

Helping Destitute Families Move from Poverty to Dignity

By Freda Catheus and Brian Stevens

Fonnèg, Haiti—

On nights when it rained here, Elianne Dessaint and her six children did not sleep. Instead they spent the night standing up, as water poured through the roof of their one-room house.

“Our beds – everything – would get soaking wet. The dirt floor turned to mud and rocks,” Elianne said. “I had no way to fix it.”

Fortunes changed for Elianne and her family this summer when they became one of 80 families from four rural Lagonav Island communities selected for Beyond Borders’ new initiative to lift up the ultra poor.

“We’re helping people like Elianne lift themselves and their families out of extreme poverty, so they can live with dignity,” said Leveille Claude Bernard, who coordinates the program – part of Beyond Borders’ *Schools Not Slavery* initiative.

Participants like Elianne are invited to select two different assets they can use to generate income for their families, usually livestock like goats, chickens and pigs, or the goods to start a small business.



80 families from four Lagonav Island communities were selected for Beyond Borders’ new initiative to lift up the ultra poor. Participants begin by choosing a money-making asset: livestock like goats, chickens and pigs, or the goods to start a small business.



“I’m determined to use what this program has given me to ensure a better life for me and my family.” — Elianne Dessaint



From L to R, rear: Beyond Borders’ Smith Maxime, David Diggs, and Leveille Claude Bernard with Freda Catheus (center, front) visit with families who are part of the Schools Not Slavery anti-poverty initiative.

Weekly coaching visits with participants for a period of six-months train them in how to manage their new assets, establish a savings account, build their confidence and deal with any unforeseen challenges that arise.

“The goal is to make sure they can stand on their own two feet long after we’re gone,” said Leveille, who supervises the team of caseworkers providing support.

Participants also receive help making basic home repairs, getting access to healthcare so they can stay healthy and keep working; materials to purify their drinking water and a latrine to better ensure their long-term health.

A small weekly cash subsidy over the course of the program helps to ensure that an illness or daily hunger doesn’t tempt participants like Elianne to sell her new assets in a crisis, before she has built up her capital.

Leveille and his team will conduct a mid-year evaluation of participants like Elianne to ensure they are on track to successfully complete the program.

Before entering the program Elianne and her family were unable to meet their most basic needs: food, shelter, clean water, healthcare and education.

“We had so many problems,” Elianne said. “When I thought about all our problems I became depressed.”

Local moneylenders had long-since dismissed Elianne, deeming her too poor to lend to, and most of her neighbors had shunned her too.

“The people who lived nearby looked down on me,” Elianne said. “They wouldn’t even let me buy on credit because they knew I had nothing,” she added.

Women like Elianne lead the vast majority of ultra poor households in Haiti and they have few, if any, productive assets.

“The lack of assets means that they are effectively shut out of the economy in rural Haiti that relies heavily on the extension of credit between small merchants and farmers,” Leveille said.

“They can’t even qualify for microcredit programs that are designed specifically for the poor,” he added.

Fonkoze, Haiti’s largest microfinance

lender, first brought this asset-building approach to Haiti in 2008 and found it to be enormously successful: 96% of participants completed the program and 75% of those went on to borrow from Fonkoze for their small businesses.

Globally, the program has delivered, “long and lasting impacts on the standard of living” of participants, according to researchers writing in the journal *Science* in 2015.

Fonkoze found similar results: the number of participants who reported that all or most of their children were regularly attending school increased from 27% to 70%.

Elianne said that she is confident she’ll achieve lasting success too. “I’m determined

to use what this program has given me to ensure a better life for me and my family,” she said.

She selected goats and a pig as her assets, and already the sow has given birth to nine piglets, which she can now sell.

She’s now able to buy and sell in the local market and her neighbors are willing to extend credit to her too.

“Things are really changing for me and my family,” Elianne said.

Five of Elianne’s six children had never been to school and her sixth was forced to quit before starting high school because the family couldn’t afford the school fees.

“Now all my children are in school and my roof is repaired. I’m so grateful to be a part of this program,” Elianne said.

“We believe people can lift themselves out of poverty, if we just give them the opportunity.”



Elianne Dessaint and the pig she selected as part of Beyond Borders’ asset-building program for the poor.

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Leveille pointed to Elianne as an example of what ultra poor women and men can do, if given the opportunity.

“By giving people like Elianne the means to get back into the local economy, you give her the opportunity to be empowered, to be the agent of her own change, not someone who waits on others to do something for her,” Leveille said.

Looking beyond the initial four communities and 80 families, Leveille said that Beyond Borders hopes to expand the program to all nine communities that they work with on Lagonav Island, reaching 720 families.

The cost per family over the course of the program is \$75 per month.

“We believe that people can lift themselves out of poverty,” Leveille said, “if we just give them the opportunity to do so.” ✕

Partner With Us

Become a *Schools Not Slavery* Partner and Help Free & Educate Children in Haiti

One in four Haitian children between the ages of 5 and 17 live apart from their parents and half of them end up trapped in domestic servitude.

Forced to work from before sunup to after sundown, they are often physically, emotionally and sexually abused, and sent to either inferior schools or to no school at all.

You can help vulnerable children escape from slavery and keep them free, safe and in school when you become a *Schools Not Slavery* Partner.



Top, students work in the school garden at St. Barthelemy School. Your gift to Schools Not Slavery supports school gardens at all 35 schools in Beyond Borders’ network. Above, your gift supports teacher training, textbook banks and tuition matching programs at the Community School of Tèwouj where these boys and girls go, and 34 other schools in Beyond Borders’ Schools Not Slavery network.

