



A Simple Approach to Supporting Healthy Mothers and Healthy Families in Haiti

Findings from the CARE & Hope Through Healing Hands Learning Tour to Haiti

September 24-27, 2016

From September 24-27, a group of influential leaders traveled on a Learning Tour to Haiti with CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands. The goal of this trip was to see the impact of U.S. investments in maternal and child health on families throughout Haiti and the role that healthy spacing and timing of pregnancy and women’s empowerment play in promoting better health outcomes for women and children throughout the country. During the trip, the delegation witnessed firsthand the importance of access to comprehensive health services at each milestone of a woman’s life – from adolescence to motherhood, to the critical first 1,000 days of her child’s life. This continuum of care helps to ensure women, their families and communities are able to survive and thrive.

► Day 1: Setting the Scene: Why Haiti?

Scene-Setter Briefing

The Learning Tour began in Port-au-Prince with a briefing by local technical experts, including Jean Michel Vigreux, CARE Haiti Country Director; Marielle Sander, Haiti Country Representative for United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); and Dr. Hubert Morquette, former Haiti Country Director for World Relief International who now works as an independent health professional engaging Haitian church communities on the importance of access to reproductive and maternal health services. The panelists described the current programs being implemented by several leading development organizations in Haiti that integrate proven health interventions, including the successes seen to date from this approach.



The delegation (from left to right): Kim Williams-Paisley, Corrine Williams-Anderson, Tom Walsh, Cathleen Falsani, Steve Taylor, Rev. Becca Stevens, Jennifer Grant, Tracy Frist, Jonathan Young, Sen. Bill Frist, Jo Saxton, Rachael Leman, Meredith Walker, Rita Wray, Jenny Dyer.

Host & Participants:

Host: Senator Bill Frist, MD (R-TN)

Former Senate Majority Leader
United States Congress

Jenny Dyer

Executive Director
Hope Through Healing Hands

Cathleen Falsani

Religion Journalist, Columnist and Author

Tracy Frist

Owner, Sinking Creek Farm

Jennifer Grant

Writer

Rachael Leman

Senior Director of Citizen Advocacy
CARE USA

Jo Saxton

Director, 3DM

Rev. Becca Stevens

Founder and President, Thistle Farms

Steve Taylor

Filmmaker, Writer, Producer and Recording Artist

Meredith Walker

Producer/Executive Director
Amy Poehler’s Smart Girls

Tom Walsh

Senior Program Officer, Global Policy & Advocacy
Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Corrine Williams-Anderson

Education Management Professional
and CARE USA Advocate

Kim Williams-Paisley

Actor and Author

Rita Wray

Vice President, E3 Vanguard
and CARE USA Advocate

The delegation also learned that Haiti currently has the highest rate of maternal and infant mortality in the Western Hemisphere, a challenge driven by poor governance, poverty, inadequate access to quality health care services and a lack of robust funding for the health care sector. The group also discussed ways the U.S. and partners can support Haiti in reducing preventable maternal and child deaths, including promoting midwifery and integrating economic and social services with health services. Lastly, the importance of further collaboration among various stakeholders was discussed, particularly the impact that leveraging local religious institutions and the faith-based community can have on raising awareness of important health issues effecting women and expectant mothers.

Briefing with U.S. Mission in Haiti

The delegation ended their first evening in Haiti by joining officials from the U.S. Mission in Haiti for a briefing over dinner. U.S. officials, including the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission Director Jene Thomas, provided an overview of U.S. investments in health, family planning, developing the agricultural sector and economic empowerment. The panel emphasized the low prevalence of contraceptive use in Haiti and the link between women's inability to plan their pregnancies and poor maternal health outcomes; only 35 percent of women in Haiti ages 15-49 use contraception, compared to more than 76 percent in the United States. The group discussed prospects for strengthening local governance, the importance of PEPFAR funding in addressing HIV/AIDS in Haiti and long-term investments in maternal and child health.



