



grace!

FALL 2006

AT WORK IN HAITI & THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

"Whoever receives one child like this in My name receives Me."

Mark 9:37 (NASB)

According to the best estimates of UNICEF and other international charities, the number of street children currently in Port-au-Prince ranges from 5,000-8,000, and the number in all of Haiti could be as high as 10,000, reports Save the Children—Canada.

Invisible Misery: The Lives of Street Children in Haiti

Hard to define and even harder to count because of their presence on the outskirts of society, the lives of Haitian street children can take several forms, but have one common denominator: misery. The prevalence of street children in Haiti began to increase noticeably in the mid-1980s when large numbers of subsistence farmers began migrating from rural areas to Port-au-Prince in hopes of a brighter future for their families. When their dreams of finding employment and a better life were dashed, many could no longer support their children and so abandoned them or sent them out on the streets to fend for themselves. Today this phenomenon continues. According to the best estimates of UNICEF and other international charities, the number of street children currently in Port-au-Prince ranges from 5,000-8,000, and the number in all of Haiti could be as high as 10,000, reports Save the Children—Canada. Despite increasing numbers, however, street children remain one of the most ignored and abused groups in the Haitian social structure.

Street children in Haiti can generally be classified into one of two categories. The first is composed of children who literally live on the streets, with no place to call home. These children find ►



Cité Soleil is generally regarded as one of Haiti's poorest, roughest and most dangerous urban slums.

Because Grace Children's Hospital will treat anyone, regardless of their ability to pay for the services, children like those below are frequently abandoned at the hospital by parents who are unable to continue caring for their child.



Febrice Millien



Felicity Innocent



Sheelove Didier

whatever food or shelter they can on the street and do not have contact with their families. They sleep on the street at night in public places, often in front of churches, stores, lottery shops, or markets. In addition to those who are completely abandoned, there is a second category of children who spend their days on the street, scraping out a living by foraging and selling scraps, but as night falls they generally return home. More often than not, they live with a family of some type and they contribute their day's earnings (willingly or not) to this family to assist in its economic survival.

The majority of Haitian street children are males, because young females often get picked up to become domestic servants known as *restaveks*, a Creole term from the French phrase "*rester avec*," to stay with. Although Haitian law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, the government fails to enforce this law for children, so the life of a *restavek* is essentially a life of sanctioned slavery—an ironic situation in a nation created through a slave revolt. Forced into servitude for a family often not much wealthier than their own, *restaveks* are made to perform the most menial household tasks and generally receive no compensation themselves, though their parents are usually paid. The U.S. Department of State reports that "the practice of parents sending their children, mainly girls, to work as domestic servants in exchange for that child's room and board has existed in the country for centuries. While many *restaveks* are well taken care of and receive adequate care including an education, a significant number are subjected to violence, threats, and other forms of physical and mental abuse." Because of this, the population of street children includes many *restaveks* who were dismissed from or fled employer's homes to escape this physically and emotionally scarring way of life. Children who are current or former *restaveks*, along with other street children, are also at higher risk for becoming victims of human trafficking for labor or sexual purposes.

In a country as poor as Haiti, where more than half the population is unemployed, climbing out of poverty as a child is nearly impossible. Although a governmental organization, the Ministry of Social Affairs, exists to help street children, it is not effective in reaching large numbers, largely due to the instable political and socio-economic conditions that have plagued Haiti for decades.

Providing care to street children is primarily left to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private institutions. ►

...there are still thousands of street children who will reach adulthood – or die trying – without ever having a chance to truly be a child.



International Child Care is one NGO working to provide better health care and an improved quality of life for all Haitian children and their families. Because Grace Children's Hospital will treat anyone, regardless of their ability to pay for the services, children are frequently abandoned at the hospital by parents who are unable to continue caring for their child. Technically, the hospital cannot keep a patient once they are well enough to be discharged, but the staff at Grace will not release a child who has no place to go. On numerous occasions the dedicated staff at Grace Children's hospital has searched for and located relatives who will care for the child or made arrangements for a child to be placed in a reputable orphanage.

Even with the efforts of NGOs like International Child Care, there are still thousands of street children who will reach adulthood - or die trying - without ever having a chance to truly be a child. They will fall asleep on a pile of rags on a dirt floor and awake to a world that barely acknowledges their existence. It is a grim reality of life in Haiti, but thankfully one that has not gone unnoticed. Although International Child Care cannot reach every child, we will continue to help as many as we can, one by one. As long as someone takes notice of them, the street children of Haiti will not suffer invisibly. ●

Finding a Family

through ICC's Community Based Rehabilitation Program

Ana Rita was just a two-year-old baby when she started hanging out on the streets of her neighborhood in Santiago, Dominican Republic. Ana Rita was the result of an unplanned pregnancy and her mother, a prostitute, and her father, a drug addict and criminal, didn't want her. Ana Rita's paternal grandmother took her in shortly after her birth, but was unable to protect Ana Rita from the physical, psychological and sexual abuse her father inflicted when visiting his mother's home. By the time Ana Rita was five years old she had a reputation as a troublemaker and a thief.

