as if they were to die and wanting Him to take them away. This time that was scheduled for them to share their stories as well as talk about what happened to them and their families was incredible, a time of healing for the children.

At one point in the sharing of stories, Kelly, one of GAIN's medical doctors from Canada, came to me and shared an urgent need. They were in the midst of treating a 2 ½ month old girl that was severely malnourished, weighing only around three pounds. She was full term, but basically skin and bones. We needed to get her to the Miami Mobile Hospital as soon as possible as she would probably die today. I was able to contact Lindsey Davies, GAIN's LIFE Team Coordinator, and she was able to drop everything and come and transport the child to the medical facility. The little girl is not out of the woods yet, but the doctors there think she now has a fighting chance. Our mission often involves treating past trauma, but the ever-present trauma of today is also present.

We then left Chambrun to go to the Village Theodat Orphanage, but were stuck in traffic for over two hours due to a man that had died on the road. Eventually we arrived at the orphanage and the precious young children were still waiting for us. We gave a box of crayons and paper to each child, again asking them to draw a picture of what happened to them on the day of the earthquake.

One nine-year-old boy had been running down a flight of stairs when the earthquake happened and the stairs literally curled up and collapsed along with the house. He was buried under so many concrete blocks that he thought he was going to die.

Many of the children at this orphanage had been trapped under blocks from the walls of their orphanage that was destroyed. Most of these children were rescued after being trapped for around two hours. I can only imagine how long those two hours seemed for each child.

Another ten-year-old child watched as his three-storey house became a concrete pancake, killing his family and friends. This child was now an orphan.

Overall, we discovered that the orphanage had lost five children and two adults in the

earthquake. Many of the children and adults had been traumatized by these losses. It was a privilege for me to be part of their healing.

After about a half-hour of our arrival to the orphanage, a yellow school bus arrived and many teens and young adults came into the orphanage. Many of these people had been survivors from the previously destroyed orphanage. If we had come on time, we would never have had a chance to meet them.

At one point, a young man, Elisha, walked up and wanted to give the paper and crayons back to us. He was 21 and had lost his identical twin brother in the earthquake. He couldn't draw the picture, as it was too hard for him to think of his brother and not cry. Elisha quickly pulled out a picture of his twin brother Elisza and Melinda was able to sit down with Elisha and talk about his twin. They were already orphans before the earthquake and now Elisha had also lost his closest friend, his twin brother. He expressed gratitude for the chance to share about his brother and to learn better ways of dealing with his grief and moving on in life.

After we did art therapy with 41 of the orphans, we broke out the toys given by many people in Hawaii. I cannot describe the joy as the children received the toys and began to play with them. Teens got novelty objects such as water balls and stuffed animals. They understood that many of the toys were for the young children, but most of them had lost everything in the earthquake and therefore, small gifts were very much appreciated.

We were planning on going to train students/leaders in trauma counseling tomorrow but the city had riots for the past two days and a demonstration and possible riot was being planned for tomorrow. The Haitians have been rioting because they are frustrated with the Government for not providing homes for them. I anticipate this growing tension to continue, as the Government has not been quick to provide land for the people to build on or to erect tents. Therefore, since our desire in GAIN is to minister but not to take unnecessary risks, we will not go downtown tomorrow. Instead, we will help out at another IDP camp. This will take the role of supporting the medical team and providing trauma counseling to the people of the camp.

As a team our continued hope is to always demonstrate the love of God, in word and deed, to these each person we encounter. Thankfully we have been able to interact with over 570 children to date on this Haitian trip, plus the 13 adults at the medical clinic.