

While at work several months ago, I checked my E-mail and saw the latest ASHT newsletter. I usually review my work E-mails quickly, reply when absolutely necessary, and hope that I remember to go back to look at longer ones (like newsletters). On this day I had some extra time before my next patient was scheduled to arrive, so I read the ASHT newsletter and saw a letter encouraging hand therapists to volunteer in Haiti. I felt such excitement while reading the account of two therapists who had spent time in Haiti establishing a clinic and treating patients. I had never been on a mission trip, but in recent years I had felt such a calling to serve in some place where I could use my skills as a hand therapist and spread God's love and comfort to others in need. While helping my mother clean up her flood-ravaged home after Hurricane Katrina, I saw firsthand what a difference volunteers can make; and I wanted to help others in some way. After weeks of prayer, thought, and communication with the therapists who had already been to Haiti, I filled out my application form and made the first payment toward my trip. Making the decision to go to Haiti was hard and a little scary, but it is a decision I will never regret.

The day after I arrived at the mission in St. Louis-du-Nord, I located the hand therapy clinic and got to work. The clinic was full of supplies and still quite organized since another therapist had been there recently. I put my marketing skills to use as I told the physicians, mission staff, and people in the community about our clinic. I treated a variety of injuries and diagnoses, including wrist sprains, tendon injuries, wounds, shoulder pain, and various fractures. I also helped with some non-upper extremity injuries, like ankle sprains and splinting for a club foot. I so enjoyed the freedom of providing whatever treatment was best for each patient without worries about insurance coverage or getting a visit precerted! Treating patients in this setting was challenging, but it was an exciting challenge and an experience that enhanced my skills as a therapist.



After completing clinic each day, I had the opportunity to take part in other activities around the mission. I loved spending time in the Miriam Center, an orphanage for children with special needs. Other wonderful experiences included spending time with elderly Haitians living at the mission, holding babies in the orphanage, and participating in the "Meals on Feet" program where hot meals are delivered to elderly people in the community.



I had no idea what to expect in Haiti, even though I had very helpful guidance from the three therapists who went before me. I was overwhelmed by the kindness and serving spirits of the other volunteers and staff at the mission. I also was overwhelmed by the loving and resilient spirits of the Haitian people. The relationships I made with my patients, staff members, and other volunteers were such blessings to me. While I saw most of my patients only one time, I treated several people on multiple occasions while I was at the mission. Seeing the progress they made in just a few sessions was so encouraging, and it increased my desire to see this clinic staffed by hand therapists on a regular basis. By giving just 10 days or 2 weeks of your time, you can make a huge difference in the lives of many people. I promise that you will be forever changed by your experience, just as I was.