



Where Is She Heading

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Volunteering After a Disaster - Yes, but probably not immediately in Haiti.

The media has kept up a steady stream of information about the situation in Haiti. As concerned volunteers, a common reaction is - What can I do? Where can I help? Your feet itch to help immediately. As you watch and read about the situation, it feels like the most important work is done right after the event. But remember, just as New Orleans is still recovering from Katrina, Haiti will need assistance for years to come.

There are many ways you can help now, but it will most likely not involve a plane ticket to Haiti.

The people/volunteers that are most needed immediately after any disaster, either domestic or international, are those with specific training and are already in or close to the area. Military personnel, National Guard, police, government workers, doctors, nurses, and engineers. The second wave of volunteers tend to be made up of non-medical volunteers who have been through special training programs with well-established disaster agencies such as Red Cross, UN Volunteers, Salvation Army or the United Way.

Why are other people who want to volunteer not encouraged to help at the disaster site? During the time immediately after a disaster, the local community is already stretched to the limit for housing, water, supplies and transportation. The first priority is to get help to the victims in the area. Time and resources spent on coordinating outside volunteers takes away from priority one.

As much as the rest of us without the credentials or necessary training would love to help, know that you can - but probably not in Haiti for right now. Don't despair because there are ways you can help.

HOW YOU CAN HELP FROM HOME

I have been following the information on Peter Greenberg's website about how to support the people in Haiti. He has a comprehensive list of agencies that are either already on the ground or are effective portals for funds, supplies and aid in Haiti. Check out Peter Greenberg.

* People are encouraged to send money and donations through one of the well-established agencies already in place.

* Relief agencies across the country may be mobilizing supplies and staff to help. Most communities have offices for the Red Cross, CARE, and Habitat for Humanity, The Salvation Army, The United Way, and/or World Vision. Check with your local offices to see if there are ways you can help now. You may be asked to sort items, pack supplies, or fill in for a staff member who has been sent to work in Haiti.

* Work for corporation? - Does your company have supplies that are new but are not going to be used? See if there is an agency that could use your donation for their relief efforts.

* Already donate blood? - See if your local blood center is looking for donations that can be sent to Haiti.

HOW YOU CAN HELP IN THE FUTURE

* Even when the immediate danger has passed, there will most likely be a need for workers and volunteers for years to come to help rebuild the infrastructure and the lives of many Haitians. Keep your eyes on disaster relief or volunteer sending organizations to find out when those opportunities arise.

* Back to blood donations (one of my favorite ways to volunteer). Even if your blood won't go directly to Haiti, remember there are local people that will benefit from your voluntary donation. Whole pints of blood can be split into three different components meaning that you may be helping three people. Donated blood has a 42-day shelf life. You might consider becoming a regular blood donor to make sure that blood is always readily available.

Recently I completed two volunteer jobs in Denver; one specifically for Haiti and the other as an ongoing commitment to that cause.

First - I spent the morning sorting t-shirts and baseball caps at the World Vision warehouse in Denver. I was one of 80 volunteers, from pre-teens to seniors, taping boxes, sorting new, donated clothing, creating service kits for healthcare workers, and repackaging them for Haiti. World Vision warehouse in Denver has a staff of only four, but so far, this location has sent three planes and multiple truckloads of clothing and support supplies. As World Vision has a distribution center on Haiti, the Denver warehouse is also sending a staff member to help for one month. During the quake, the building was damaged and although the staff was temporarily trapped, they suffered no injuries. Check out World Vision as they have several locations around the country and globe.

Second - I gave blood at my local blood bank. I love to give blood, not the needle or feeling a little spent afterwards, but because it makes me feel good to give something that is needed and that I have in ready supply. I admit it. I go for the cookies and the ice cream sandwiches as well.

You may find that for right now, supporting the medical people and volunteers on the ground from afar is what you can do today. If you are interested in following an individual who is on the ground in Haiti, check out Barton Brooks' blog on Guerilla Aid. I just found out about Barton and his two projects, Guerilla Aid and Global Colors, a non-profit that encourages people to arrive in a location and then look around for ways to help.

There will be an on-going need for post-disaster support and volunteering. If this type of volunteer work is where you are called, investigate local training opportunities now so that will you can be a viable candidate for on-the-ground volunteering in the future.

Check out - Red Cross
Salvation Army
United Way

Until next month, please

Travel in Safety.

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