



Grace!

WINTER 2008

AT WORK IN HAITI & THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

Hebrews 12: 12-13 (NASB)

The World Health Organization estimates that **more than 300 million people worldwide are disabled, over 70 percent of whom live in developing countries.**

Only about one to **two percent have access to rehabilitation** and the majority of them are relegated to the margin of society.

World Health Organization Disability and Rehabilitation Team

COMMUNITY BASED REHABILITATION: Improving the Lives of Children with Special Needs

People with disabilities face challenges no matter where they live, but it is especially difficult to live with a disability in developing countries like the Dominican Republic. Public access to rehabilitative services is often limited by geographic and economic barriers, and social stigma toward the disabled means it is even less likely that those in need will receive adequate care. Children with disabilities in the Dominican Republic are often seen as an embarrassment to their families or even as a curse from God. Many are hidden, deprived of food, or abandoned by parents who don't know how to care for them or don't want the stigma of having a disabled child. Only families with greater economic means can usually afford the limited services that do exist for the disabled in the Dominican Republic.

Further compounding the problem is the fact that the Dominican Republic's health system infrastructure is still inadequate to meet the basic health needs of its population. Often, disability is at the forgotten end of the primary health care spectrum and, as such, fails to attract the level of financial and human resources required to even begin addressing some of the needs. Making the most of the resources that do exist, Community Based Rehabilitation programs have proven to be an effective way to reach many people with disabilities who otherwise would have no access to care.

Over the past decade, the World Health Organization (WHO) has been promoting community based rehabilitation in resource-poor settings, and International Child Care was at the



ICC Rehabilitation workers use developmental toys, like stacking rings, to help improve eye/hand coordination and fine motor skills. Jenny meets weekly with Jesus David, who has Down's syndrome, and teaches in-home rehabilitative care.

forefront of this movement that empowers families to improve the lives of their children with special needs. Community Based Rehabilitation brings rehabilitation techniques to families with disabled children living in marginal neighborhoods or rural areas who have no access to regular rehabilitation services. Through weekly education of a caregiver in the home, International Child Care provides a sustainable way for families to help their children develop to their fullest potential.

Community Based Rehabilitation involves teaching parents or other caregivers about simple rehabilitation techniques and tools in a way that is easy for them to understand. Following the grassroots model of primary health care, rehabilitation methods and techniques are presented in a manner that allows even an illiterate community member to carry out therapeutic exercises and to produce and use simple aids and devices. These exercises help the child progress toward appropriate developmental goals and empower the family to assist the child's growth and improve both the family dynamics and the community's attitude toward people with disabilities. A staff of 56, including 33 Community Rehabilitation Workers and seven supervisors, carry out ICC's Community Based Rehabilitation program activities under the guidance of three coordinators, two

psychologists and a program director; all of them are local Dominicans.

International Child Care also works in partnership with other governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide services to the disabled. An Association of Mothers of Disabled Children (In Spanish, abbreviated MANIDI) and a Cooperative of Family and Friends of Disabled Children (COFANIDI) are both organizations that have formed as a result of International Child Care's work in the Dominican Republic. The program also partners with several medical specialists who attend to the children at low cost and make referrals to local, private special education schools for the intellectually challenged and the hearing impaired.

Over the past fourteen years, International Child Care's Community Based Rehabilitation program has successfully improved the lives of more than 1,200 children and families. Community Based Rehabilitation has a proven track record and has succeeded in helping children with disabilities and their families to reclaim lost levels of developmental function and recapture a sense of self-respect, dignity, and hope for the future. ●

AMAZING GRACE

Erica Rodriguez

Six-year-old Erica grins, cups her hand around her mouth and whispers into her cousin's ear. Giggling, her cousin Julissa leaned over to whisper back. To the untrained eye, these two have one major difference: Erica's spina bifida confines her to a wheelchair, while Julissa appears healthy and strong. But to each other, they see only a best friend and someone to share their secrets with.

Spina bifida is a birth defect that happens in the first month of pregnancy, often before the mother even knows she is pregnant. Though the exact cause is not known, researchers suspect that a combination of genetic factors and a lack of folic acid increase the risk. With spina bifida, a baby's spine will not form properly, resulting in problems with movement and control from the waist down. The incidence of spina bifida worldwide is about 1 to 2 cases per 1000 births, but is sometimes higher in Hispanic populations. Children often need multiple surgeries to repair the area around the damaged part of the spine, but in most cases, their mental function is normal.

