



READ HAITI & STRONG BEGINNINGS

End of Year Newsletter | 2020

In 2020, through the support of the Global Development Alliance (United States Agency for International Development, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and an anonymous foundation), the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education Haiti and Global Center for the Development of the Whole Child teams (hereafter 'Notre Dame') finished the **Read Haiti** program and introduced the **Strong Beginnings** initiative. Where **Read Haiti** worked to integrate early-grade literacy programming in Creole and French in first and second grades and piloted a social and emotional learning (SEL) program, **Strong Beginnings** builds on this work, expands the SEL program, and introduces community-based early childhood development (ECD) initiatives and positive parenting interventions within the community's home, school, and church ecosystem.

[LEARN MORE ABOUT STRONG BEGINNINGS](#)



IN-CLASS INTERVENTIONS: EARLY GRADE LITERACY AND SEL PROGRAMS

Throughout 2020, Notre Dame's in-class interventions reached students across 340 schools in five departments in Haiti: Sud, Grand'Anse, Nord, Artibonite, and Centre. Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, Notre Dame piloted responses that addressed all components of students' well-being and development.

RADIO EDUCATION DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

Recognizing radio as the most efficient and democratic means of distance learning in Haiti's low-tech environment during COVID-19 school closures, Notre Dame developed a radio distance learning program for pre-K, first-, and second-grade students and their parents in March. The radio programs ran on community-based radio stations in all five departments from March through September and provided students with opportunities to cultivate key literacy and SEL skills. The shows also included health and psychosocial messaging in order to encourage healthy habits and provide support. The team also distributed 15,200 radios and solar panels to families to facilitate participation in the radio programming. Initial assessments of the radio program reveal positive trends in phonemic awareness, vocabulary knowledge, and listening comprehension for participating students.

STUDENT LITERACY BOOKS AND TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDES

The team distributed student literacy books and teacher curriculum guides, funded by USAID and distributed by the United Nations Office of Project Services, to first and second grade classrooms in November. These materials are available in Creole (*M ap li nè ale*) and French (*Je parle bien français*), enabling students to develop key literacy skills in their mother tongue and the language of instruction. You can explore these resources on the Strong Beginnings website.

DISTRIBUTION OF WASH MATERIALS

In November, Notre Dame worked with Caris Foundation International to provide water, sanitation, and hygiene materials; personal protective gear for teachers; and buckets, soap, chlorine, and handwashing stations for classrooms to support the safe return of students to school in Haiti. USAID funded this initiative.



Above: A mother and daughter pose with a solar-powered radio and literacy worksheets distributed through the Notre Dame Radio Education Distance Learning Program.

Left: A shipment of WASH materials, distributed in collaboration with Caris Foundation International and funded by USAID, provided schools with essential resources for creating a safe and sanitary environment.

COMMUNITY-BASED ECD INTERVENTIONS: FIVE INNOVATION COMMUNITIES IN THE NORD DEPARTMENT

As part of its community-based approach to ECD interventions, the Strong Beginnings initiative engages community actors and stakeholders at the 'lakay, lekòl, and legliz,' or 'home, school, and church' levels. By activating the Haitian child's most central networks, engaging key stakeholders, and leveraging culturally-relevant and engaging programming, Notre Dame promotes a whole child approach to development that will create a ripple effect in the community.

In five particular communities in the Nord department in which Notre Dame works, these 'Innovation Communities' are the first communities to receive this intervention and will help Notre Dame refine programming to have the greatest future impact. Using lessons learned in these communities, Notre Dame will scale the most relevant and effective interventions to its wider network of communities across Haiti.

Leveraging this innovative approach, this year the team's interventions ranged from programming to support mothers amidst the pandemic to cultivating partnerships for digital learning hubs to bridge the digital divide.

HOME

MOTHERS EMPOWERMENT INITIATIVE: ALO MANMAN, KOMAN OU YE?

In response to the added stress placed on mothers during the COVID-19 pandemic, Notre Dame's Haiti-based team formed an initiative to provide an opportunity for mothers to be seen, heard, and supported in July. Aligned with the pre-K and parent engagement radio program already developed by Notre Dame, mothers in the program received weekly wellbeing calls from trained facilitators, which were made possible by the generous support of Digicel, which provided smartphones for the facilitators and mothers. In October, with continued support from the Project Coordination Unit of Haiti's Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training (UCP-MEN-FP), the program continued weekly wellbeing calls and started in-person support group meetings with targeted information sessions for mothers in compliance with local health guidelines. The program will continue in 2021 with in-person meetings, led by community facilitators, in each of the five Innovation Communities.

PARENT TRAINING PROGRAM

After hosting a three-day workshop in Cap-Haitien in February to test Notre Dame's parent training sessions and refine programming, the team launched Version One of its Parent Training program in October. The program integrates interactive games and songs parents can use with their children and unpacks context-specific positive parenting videos. Version Two of the program is set to launch in February 2021 and will reach all five Innovation Communities in the Nord department in which Notre Dame works.

Right: A mother participates in a session for "Alo Manman."



Above: Parents join in the opening activity for a parent training session.

SCHOOL

PRE-K SEL MORNING CURRICULUM

In December, Notre Dame hosted a focus group with pre-K teachers to experiment with different SEL activities, which resulted in adjustments and fine-tuning of the team's scripted pre-K SEL morning meeting curriculum. The team will launch the newest version of the curriculum in classrooms of Innovation Communities in March of 2021.

Pre-K students participate in a morning meeting activity.



WEEKEND RADIO PROGRAMMING

Recognizing the need for supplemental academic and SEL programming outside of the classroom and the importance of radio in disseminating critical information to students and parents, Notre Dame created a weekend radio program targeting pre-K to second-grade students and their parents. Episodes will include SEL morning meetings; literacy, numeracy, and science activities; read aloud stories; and positive parenting sessions. Episodes are set to begin broadcasting in February 2021.

CHURCH

ECD MESSAGING INTEGRATION: BAPTISMS

Notre Dame has partnered with Fr. Délince Exalus, Head of Catechism for the Diocese of Cap-Hatitien, to merge science and theology messaging into baptismal sessions for parents. Ultimately, this work will streamline baptismal sessions for all 62 parishes in Cap-Haitien and ensure participating parents receive messages on the intersection of promoting healthy brain development and the importance of parental love and care with the belief that we are beloved children of God and must care for one another.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTERS & DIGITAL LEARNING HUBS

Given the numerous ways in which COVID-19 exacerbated the digital divide in Haiti, Notre Dame has partnered with the Digicel Foundation in Haiti to pilot a Community Resource Center to serve as a digital learning hub as well as a homebase for additional community resources. The partnership hopes to establish a center in one of the five innovation communities in 2021.



A radio technician broadcasts Notre Dame's radio programming.

SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP & MICROENTERPRISE INITIATIVES

Notre Dame is working with social entrepreneurs in each of its five innovation communities to identify potential business ideas to fund community needs such as tuition assistance and operational costs of Community Resource Centers. So far, projects include a clean water initiative and development of a photo studio and copy center.