

# Deseret News

## Provo relief organization still working hard to sustain Haiti after earthquake

By Dennis Romboy , Deseret News

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A class to teach Haitians

English has proven to be popular because people believe it will help them find jobs. (Sustain Haiti)

**PROVO** — Not much has changed near the epicenter of the earthquake that devastated Haiti nearly 18 months ago.

Many people still live in tents or makeshift shelters. They don't have clean water or access to sanitation. Chunks of concrete and cinder block that were once houses sit where they fell. Rubble chokes the narrow dirt streets.

Some 30,000 people died in Leogane, a city of 150,000 people located 18 miles west of the capital city of Port-au-Prince. An estimated 80 percent of its buildings were damaged. And the government isn't doing much to improve conditions.

"Nothing is happening," said Rony Charles, a native Haitian and Utahn who works for a Provo-based nondenominational relief organization called [Sustain Haiti](#).



Haitian children get water from a new well in May. Sustain Haiti crews have helped with a variety of projects. (Sustain Haiti, Sustain Haiti)

While reconstruction may not be occurring on a grand scale, Sustain Haiti continues to make a difference in a small corner of the ravaged island nation.

Now into its second summer in the country, the program shuttles volunteers, mostly college students who pay their own way, in and out every few weeks. They dig wells, build hand-washing stations, teach cholera prevention and show people how to garden in small spaces, he said.

In addition, they teach English, help out at hospitals and orphanages and provide microfinance loans to get people working.

"I think the whole key is to give the people an opportunity, you could say, to fish for themselves," said Katie Baldwin, who has been in Leogane since May 1.

Baldwin, a New Yorker who will teach at an Ogden charter school this year, developed an English language curriculum for Sustain Haiti.



Haitian children get water from a new well in May. Sustain Haiti crews have helped with a variety of projects. (Sustain Haiti, Sustain Haiti)

"Our class are packed," she said, even the ones that start at 5:30 a.m. Knowing English, she said, opens doors to jobs.

Utah State University senior Emily Albretsen spent six weeks in Leogane in May and June doing everything from collecting trash for composting to teaching business classes. She said she most enjoyed teaching Haitians how to apply for work, often with many of the American nongovernmental organizations in the country.

"They came to us. They put in the time and effort to come and meet with our classes," she said. "They are qualified people. They know exactly they're doing to find employment."

Albretsen, who majors in international studies and economics, said she could have gone with another group to build shelters or dig wells, but felt like Sustain Haiti allowed her to work with people one on one.



Sustain Haiti staffers clean up a flooded floor inside a Haitian hospital in May 2011. (Sustain Haiti)

"I felt like I made a difference individual people's lives," she said, adding she hopes that trickles down to the next generation as way to rebuild the country.

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