

New Yorkers' donations help restore medical clinic in earthquake-ravaged Haiti



Kids attend an educational club at the Centre Medico Social in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Walking through the center, staff show visible pride in their freshly painted facility with white-and-green walls, consolation rooms and a mini-pharmacy. On weekends, the center hosts a club for children on civics, sex education and public speaking. "I like coming here every week," said Kimaeka Desmarais, 12. "They teach us important things."

All of it is free - and no one is turned away. "We respect patients and treat them without discrimination," Alcius explained. "Whether they come in barefoot, or with a shirt and tie, it's the same. We treat everyone." The clinic's eight staffers offer vaccinations for kids and gynecological and family-planning care for women. The men and women who walk through the doors have a wide range of ailments, from high and low blood pressure to hypoglycemia, malaria and infections.

With millions in quake aid flowing into Haiti, some donors wonder whether their contributions really make a difference. New Yorkers who supported the clinic said they never doubted their money would be put to good use. "It was the one place that over and over, you knew that the money would go to the right place," said Laura McLoughlin, 30, of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, who gave about \$300 to the group.

PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI - Tucked away off a bustling main road, a small medical clinic is back on its feet - thanks to the help of generous New Yorkers. Huge cracks ran ominously down the walls of the Centre Medico Social after last year's devastating earthquake, forcing staff to treat patients under a tarp in the driveway. Now, 12 months later, the cracks are gone. The damage is repaired, and rooms are freshly painted. At least 25 patients a day walk through the doors for free appointments, medical advice and treatment.

"The clinic is better now than it was before," said clinic director Dumas Alcius, 33. The clinic in the Nazon neighborhood got back on its feet with the help of \$20,000 in donations from individuals, many of them Haitian-Americans from the New York area.

"Without the money from the diaspora, the clinic would have had to keep its doors closed," Alcius explained. "I don't know how we would have reopened."

The inspiring rebirth was engineered by Brooklyn's Diaspora Community Services and executive director Carine Jocelyn, a Haitian-American who lives on Long Island. Several years ago, Jocelyn dreamed of creating a clinic that served the community, employed local staff and helped Haitians learn to help each other without relying on handouts. The clinic opened in 2007.

When the earthquake threatened to shut it down, Jocelyn set up an online appeal to raise funds. Donations quickly started flooding in from Brooklyn, home to many among New York's large Haitian population, and beyond. "People gave anything from \$25 to \$500," Jocelyn explained. "We got no money from the Haitian or U.S. governments, and no money from large NGOs." Jocelyn's fund-raising efforts have enabled the center to repair and paint the walls, install a new water-filtration system and upgrade the electricity.