Senator Frist introduces himself to USAID Mission Director Jene Thomas while the delegates prepare for a briefing from the U.S. Mission in Haiti.

“We don’t pretend to have all the answers, but we are making a significant contribution.”

Jene Thomas, USAID Mission Director

► Day 2: Empowering Women and Girls in Haiti

Visit to CARE Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Program

The next day, the delegation met with a group of beneficiaries of CARE’s VSLA program in Port-au-Prince. The program currently has a membership of 21 women and nine men who come together to learn how financial empowerment equips women with the resources to support the needs of their families. The group simulated a VSLA meeting, including making individual contributions to the social fund and to the investment fund and tracking of group savings by the leadership committee. The delegation also heard from several program participants who have benefited greatly from the VSLA program. Mimorose Jentille told her story of how she turned to the VSLA for a loan when she was suffering from pre-eclampsia just before giving birth to her son. This severe pre-natal condition put both her and her unborn child at serious risk for additional birth complications. While all public hospitals were on strike, the group loaned Mimorose 1,500 Haitian gourdes to help her pay for private hospital services and safely deliver her son, who is now a healthy one-year-old and frequently joins Mimorose at VSLA meetings.



Mimorose introduces the group to her infant son, who she was able to deliver safely following a complicated pregnancy. Thanks to her involvement in CARE’s VSLA program, Mimorose was able to take out a loan in order to pay for a life-saving c-section.

Visit with Families and Community Health Agents

Later that afternoon, the delegation traveled to a low-income, urban community in the lower Delmas region of Port-au-Prince to meet with community health agents (CHA) who serve as health liaisons throughout Haiti, helping to connect women to information and vital health services. Delegates received an overview of the role of CHAs from Gary Philoctète, Senior Vice President of the J/P Haitian Relief Organization (J/P HRO) and heard from Dr. Elder Pierre, a lead medical specialist and pharmacist at one of J/P HRO's health clinics. They were then divided into two groups and followed CHAs to the homes of two women, Rose who is six months pregnant with her second child and interested in family planning after delivery and Chantol who is caring for her newborn son. The delegation sat down with two mothers and CHAs to observe pre-natal consultations as well as nutrition counseling provided to mothers after they have given birth, to promote the health of both the lactating mother and her growing child.



Ester, a community health agent with J/P HRO, uses visual resources to teach mothers in Port-au-Prince about maternal and child nutrition.

Tour of DASH Urban Health Facility

After meeting with CHAs and their beneficiaries, the delegation traveled to an urban health facility, still within the Delmas area, known as Development of Health Activities in Haiti (DASH). DASH founder, Dr. Ronald Laroche, greeted the group and provided background on the DASH health insurance model, which emphasizes the importance of preventative health care for patients rather than expensive curative care, similar to an HMO health insurance plan in the U.S. Dr. Laroche explained that DASH offers health insurance plans, ranging from \$1 per month to \$10 per month and every patient is given an identification card based on the package of health services they purchase. Patients then use that card to access services at any of the 20 DASH medical centers located throughout Haiti. As the delegation learned, this self-sufficient healthcare model provides more than

130,000 Haitians with the preventative, outpatient and inpatient care they need to stay healthy. Reverend Becca Stevens described the model as “so respectful of the [Haitian] people and it feels healthy just hearing about it.” The delegation took a tour of the DASH facility and discussed the unique funding structure of DASH as well as the need for private, public and government partners to work together to strengthen the foundations of Haiti's health care system.



Delegates hear from the founder of DASH, Dr. Ronald Laroche, about maternal health services during a tour of one of the 20 DASH medical centers offering comprehensive, affordable health care throughout Haiti.