This is clearly the case for Erica, a bright first-grader who loves to draw pictures and go to school. Her parents, Daniel and Yohany Rodriguez, say that Erica frequently takes the lead when playing with her friends - being the mom when they play house or the teacher when they play school. Her sweet-natured determination has helped her progress through ICC's Community Based Rehabilitation program and learn to live with her disability, despite the challenges. Erica's rehabilitation worker helped fit her with a donated wheelchair and advocated to get Erica placed with her peers in a local school. Erica's dream is that someday she will be able to walk—a distant possibility, but one that nevertheless gives her hope. ●



REHABILITATION: A FAMILY EFFORT

How ICC Uses the Portage Guide to Early Education

The Portage Guide to Early Education, originally developed for use in rural areas of the USA, is the base method for ICC's Community Based Rehabilitation home visiting program. This method allows Community Rehabilitation Workers to collaborate with families to design a developmental program appropriate to each individual child.

1 The ICC-trained rehabilitation worker meets with the child's parents and assesses the child's condition.



Photo © Keith Mumma

2 The rehabilitation worker demonstrates exercises appropriate to that child and watches as the parent practices them.



Photo © Keith Mumma



Photo © Keith Mumma

3 The rehabilitation worker notes the child's progress for her own files and leaves the parents with an activity card reminding them of what to do with the child in the coming week before her next visit.

Two-year-old Brayn (pronounced Brian) has cerebral palsy. Jenny, and ICC Rehabilitation Worker, visits Brayn each week in his home and teaches his mother basic exercises. Meanwhile, his enthusiastic cousins look on because they often help with his therapy throughout the week. For them, it is just another way to play with Brayn.

Special Events in Haiti Mark ICC's 40th Anniversary

International Child Care Haiti hosted a series of events November 27 through December 1 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of ICC and Grace Children's Hospital. Participants gathered from ICC's four member countries—Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Canada, and the United States—for a Medical Congress, cocktail reception, and the inaugural meeting of the International Child Care board of directors, an international coordinating body made up of three representatives from each of the four member countries.

The festivities began November 27 at Grace Children's Hospital, where the ICC Haiti staff held a one-day "open house" and provided exams and some medications to local residents free of charge. The following day, the hospital administration, led by General Director Dr. Harry Geffard, presented certificates of recognition to representatives from each department and celebrated with an all-staff luncheon.

The Medical Congress, held November 29 and 30, focused on the topic of "The Medical and Social Impact of Infectious Diseases on Children." A group of nearly 200 medical professionals enjoyed 18 presentations by a variety of specialists in pediatrics, infectious disease, nursing, and related areas.

Nine of the presenters were from North America and nine were from Haiti.

"It's not easy to accomplish in 40 years such significant results, and I think this achievement is part of your commitment, your love for the people who are in poverty and suffering."

~Dr. Robert Auguste, Haitian Minister of Health

Dignified guests at the cocktail reception on Friday evening included representatives from two of ICC's long-time partner organizations: Dr. Robert Auguste, the Haitian Minister of Health, and Ms. June Kim, the Executive Secretary for World Hunger/Poverty and Sustainable Agriculture and Development for the United Methodist Committee on Relief. Ten long-time volunteers from a local women's organization in Port-au-Prince received special certificates of recognition.

At their December 1st meeting, the newly-formed international board appointed Dr. Ellen L. Palmer as the International Director of International Child Care. Dr. Palmer will serve in this coordinating role to facilitate fundraising efforts for ICC and enhance communication

among the four member countries. Dr. Palmer is an Assistant Clinical Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Texas at Arlington. As an active United Methodist and wife of a Methodist pastor, she has served in a number of volunteer roles with International Child Care for thirty years. ●



Photo © Keith Mumma

The newly-appointed International Director of International Child Care, Dr. Ellen Palmer, has been involved in the work of ICC for more than thirty years.



Photo © Alison Kern

The entire staff of Grace Children's Hospital gathered for a 40th anniversary celebration on November 28.

grace!

Grace! is published quarterly for friends of International Child Care. ICC is a Christian health agency working in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to change conditions which make people sick, hungry, unemployed and afraid.

ICC depends on individuals, churches, and donor agencies for the financial means to serve. A response card and envelope are enclosed for your contributions. Your gift will be receipted for income tax purposes.

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