Partners commit to giving or raising \$1,200/year to help support *Schools Not Slavery*.

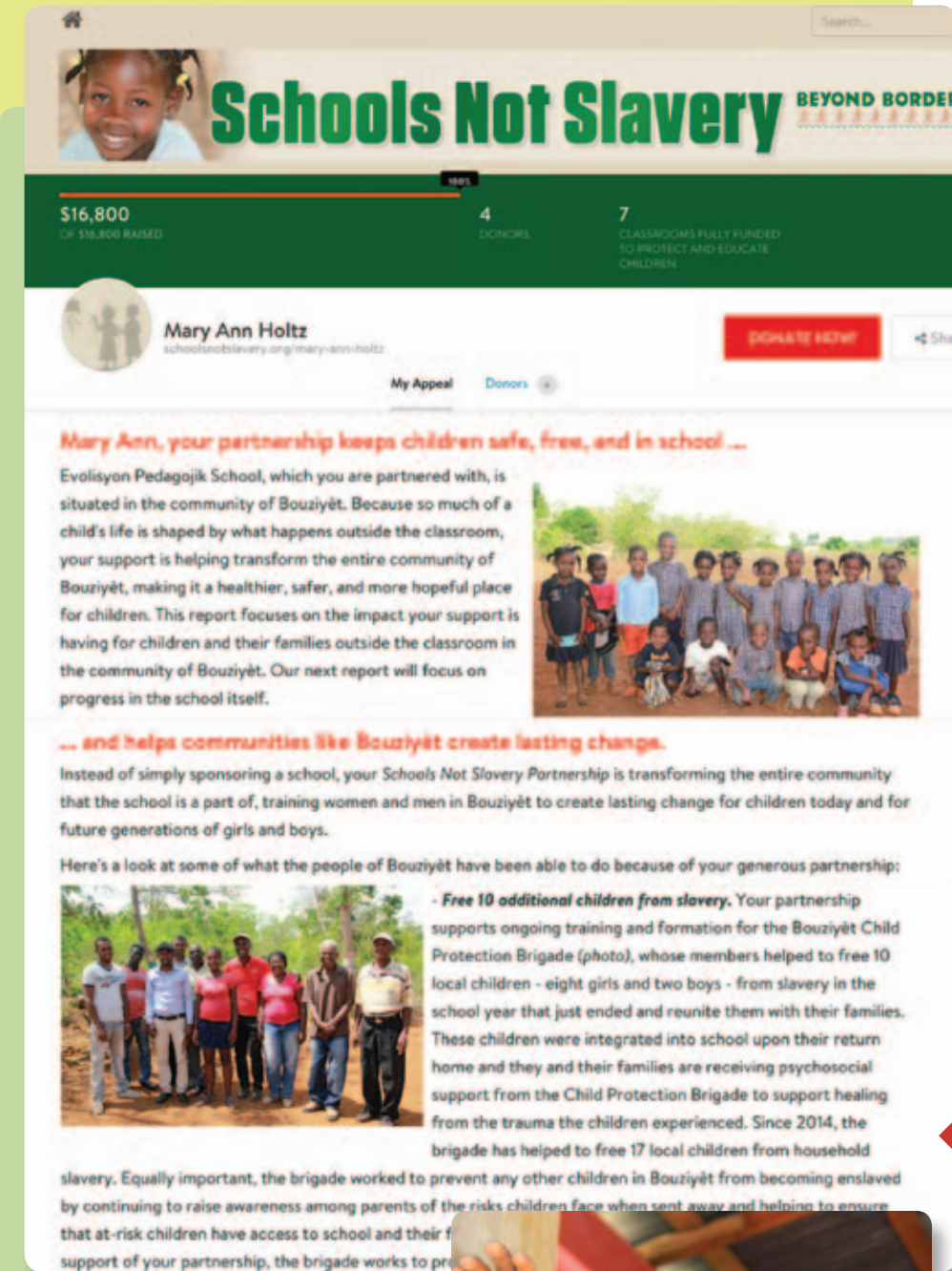
And because so much of a child’s life is shaped by what happens outside the classroom too, your partnership will help transform the entire community, making it a healthier, safer, and more hopeful place for children.

Here’s what your *Schools Not Slavery* Partnership does:

- ✓ Helps parents find and free children they’ve sent away and organizes the community to stop the flow of children into slavery;
- ✓ Trains teachers in nonviolent classroom management techniques, funds school textbook banks to provide affordable book rentals for every student, supports tuition matching programs for parents who can’t pay their child’s full tuition, and school gardens to teach children about agriculture;
- ✓ Supports adult literacy training, agricultural training, small business training, and seed and tool banks to help struggling rural families lift themselves out of poverty;
- ✓ Trains and organizes the entire community to prevent violence against women and girls.

When you become a partner, we’ll create a personalized page for you on Beyond Borders’ www.SchoolsNotSlavery.org website that you can share with others and invite them to support your partnership. You can also track your own progress toward your fundraising goal on your page.

We’ll post progress reports like this (above, right) on your page for you to share with those who’ve donated. Progress reports include photos from the community and school that you are partnered with and an interactive Google Map of the area. ✕



To become a *Schools Not Slavery* Partner go to www.SchoolsNotSlavery.org and click the ‘Join the Campaign’ button to create your account and get started. Or, we can create a page for you. Just call Beyond Borders’ Brian Stevens at (305) 450-2561 or email him at b.stevens@beyondborders.net



You can help ensure children like Didjori are free, safe and in school with your gift to Schools Not Slavery.

As a *Schools Not Slavery* Partner you’ll make a dramatic difference in the lives of vulnerable children. Please consider becoming a partner today!