

Haiti earthquake - 6 months on - Charity Challenge launch new school building project



On Tuesday January 12, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti and devastated the lives of millions people across the country. The disaster left 222,570 people dead, more than 300,000 injured and 1.5 million people displaced. Its epicentre lay just 10 miles to the west of the country's capital, Port au Prince. Already the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti's plight was further exacerbated by the widespread destruction caused by the earthquake.

Almost six months after the earthquake, Charity Challenge organised a trip to Haiti along with a team from News of the World and GMTV presenters Ben Shephard and Dr Hilary Jones. The challenge was joined by Charity Challenge director, Simon Albert, and a team from the leading international children's development charity - Plan International. During the 8 day trip, they visited Plan supported projects in schools, hospitals, maternity clinics, HIV/Aids related projects and a number of damaged and newly built schools.

"No one could fail to be touched by the stories and pictures coming out of Haiti six months ago," said Dr Hilary. "And the truth is that it'll be a long road to recovery for the people of Haiti – but there is hope."

Plan UK's director of communications, Leigh Daynes, says: *"The Haiti earthquake was proportionately the worst disaster of its kind in living memory. Hundreds of thousands have been affected, none more so than children, who are still coming to terms with what happened."*

Almost 5,000 schools were destroyed or seriously damaged leaving close to three million children without a safe place to attend school and learn. 87% of schools in Port-au-Prince and 96% of schools in Leogane (the epicentre of the earthquake) have been damaged or destroyed.

The statistics give a very clear view of the situation on the ground. More than 1 in 9 children die before reaching the age of five. Nearly 20% of children suffer from stunted growth due to poor nutrition. Nearly half of children do not go to primary school. 60% of rural communities suffer from chronic food insecurity and two thirds of the population does not have access to adequate sanitation facilities.

"It was utterly heartbreaking to see that six months on, hundreds of thousands of people are still leaving in flimsy tents, with scarce access to water and sanitation. They deserve better. Having survived the earthquake, they have already experienced one rainy season and the hurricane season has just begun." said Simon Albert.

Trevor Gibbs, one of Charity Challenge's team leaders was in Haiti. He said *"It's currently around 38 degrees centigrade and in the tented schools, the temperatures rise even higher. The children have limited access to food, and often come to school on an empty stomach. Many we spoke to said they had literally passed out in the classroom from the heat.*

Teachers are dealing with the psychological impact of the earthquake on the young children, and having to try and keep their attention to learn in these very difficult surroundings."

He continued *"We are privileged to be able to do something tangible help rebuild schools in Haiti. Before the earthquake Haiti was aid dependent, having suffered years of political and economic turmoil. About 80 per cent of the population lived on less than £1.50 a day. We hope that by working with organisations like Plan International, who have been in the country since the early 1970s, we can make a real difference to the lives of the Haitian people."*



Charity Challenge developed a strong community challenge programme over the last 5 years starting with house building in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, then building houses and classrooms in coastal damaged communities in Southern India, and subsequently houses, classrooms and community centres in Mali, Cambodia, Nepal, Tanzania, Mexico, South Africa, China and soon to be launched – Kenya and Brazil.

Working with a number of highly regarded international NGOs, Charity Challenge have raised over £1.4m for various organisations through their community challenge programme.



Ben Shephard helping to rebuild a school in Haiti

During the recent trip to Haiti, Charity Challenge joined forces with Plan International to help build two new classrooms at a school in Jacmel replacing one damaged by the earthquake. GMTV's Ben Shephard got involved hammering some of the wall frames together and erecting the structure during his visit.

Over the next year, PLAN aims to build transitional classrooms for at least 50 schools in quake affected areas in Haiti. Longer-term work includes building 150 permanent classrooms, training 500 teachers and employing 12,000 Haitians in the recovery effort.

On seeing the progress made Ben said: *"What's being done is brilliant—the children are getting a safe environment in which to learn."*

Charity Challenge are now looking for volunteers to put their heart and 'sweat' into what they believe will be one of the most rewarding experiences they can offer - helping to ensure that the most vulnerable children from earthquake-affected communities can return to a safe school environment as soon as possible. You'll be working with and raising funds for local NGOs who are building schools in Haiti. The children need a place to escape the routine of the IDP camps, to be children again, and of course to get an education. With over 50% of the population under 18, education is a major factor in the future of Haiti.

"It is a physical and emotional experience, and volunteers often come away knowing a great deal more about themselves than they did beforehand. All you need to take part in a community challenge build is enthusiasm, motivation and a desire to help make a difference. You will be working alongside the local community, supervised by local trades people, helping support the local economy and lifting moral amongst the wider community." said Anthony Waugh, Charity Challenge's construction supervisor.

If you would like to get involved, please email your contact details to info@charitychallenge.com to register your interest.

Please look out for coverage in News of the World on Sun 11 Jul, and on GMTV on the six month anniversary (Mon 12 Jul), and further coverage on Tue 13, Wed 14 and Thu 15 Jul.



About Plan: Plan was founded by British journalist John Langdon-Davies in 1937 to rescue orphans and other vulnerable children from the Spanish Civil War. Today Plan works in 48 of the poorest countries on the planet across Africa, Asia and South America. Their projects, including schools and health centres, are geared to working with children and their communities to help them fulfill their potential.

For more information on Plan's work or to make a donation visit www.plan-uk.org/rebuildinghaiti