

Nonviolent, Curiosity-Inspiring, Community-Focused Education is Thriving on Lagonav Island

By Brian Stevens

Matènwa, Haiti

Often, when and where you are born can be one of the biggest factors in determining how well you fare in life.

Fourth graders Nadia, Ruth, and Clarancia all had the good fortune to be born near the Matènwa Community Learning Center (MCLC) on Lagonav Island.

Two years ago, the Haitian government recognized MCLC as one of only four model schools in the entire country, with MCLC the only rural school to be honored.

"I want to be a pharmacist," Ruth told a recent visitor. "And I want to work with computers," Clarancia said eagerly. Not to be outdone, Nadia quickly added: "I want to be a nurse!"

In typical Haitian schools — particularly in isolated rural villages like Matènwa — this kind of excitement about education is rarely encouraged.

Instead of promoting curiosity, creativity, and critical thinking, traditional schools force students to memorize long passages in French, a language that almost no one in the community, including teachers, can actually speak.

To keep students focused on this mind-numbing exercise, most teachers feel forced to beat and humiliate students.

"Traditional schools in Haiti perpetuate the old authoritarian model of leadership. Curiosity is discouraged. And what students are meant to learn almost never has any practical application outside the classroom," said David Diggs, Beyond Borders Executive Director.

Visit MCLC — or any of the schools in Beyond Borders' Schools Not Slavery

Network where teachers are being trained in the same radically different methodology — and you'll immediately see the difference.

Vibrant, active students are interacting and becoming literate in their native language first, with French and English introduced as second languages.

Questioning and curiosity are encouraged, and what students learn in the classroom is put to immediate use for the benefit of the community.

With guidance from teachers trained in MCLC's nonviolent, participatory approach to classroom management, students make their own class rules and manage their own behavior, negotiating problems, and mediating conflicts that arise. "Communities benefit from a whole new generation of young leaders who are committed to democratic decision-making and know how to find alternatives to violence in the community," David said.

MCLC's radical approach also includes changing the way teachers and students

You can become a partner and help expand this effort to reach more schools, communities, and families. Visit www.SchoolsNotSlavery.org to learn how.



Nadia, Ruth, and Clarancia are fourth graders at the Matènwa Community Learning Center on Lagonav Island.

think about rural life.

In traditional schools, students are taught to look down on farming and other labor that rural communities depend upon.

At MCLC and schools like it, much of the learning happens outside the classroom, in large school gardens, where students measure, calculate, and document results.

Students test and refine the sustainable farming practices they learn, making the school gardens far more productive than traditional farms. The extra food students grow supplements their meals at school and produces income for schools.

Parents learn side-by-side with their children in the school gardens, using what they learn together to get higher yields and grow a larger variety of food at home in their own gardens.

"Hunger is reduced and nutrition improved across the entire community," David said.

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Education on Lagonav continued from page 5

School gardens also show parents new ways of responding to the chronic drought Haiti now faces due to climate change.

At MCLC and schools in the Beyond Borders' network, students and their parents learn techniques for collecting rainwater from their roofs and using that water judiciously for irrigation.

The materials needed for collecting rainwater are not expensive, but they are beyond the reach of most school families. With support from the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the HOPe Foundation, Beyond Borders covered the cost of these water catchment systems for 150 school

families so far this year.

"This garden has been so useful to me," said Carol Doriska, a parent with three children in school at MCLC.

"There have been so many changes in my life because of it. I've sold vegetables and I've been saving the money in my savings account. I can collect water for my vegetables, my farm animals, and to do laundry," she said.

Since 2014, Beyond Borders and MCLC



Carol Doriska of Matènwa, stands in front of her water catchment system, holding vegetables from her garden.

have partnered to expand this radically different, community-focused approach to education to more than 40 rural schools on Lagonav Island.

"We couldn't be working in these schools and their communities without the generosity and commitment of supporters who've become Schools Not Slavery Partners," David said. "They make all this possible, and we are grateful for them." ✕

NEW PARTNERSHIPS

New Effort Addresses Violence Against Those Living with Disabilities

By Rebecca Poier

People living with disabilities face discrimination worldwide.

In Haiti, we see how this discrimination and the resulting power imbalance leads to violence against those living with disabilities.

In fact, it happens in much the same way that the power imbalance between women and men leads to violence against women and girls.

For women and girls living with disabilities, these vulnerabilities can be compounded when an abusive partner uses his mate's disability to further isolate her from the community. Since 2010, Beyond Borders' Rethinking Power team has

trained more than 50,000 women and men as part of our effort to build the movement to end violence against women and girls in Haiti.

