

# Update on Haiti – Microsoft Partners, You Did It!

Microsoft partners are kind and generous. In less than 6 weeks, late last year, you dug into your pockets and came up with \$6,000 to help feed an orphanage of 70 children in Haiti who were not eating daily. That \$6,000 was matched by my good friends Tom and Cheryl Leavitt (founders of [Harvest for Humanity](#)), so this orphanage now has an adequate monthly food supply for the next 12 months – an entire year!

## Eliminating the Middle Man

On December 27<sup>th</sup>, with the help of two money bags purchased at Mountain Equipment Coop (MEC), I strapped the \$6,000 in cash to my body and flew from Toronto into Port-au-Prince, Haiti. (Note: Strapping \$6,000 to your body makes you look very fat!) Yes, it is legal to take that much money out of Canada, but I did feel strange, like I was about to be arrested on an episode of “Border Patrol”; however, taking cash directly to the food distributor in Haiti enabled us to negotiate the best deal.



Prior to our donations, this was the only food left to feed 70 children / day.

Haiti is hot and dusty. Foreign aid for infrastructure has, in some cases, resulted in roads that are smooth and well-maintained; however, the moment you turn a corner, you can be on a bumpy, pitted avenue that appears to be carved out of stone. Deep pot-holes slow speeds down to 5 mph. It seems to take 3 hours to go anywhere in Haiti.

The streets are lined with vendors selling everything from live turkeys to slaughtered cattle to pharmaceutical drugs, fresh fruit, chicken patties, furniture, shoes – almost anything you can think of.



Our truck was surrounded by hungry villagers looking for food. Many orphans come from this village, as families cannot care for children.

During our time in Haiti with [Harvest for Humanity](#) we distributed food to two other orphanages, as well as visited an impoverished village and took food there. Many of the orphans I met actually came from this particular village. As adults die, extended family members cannot care for the children left behind so they drop them off at orphanages.



In addition to rice and beans, we also brought fruit, candy, toys and games.

## A Sustainable Model

In stark contrast, the children at the [Harvest for Humanity](#) home are well-fed, confident and enthusiastic about their future. Staffed by a Haitian mother, two big brothers, and a complement of local women who clean, cook and play with the children, they are all learning French and English along with computer skills at the private school they attend. If you mention the word “orphan”, they will correct you – “We are not orphans, we are a family.”

Ask them what they want to be when they grow up and they shout out “doctor, nurse, teacher, engineer.” Those are the jobs that are needed in Haiti – they pay well and they offer a future. Sadly, a lack of computer facilities and labs mean that there is little opportunity to learn technology. One young girl I met told me that she is good in sciences but has no access to a computer. It would be good to find a way to change this.

[Harvest for Humanity](#) has established a lettuce farm that employs locals and provides lettuce to restaurants and markets. After 7 years of trial and error, they are finally netting a profit, and will soon be able to cover the expenses of running the orphanage.

The vision is to help other orphanages set up similar models. Growing food such as mangoes, bananas, pineapples or lettuce will not only provide an income for the orphanage, it also helps locals find work, while teaching valuable skills to the children at the orphanage, including farming, commerce and business acumen.

### **100% of the Donation Goes to the People**

While [Harvest for Humanity](#) is growing lettuce on their land, other orphanages are collecting garbage. The intention is to change that and build for sustainability.

Because Tom and Cheryl personally cover the salaries, building fees and any other administrative expenses of the work that [Harvest for Humanity](#) is doing, 100% of any money donated goes directly to the people. It’s a great way to know that your donation is making a difference in people’s lives.

### **Help Send Valancia to Nursing School – We Only Need \$3,000**

On my second-last day there, I met Valancia Georges. Valancia has a sponsor who is paying her tuition for nursing school in Haiti; she is in her final year and at the top of her class. Because of her grades, she has been selected to go to the United States to complete her nursing training – a move that will ensure she qualifies for a well-paying job in Haiti (or even other countries). Valancia can then send her younger sister to nursing school as well – a dream that her younger sister is nurturing. The sponsor cannot afford to pay the \$3,000 needed for the US tuition, and Valancia was desperate when I met with her. She has until June to raise the money but needed to tell her school “yes” or “no” within the next few days or another student would be selected. I told Valancia to say “yes”, that I knew lots of amazing women (and men) who would be happy to help her.

**Subject:** Greetings

Dear Gail,

It's been a bless for me to meet with you while for visit in Haiti. How was your flight back home? I should do this before, cause I didn't have access to internet I couldn't. Hope everything goes well for you and for your family. I really thank you for helping me to take the stage for nurse to the united state. We will keep in touch from now on.

regards  
Valancia



While Harvest for Humanity is growing lettuce on their land, the other orphanages are collecting garbage. The intention is to change that and build for sustainability.

If you would be interested in helping Valancia realize her dream, simply log on to <http://www.harvestforhumanity.ca/> and make your donation. In the comments section, note that this is for the tuition for Valancia Georges.

### A Final Note

My time in Haiti was joyful. While I was saddened by the dire circumstances of many of the people I met, I was impressed by the resilience, compassion, gentle nature and optimism that most inhabitants exhibit.

We laughed, played games, learned to play the ukulele and danced. I was also excited that by working together we had made a difference in the lives of wonderful people who are determined to build a better life for themselves, and a better Haiti for everyone.

Thank you for your support and generosity – you are an amazing tribe.

With love and gratitude,

*Gail Mercer-MacKay*



Without a sponsor, children can't go to school. I had an opportunity to meet the Brevils, a single mom and her 5 boys the MacKay family have been sponsoring for the past 4 years. It costs us only \$1,000 / year to send her 5 boys to school.

### About Gail Mercer-MacKay:

Gail is the president and founder of Mercer-MacKay Solutions Inc., a successful marketing communications company specializing in digital story-telling, social media management and channel/alliance development. She is also the founder of the Six Figure Freelance Writer, a community that teaches writers how to write for technology companies. A big believer in giving back, Gail has committed countless hours in service of IAMCP and she is dedicated to IAMCP WIT. She is also the co-founder of two creative writing programs for men and women struggling with addiction. These programs encourage confidence through the process of writing.