

# CHILDREN IN HAITI

## THE LONG ROAD FROM RELIEF TO RECOVERY



Photograph by Mark Stedman, Photocall Ireland

## Haiti Earthquake 2 Years On: Julianne Savage

### UNICEF Ireland

I'd been in Haiti after the earthquake in July 2010 and it took me a long time to try to come to terms with what I'd seen. To witness people desperately trying to survive – enduring anywhere they could find a scrap of land to live on. Back then, six months on from the earthquake, I always felt like we were surrounded by death. No matter where we went we were surrounded by rubble and we watched helplessly as people dug with their hands in many instances through the masses of concrete.

I was fearful of going back to Haiti because I was afraid I wouldn't see enough progress. I was afraid I wouldn't see hope. The scale of the disaster was such that I wondered how long it would take for conditions to really begin improving for children. Then, to really compound matters, a

cholera epidemic broke out in late 2010, which has killed nearly 7,000 and sickened close to half a million people.

Nearly 18 months on from an earthquake that had killed over 250,000 people and left 1.5 million people homeless, I returned to Haiti in June of last year and I was really heartened by the progress I saw.

A whopping 5 million cubic metres (about half) of the rubble had been cleared. The traffic situation in Port au Prince was just as crazy as ever but with less rubble clogging up the streets, getting around the city had become a whole lot easier. In the space of a year, nearly two thirds of the people made homeless by the earthquake have been moved out of

overcrowded camps across the city.

We visited Champs de Mars and walked through the camp meeting families and children. Heavy tropical rain began to fall and the ground underfoot became really muddy and the children laughed as my feet got stuck right in it.

Think of your worst camping weekend ever at an Irish music festival with rain and mud everywhere and it doesn't even begin to compare with the conditions these families have lived in for the past eighteen months. These vulnerable children, women and men are just some of the more than 550,000 Haitians continuing to shelter in 800 over-crowded sites, patiently waiting to be re-housed.

But there were also clear examples of development and



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things changing for the better and nowhere could this be seen and felt more than in the schools we visited during our trip. Before the quake, it is estimated that less than half of the children in Haiti ever got the chance to see the inside of a classroom and even if a child was enrolled in school, there was only a one in 3 chance of the little one finishing primary school. The 2010 earthquake further crippled the education system, with almost 4,000 education buildings damaged or destroyed, which interrupted the schooling of over 2.5 million children.

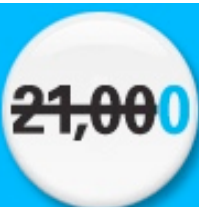
Since the earthquake, UNICEF has helped construct nearly 200 semi-permanent schools, which are now used by 80,000 children every day. Standing in a school set up by UNICEF and watching children take part in a maths class was a special moment for me in Port au Prince last June. One by one, the kids went up to the blackboard to do their sums. Who can forget the fear you'd have as

a child as you made your way up to the blackboard in front of everybody! So many of the kids there that day were getting their very first taste of education and the classroom buzzed with energy and excitement. An eagerness to learn was etched on every happy little face in the class.

Just think what the future of Haiti would be like if we get every Haitian child access to a quality education - their potential to end the cycle of poverty and contribute to the recovery of their nation would increase exponentially. It's no wonder President Martelly has made it one of his priorities to get free education for every child and UNICEF will work closely with the Haitian government to make this a reality. Do you know your support helped us provide some 750,000 children and more than 15,000 teachers in 2,500 schools with learning and teaching materials last October for Haiti's Back-To-School campaign?

**UNICEF's work has moved on in Haiti – it's not all about recovery and re-building any longer, but a critical time for change and progress. Change that you could see on the ground and feel reflected in how people spoke with hope and optimism about the future for Haiti's children. This change wouldn't have been possible without you, our supporters, and so thank you to everyone who supports our work for children in Haiti. We couldn't achieve all that we do, without you.**

For more information and multimedia content please visit our website: [www.unicef.ie](http://www.unicef.ie)



**21,000** CHILDREN DIE EVERY DAY FROM PREVENTABLE CAUSES.  
WE BELIEVE THAT NUMBER  
**SHOULD BE ZERO.**