While doing this work, our team discovered that communities need special skills to address the complexities facing women and girls living with disabilities.

Now, thanks to a new three-year grant from the United Nations Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women, we are able to take on this challenge.

This year we're launching two new partnerships with two Haitian organizations that have long engagements in the movement to protect and defend the rights of people living with disabilities - Pazapa and Théâtre Toupatou.

Together, we'll create complementary awareness-raising materials, trainings, and activities that organize communities to advance the rights of people living with disabilities and end violence against women and girls at the same time.

Building partnerships like these is one way we at Beyond Borders are continuing to expand our grassroots, human rights-based movements for change in Haiti. ✕

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BEYOND BORDERS helps people build movements to liberate themselves from oppression and isolation. In Haiti and the United States, we are bringing people together for just and lasting change. We support movements in Haiti to:

- ✕ End child slavery
- ✕ Guarantee universal access to education
- ✕ End violence against women and girls
- ✕ Replace systems that oppress the poor with systems that support dignified work and sustainable livelihoods

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"I'M NOT THE SAME PERSON..."

Against All Odds, a Woman, Her Family and Their Community Reclaim Their Dignity

By Brian Stevens

Chenkontan, Haiti

Marie-Ange Renesca ran out of fin-gers as one-by-one she recounted all the problems she, her husband, and seven children had faced.

"We had no work or reliable income... We couldn't afford to keep our kids in school... We often went hungry... The roof leaked so much we had to gather in a corner to keep from getting soaked... The latrine was so flimsy it fell into the hole, so we had to relieve ourselves out in the open... The children were often sick, and we couldn't afford a doctor... We didn't have a way to filter our drinking water..."

This was the second time I'd met Marie-Ange. The first time I'd been visiting her remote rural community with a small group of Beyond Borders supporters from North America. As I translated while Marie-Ange shared her story of transformation, I knew I wanted to return when I could take more time to hear her full story.

Now as I sat talking with her one-on-one and could see the family's former two-room dilapidated house behind her, I knew something else that was a challenge for Marie-Ange. A colleague on Lagonav Island told me that Marie-Ange spent much of her childhood enslaved in domestic servitude — a practice Haitians call *restavèk*.

This helped explain the myriad of challenges that she faced — and it made her transformation all the more remarkable. Not only do most survivors of *restavèk* enter adulthood destitute and without marketable skills, they often have had their dignity stolen from them.

Their history of trauma and humiliation leaves many

Marie-Ange and her family are now able to meet all their basic needs of food, shelter, clean water, health care and education, and save money, even buying more animals.



A survivor of child slavery, Marie-Ange Renesca is providing a better life for her children, and is an emerging leader in the transformation of her community.

especially vulnerable to continued exploitation. Like Marie-Ange had been, they are often among the very poorest members of their community, and their children are at much greater risk of being sent away to live with other families and become enslaved.

So, when Marie-Ange kept telling me during this second meeting that she was not the same person, I knew that there were many dimensions to what she was saying.

This wasn't just about the external changes in her life — dignified housing and sanitation, all her children in school, regular meals, savings and the assets needed to assure a sustainable income on into the future. The non-material differences were equally impressive. Marie-Ange spoke with confidence and strength. She was empowered now.

And because I'd previously visited Chenkontan, the community on Lagonav Island where she and her family live, I

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also knew that Chenkontan was no longer the same.

Things began to change four years ago. That’s when local leaders in Chenkontan invited Beyond Borders to begin working alongside the community as part of our Schools Not Slavery initiative.

Back then, one in five children in Chenkontan was not in school, and many had been sent away to live with other families. Hunger and economic destitution were common among families.

Beyond Borders began by organizing a group of a dozen adults to meet weekly for six months to hear stories about the challenges that children often face and to discuss the challenges they saw for their own children.

As in other communities I’ve visited, this approach radically changed the way that adults thought about the risks that children face, and it inspired them to take action to do something about it.

Marie-Ange participated in one of these Child Rights Training groups. It was here that she first came to terms with how her own childhood had been stolen from her, and she became determined to make a difference for her own children and every child in her community.

Since 2014 more than 300 children have been brought home by their parents with the help of Child Protection Brigade leaders like Marie-Ange.

Others in her group recognized Marie-Ange’s passion and she was elected to receive specialized training from Beyond Borders as part of an all-volunteer Child Protection Brigade in Chenkontan. The brigade would lead a community-wide effort to ensure that all children could attend school.

Brigade members like Marie-Ange also help parents who’ve already sent children away find and free them if they’ve become enslaved.

