

Local women launch ambitious plan to open orphanage in impoverished Haiti

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Staff Writer

Three friends have launched an ambitious project they hope will meet the needs of some of Haiti's disadvantaged children.

Audrey Hoekstra and Camille Otum, both of Georgetown, and Era Ferron of Brampton plan to open an orphanage in Haiti, considered to be the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Otum hails from Haiti.

The orphanage will be called Welcome Home Children's Centre and provide a safe and nurturing environment for children of all ages who have been orphaned, neglected, abused, exploited or simply left behind.

All three women are members of the Centre's board. They hope people will support the project by making a monetary donation.

The goal of the Centre is to provide hope for a better future and tangible resources that will allow children to develop the skills and abilities that will ensure they become the best they can be.

While they want to ensure that each child is placed in a loving, caring, and nurturing

home, they realize many of the children will remain in the care of the orphanage until they reach adulthood so they intend to raise the children in a way that will address all aspects of their lives- physical, psychological, intellectual and spiritual.

Hoekstra said they witnessed the poverty in Haiti first-hand while on a mission team with Georgetown Christian Fellowship approximately five years ago.

"We saw a lot of children eating from the ground," said Hoekstra. "The idea was to set up an orphanage where children can eat from the table, and have proper clothing."

Their goal is ultimately to acquire approximately 10 acres of land and build an orphanage in Cabaret, which is just north of Port-au-Prince.

But in the meantime, the organization is looking at renting a home that belongs to a family member of Otum's in the same town to be used as a temporary orphanage until they can build and open the permanent home.

Otum and Era are heading to Haiti today (Friday) to see if the temporary home is suitable for use as an orphanage. If it is,

Hoekstra said they, along with their husbands, plan to go back to Haiti in March to do whatever work is required to get the home ready and hopefully be able to move some kids in that spring.

Hoekstra said eventually they want to provide programs such as farming techniques, educational programs to facilitate academic excellence and social programs to groom the children to become responsible citizens.

"We first want to make sure they have the medication they require and get them fed properly," said Hoekstra.

She said they hope to start with eight children who are living on the street.

She estimates they will need about \$50,000 to set up the temporary orphanage and annual costs to run it will be about \$20,000.

They figure three staff people along with a 24-hour guard will be required.

They want to see the children in the orphanage finish high school and to teach them to become self-sufficient. They will also help with the younger children and harvest the vegetables in the orphanage's garden.



Friends Camille Otum, Era Ferron and Audrey Hoekstra are hoping raise \$300,000 to open an orphanage called Welcome Home Children's Centre. Otum and Ferron were expecting to leave today for the poverty-stricken country. Submitted photo

"The need is so tremendous," said Hoekstra.

"It's a big undertaking but it can be done," said Hoekstra. "The way the doors are being opened for us is amazing."

Hoekstra said visiting Haiti on the earlier mission was a real eye-opener for her.

"I thought the worst place we've ever been to was Malawi," said Hoekstra, but her opinion changed after the mission to Haiti.

"It was unbelievable. It will make your hair curl," she said.

Their goal is to raise \$300,000 and they have been holding various fundraisers including car washes, garage sales, trunk sales and silent

auctions. To date about \$3,000 has been raised.

The organization is in the process of getting a charitable number but in the meantime those who make monetary donations can receive a tax receipt if they make the cheque out to Georgetown Christian Fellowship, with Welcome Home Children's Centre Inc. on the memo line.

Send cheques to Georgetown Christian Fellowship at, 13619 Hwy. 7 West, RR 1 Georgetown ON, L7G 4S4.

Tax receipts will be issued for any donation of \$20 or more. Receipts will be issued at the end of January for the previous taxation year.

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