At the age of seven, Ana Rita witnessed her father being shot and killed by a policeman. A year later she was referred to International Child Care's Community Based Rehabilitation program by a concerned neighbor. It was not easy to connect with Ana Rita after all the abuse and anguish she had experienced during her short life, but her rehabilitation worker quickly enrolled her in counseling and began teaching her appropriate socialization skills.

ICC's Community Based Rehabilitation program teaches family members how to provide basic rehabilitative and therapeutic care to their loved ones. The rehabilitation workers do in-home visits identifying the causes of disability, whether physical or mental, and then teach parents or other caregivers appropriate exercises to help the child. It is then the responsibility of the family to work with their child daily to stimulate and reinforce learning between the weekly home visits. After eight months in the program it became obvious that no one in Ana Rita's life was willing to take on this responsibility.



Photo © Melissa Early

Anna Rita visits with her paternal grandmother.

The lack of discipline and negative reinforcement in the home continued to drive her to the streets.

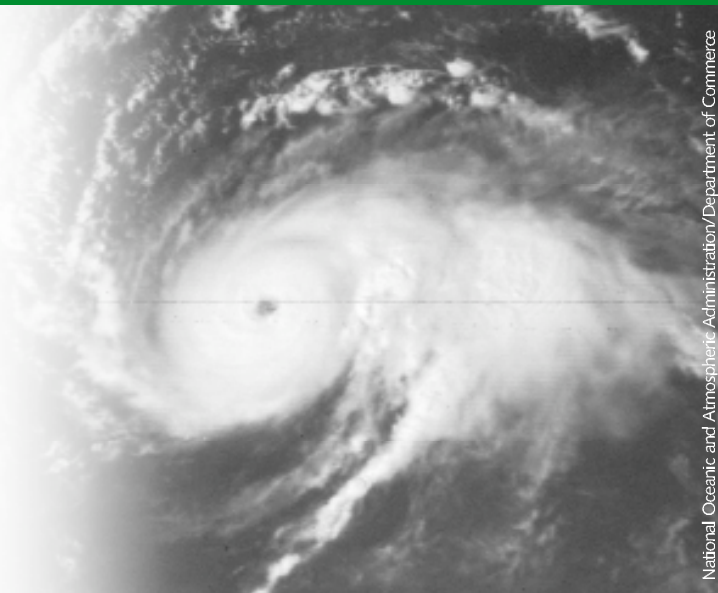
ICC program director Marisol Martínez visited Ana Rita's grandmother to discuss the situation. Sadly, since no one in Ana Rita's family wanted to take on the responsibility of raising her, it was decided that International Child Care would assist in finding a new home for the girl. Numerous government services and private homes were contacted, but because of Ana Rita's background and behavioral issues she was repeatedly rejected. Twice, Ana Rita was placed in homes only to be thrown out within a day due to her offensive behavior.

The ICC staff made trips all over the country in an effort to find her a good home. Eventually Ana Rita was placed in a girl's home in the countryside east of Santo Domingo. The nuns give Ana Rita the love and positive attention she so desperately needs. Ana Rita is now part of a family that she never had. ●

Newslines – Tropical Storm Ernesto Kills Two in Haiti

Tropical Storm Ernesto was blamed for the deaths of two people in Haiti. The storm weakened from a hurricane as it skirted Haiti's southern coast destroying more than 200 flimsy shacks along rivers and coastline in the impoverished country. The storm also wiped out banana crops and washed away a bridge linking the southern peninsula with the capital, Port-au-Prince.

The Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, saw little damage compared with some past storms and no deaths or injuries were reported. Nevertheless, flooding and landslides in the capital of Santo Domingo and nearby San Cristobal province damaged about 400 homes and forced the evacuation of 1,655 people. ●



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration/Department of Commerce

AMAZING GRACE

Eighteen-month-old Judeline Piersaint was born in a shantytown in Port-au-Prince named "Peace Village," where peace exists only in name. Judeline's mother died just a few months after her birth and her father, a builder, was left to raise Judeline and her older sister alone. He was unable to care for both his girls so decided to leave Judeline at a Catholic orphanage.

Shortly after arriving at the orphanage, Judeline, who was already malnourished, started exhibiting a bad cough. The orphanage staff took her to Grace Children's Hospital where she tested positive for tuberculosis. Judeline was admitted in March and began treatment. Due to the severity of the TB, Judeline spent four months on the inpatient ward. From time to time, the orphanage staff would visit her.

Judeline, an affectionate baby who enjoyed being held and cuddled, was well enough to leave the hospital over the summer. The orphanage staff continues to bring her back to the outpatient clinic for follow-up visits.



After her mother's death, Judeline's father was unable to care for her and left her at a Catholic orphanage.



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 received for income tax purposes.

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