Since 2014 more than 300 children have been brought home by their parents with the help of Child Protection Brigade



Marie-Ange Renesca and her family, along with 149 other families, graduated from Beyond Borders’ 18-month anti-poverty initiative in September 2018.

leaders like Marie-Ange.

Then last year, Marie-Ange became a founding member of the Chenkontan branch of the Adult Survivors of Child Slavery Network.

Through the efforts of emerging leaders like Marie-Ange, the change in Chenkontan was well underway by January 2017, when a census demonstrated that fewer than one percent of school-aged children were not attending school — a drop from 20 percent just two years earlier.

And instead of parents in Chenkontan sending their children away, now parents were finding children they’d sent away and bringing them back home.

But the poorest families in Chenkontan still had great difficulty caring for their children. Many had lost their modest homes in Hurricane Matthew in October 2016.

In response to the hurricane and the broad array of challenges facing the poorest, Beyond Borders launched an initiative proven highly effective globally at helping families trapped in abject poverty overcome hunger and build sustainable livelihoods so they no longer needed to beg or depend on outside aid.

Marie-Ange’s family was selected to participate and partnered with long-time Beyond Borders supporters, Jane

and William Brown, who covered the cost of the intensive 18-month process of training, weekly coaching, and integrated investments in the Renesca family. (See box below.)

All of the complex problems that kept Marie-Ange’s family trapped in abject poverty were addressed.

Through the efforts of emerging leaders like Marie-Ange, the change in Chenkontan was well underway by January 2017, when a census demonstrated that fewer than one percent of school-aged children were not attending school - a drop from 20 percent just two years earlier.

The cost of building materials for a sturdy new home and a sanitary latrine were covered. Marie-Ange was given the choice of two productive assets that allowed her family to begin earning an income. They received a water filter to ensure they had access to clean water. The goats and pig they chose as their two assets gave birth to piglets and kids, which they were able to raise and sell. They received training in animal husbandry and basic business skills.

And to ensure that they didn’t prematurely sell their livestock to respond to a crisis or hunger, they were provided a

small weekly stipend (less than \$6 US) for six months and free healthcare.

Most importantly, they received weekly visits from a life-skills coach who provided ongoing training and encouragement, helped them resolve issues, and showed them how to begin to save and plan for the future.

In September 2018, Marie-Ange and her family graduated from the program and now they are able to meet all their basic needs of food, shelter, clean water, health care and education. They have even been able to save money and buy some more animals.

They’re growing so many vegetables at home — using new skills that their children are learning in an innovative school-based sustainable agriculture program supported by Beyond Borders — that they produce more than they can eat and are selling the excess produce in the local market.

As Marie-Ange spoke of the transformation they’ve experienced and showed me her family’s new home, their livestock, and the abundance from their garden, it reminded me of something I’ve witnessed over and over again in the communities where Beyond Borders works. In place of destitution and dependence, dignity and hope are blooming.

Marie Ange said it best: “Life has changed for me now,” she said. “I am not the same person anymore.” ☺

You Can Help an Entire Family Permanently Overcome Hunger

“Our hearts are full knowing that so little could make such a difference to a family. We are glad that we took time to participate.”
— Jane Brown



Marie-Ange’s family is just one of 229 rural families who’ve recently graduated from abject poverty through a family partnership initiative.

Jane and Bill Brown - longtime Beyond Borders supporters - partnered with Marie-Ange’s family to make their transformation possible.

The cost to partner with a family is \$100/month for 18 months or \$1,800.

You can help Beyond Borders expand this partnership initiative to reach more families like Marie-Ange’s.

Visit www.beyondborders.net/Rise to learn more or contact Brian Stevens at b.stevens@beyondborders.net, (305) 450-2561.

Thank you!

THE MOST COURAGEOUS 678 WOMEN AND MEN I KNOW

Adult Survivors are Leading the Movement to End Child Slavery in Haiti

By Joseph Leroy Wood

Port-au-Prince, Haiti -

I work with 678 of the most courageous women and men ever. They are members of Beyond Borders’ Adult Survivors of Child Slavery Network.

These survivors are supporting each other to find their collective voice, cast aside the sense of shame that many carry, and organize their communities to stop child slavery.

Survivors raise awareness about the rights of children and mobilize their neighbors to take action to protect and defend every child in their community.

Survivors also meet with government officials to advocate for improvements in public policy and the enforcement of existing laws.

I asked three of these grassroots leaders to explain, in their own words, why they joined the survivors network and what they are doing to ensure that no child ever suffers what they did.