Taking Action Back Home

To end the day, the delegation came together over dinner to reflect on the programs visited and consider the trip's goals and learning objectives. The dinner, which was facilitated by Sen. Frist, MD, encouraged the group to reflect on their most memorable experiences from the trip, as well as discuss ideas for next steps upon return home from the Learning Tour. Delegates discussed how powerful it was to hear the voice of Haitian women. “Our responsibility is to take what we learned and shape it into a voice that is loud,” said Frist. The dinner concluded with a call to action for each delegate to influence policymakers, the U.S. foreign assistance budget and faith-based communities to emphasize women's maternal health and the healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies as a central priority. The delegation agreed that religious leaders should have a prominent role in promoting healthy spacing and timing of pregnancy for women around the world.

“If you're (an) advocate for healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy, you're saving lives.”

Kim Williams-Paisley

► Day 3: Increasing Access to Health Services

Meet with Women and Community Health Agents and Tour Project Medishare Facility

The delegation began their last full day in Haiti by traveling two hours outside of Port-au-Prince to the village of Marmont in the Central Plateau region to visit a Project Medishare clinic. The delegation was greeted by Renee Lewis, Project Medishare Executive Director, who provided background on the Project Medishare program and the unique role of community health agents (CHAs) in a rural context. The delegation then followed Renee to the home of Ermicile Joseph, a woman from the Marmont area who gave birth to 11 children before being introduced to family planning services by a community health agent. Ermicile shared that she now has the ability to prevent future unwanted pregnancies and has provided this education to her oldest daughter who is 31 years old and using contraception until she can afford to care for children of her own. Delaying pregnancy until she is financially prepared to support a family will promote economic prosperity and access to opportunities for Ermicile's daughter, demonstrating a real-life example of how educating women about healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies can help break the cycle of poverty.



The group hears from Rose Merline Pierre, nurse midwife for Project Medishare, about the services that community health agents provide to women in rural communities, including pre- and post-natal care and family planning education.

The delegation then split into two small groups to observe two CHAs simulate what an initial meeting would look like with mothers in the community. The CHAs explained different forms of voluntary birth control to the women, asking about the women's lives and interest in the timing and spacing of their pregnancies and then they invited the women to visit the Project Medishare clinic to learn more. The delegation discussed with the women their interest in family planning methods and their hopes and dreams for the future.



The delegation observes a community health agent meeting with Dilana, an expectant mother, who receives education on the importance of giving birth in a medical facility and her options for timing and spacing her pregnancies after she has delivered.

One of the women, Destine who is a mother of four, shared that a CHA introduced her to the nearby Project Medishare clinic, where she is now able to obtain the resources necessary to safely time and space her pregnancies. Lastly, the delegation followed the beneficiaries and CHAs back to the clinic for a tour of the maternity wing and to observe how a trained nurse midwife walks women through their family planning options.

Tour of GHESKIO Hospital

Later that day, upon returning to Port-au-Prince, the delegation visited a GHESKIO hospital, which offers comprehensive health services integrated with early childhood education and income generating activities. The group heard from Dr. Marie Marcelle Deschamps, MD, General Secretary of GHESKIO, about the long list of life-saving services offered at GHESKIO medical facilities and the need for a comprehensive approach to women's health.



While touring the GHESKIO clinic, Sen. Frist, MD and Corrine Williams-Anderson from the delegation discuss with Dr. Deschamps the services needed to keep mothers healthy.

An estimated 40 percent of the population in Haiti lacks access to essential health and nutrition services and being able to offer a wide array of services in one location is one way to address that challenge. During a tour of the facility, the delegation saw this service provision firsthand, including tuberculosis (TB) and HIV treatment, family planning counseling and resources, an adolescent and pediatric clinic, pre-natal and post-natal care, maternal/child nutrition counseling and HPV vaccination. Delegates learned about the tremendous impact of GHESKIO offering such a wide range of services to impoverished Haitian women. The tour ended at a GHESKIO workshop where vulnerable women can create textiles, masks and furniture to sell to support their families.

“All of these are...women who are just trying to survive. A prosperous Haiti is a Haiti that puts comprehensive, integrated women’s health services at the center of development.”