KETTIA CASSIS, member, Zoranje neighborhood survivors’ network chapter:

Before I joined, I used to sit and ask myself, ‘Am I even a human being?’

I was sent to live with an aunt as a child, and she treated us like we weren’t human.

Now, thanks to the training, I see that I am a human being just like everyone else.

We do trainings in our neighborhood, we go door-to-door, we educate people about the rights of children, and we find afterwards that they aren’t the same people anymore. They are changed.

I just hope this survivors’ network can grow and reach more people because there are so many children who are living in slavery.

VILLIEN DORCENAT, member, Mòn Laza neighborhood survivors’ network chapter:

As survivors of child slavery, it’s our duty to protect children from slavery.

I was sent to live with my aunt as a boy. At the time, I didn’t understand.

I would ask myself, ‘Why is this happening to me?’

This is our message: don’t mistreat any child living with you. Send every child living with you to school.

Don’t treat them like you treat your animals. Care for every child living with you as if they were your own children.

JISIKA JEAN-CLAUDE, member, Karade neighborhood survivors’ network chapter:

The moment I arrived at my first survivors’ meeting, I knew that I belonged.

I’ve taken part in advocacy training and child rights training, which helps us to identify children who are living as household slaves or are suffering from abuse or neglect.

We’ve identified a number of children in our community who were enslaved, and we’ve accompanied them so that they could be free and return to their families.



Members of Beyond Borders’ Adult Survivors of Child Slavery Network in Port-au-Prince.

What the network offers survivors:

• **Belonging:** Many survivors were ostracized as children and continue to face social isolation as adults. The survivors network offers them a community of understanding.

• **Freedom:** In regular group sessions survivors feel free for the first time to talk about what they suffered as children. They begin to find freedom from the burden of shame they have carried.

• **Dignity:** Survivors often enter adulthood penniless and continue to suffer the humiliations of extreme poverty. The network offers survivors access to cooperative savings and credit to start a small business.

• **Purpose:** As survivors gain confidence, they begin to make use of the advocacy training they receive from Beyond Borders. By working to defend and free children, survivors find great purpose for their lives.

• **Healing:** Their trauma can sometimes take a lifetime to heal, but as survivors succeed in saving children from the suffering they experienced, the pain they endured as children is redeemed.

• **Recognition:** As children, many survivors were expected to stay in the shadows and work endlessly without recognition or thanks. As survivors become vocal leaders, they win public recognition for their work.

• **Joy:** The pain released at survivors’ network meetings often leads to tears. But survivor group leaders are also trained to help their fellow survivors celebrate, dance, sing, play and laugh. Many survivors say that through the network they are finally experiencing joy.

FREEDOM. BELONGING. DIGNITY. HEALING. EMPOWERMENT.

Beyond Borders’ Adult Survivors of Child Slavery Network Gives Hope to All

Perhaps no one understands the complex realities facing enslaved children more than adult survivors. By helping survivors heal, Beyond Borders is empowering them to become leaders in the movement to end child slavery, vastly expanding our ability to respond to children in need.

Here are some of the ways that Beyond Borders’ Adult Survivors of Child Slavery Network promotes healing among survivors, and how survivors are taking action to protect children.

What survivors offer enslaved, abused, and neglected children:

• **Passion:** Once they are surrounded by a supportive community, no one brings more passion and energy to the movement to end child slavery than survivors.

• **Compassion:** No one is able to show more compassion for children still trapped in slavery than those who have lived their experience, and no one is more willing to sacrifice for these children than survivors.

• **Voice:** When children are still enslaved, it is too risky for them to attempt to advocate for themselves. But when survivors discover that their voices will be heard, no one is better placed to speak for these children than survivors.

• **Skill:** Survivors are experts at identifying children who are enslaved and finding ways to free them and reconnect them with their parents or surrogate families. They also are quick to understand the complex causes behind child slavery and the risks that children face from poorly designed efforts to help.

• **Moral Authority:** Human rights advocates, academics, clergy, and community leaders can all speak persuasively about this issue, but no one can speak with greater moral authority than survivors.

• **Focus:** In the midst of a long struggle to end child slavery, allies of the movement can become distracted or lost in side issues. Survivors bring both longevity and great focus to the struggle.

• **Hope:** As survivors become leaders, their courage not only inspires hope in other survivors who are just coming forward, their courage inspires hope in the movement. When survivors stand up and announce “deliverance to the captives,” they can be believed because of the freedom they embody. ☺



Survivors march in the 2018 carnival in downtown Port-au-Prince. The banner reads: Let’s end the practice of child slavery so Haiti can bring real change to all children.