Dr. Marie Marcelle Deschamps

Conclusion:

As the delegation saw, throughout every stage of her life, a woman will depend on a variety of quality health care services to lead a healthy lifestyle – services that include nutrition counseling, family planning, pre- and post-natal care and access to a variety of vaccinations and medications. No one aspect of care is separate or more important than the next. From adolescence to adulthood, to motherhood, to the first 1,000 days of her child’s life, a woman depends on a comprehensive and responsive continuum of care that can meet her needs, her partner’s and her family’s needs at every step of the way. For this reason, solutions that aim to create such comprehensive health systems will be key in breaking the cycle of poverty and promoting better health outcomes for women and their families.

As seen throughout this trip, the Government of Haiti must prioritize maternal, newborn and child health. At the same time, the international community should maintain investments and offer long-term, flexible financial support for global health programs aimed at ending preventable maternal and child death. The private sector must play a larger role by investing in the innovative solutions that are improving health outcomes, strengthening workforces and economies. Finally, the faith-based community should use its

unique position in communities to promote advocacy for healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies that are proven to reduce maternal and infant death. Working together, these stakeholders can build a smart, strategic, long-term approach to health policies that emphasize the integration of proven solutions in Haiti. Leveraging the influence and special capabilities of the United States as well as the faith-based community will motivate others to do more and create lasting collaborations that could transform the lives of millions in Haiti and around the world.



Ermicile Joseph (right) stands outside her home with her eldest daughter, Rapheal (left). Both women discussed the impact that access to family planning has had across two generations of their family.

Policy Recommendations

Support Smart Foreign Assistance

U.S. foreign assistance is critical to building a stable and secure world. U.S.-funded programs produce real change in the lives of children and families living in extreme poverty, while at the same time strengthening U.S. economic security, defending against global health threats and creating the basis for respect and goodwill toward the U.S. in countries around the world. By emphasizing self-reliance and sustainability, U.S. foreign assistance helps people help themselves.

One of the most important things the U.S. can do to fight global poverty is to devote sufficient resources to these programs. The International Affairs budget is just one percent of the total federal budget, yet it helps to feed millions, reduce mortality for women and children and enables the U.S. to respond

to humanitarian crises like the conflict in Syria or the recent Ebola epidemic in West Africa. While we recognize the significance of this difficult budget climate, CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands advocate for the U.S. to maintain and strengthen its support for the international affairs budget, including funding for international family planning and gender equality.

Invest in Women and Girls

CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands support strong U.S. commitment for lifesaving maternal and child health programming in the international affairs budget. Key among these interventions is the practice of **healthy timing and spacing of pregnancies**, which is funded through the family planning line item of the international affairs budget. To protect and increase this funding, we need the leadership of conservatives and faith-based influencers to take a stand and advocate among conservative Congressional leaders for the critical

importance of international family planning to save the lives of women and children in the developing world.

CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands advocate for the U.S. government to integrate gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment throughout its foreign assistance programs. This can be done by creating strong policies and robust resources to promote girls' education and leadership, prevent child marriage and combat gender-based violence.

CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands support the Reach Every Mother and Child Act of 2015, a bill that would leverage existing resources to ensure that proven interventions in maternal and child health are integrated and scaled up across the world. This bipartisan legislation would advance the U.S. government priority of ending preventable maternal and child deaths by 2035. This is a meaningful and achievable goal that requires broad support to uphold.

We are deeply grateful to the many people who generously gave of their time to make this visit to Haiti a success. CARE and Hope Through Healing Hands specifically thank the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for its generous financial support of the Learning Tours and this special partnership to bring faith-based influencers to Haiti.

If you are interested in learning more about CARE's Learning Tours program, please contact:

CARE Learning Tours
1899 L Street NW, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20036



202-595-2800
CARELearningTours@care.org
www.care.org/learningtours



If you are interested in learning more about Hope Through Healing Hands, please contact:



Hope Through Healing Hands
P.O. Box 158554
Nashville, TN 37215

Tel: +1-615-469-4060
Web: www.hopethroughhealinghands.org
Email: jenny@hopethroughhealinghands.org