

# Haiti



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## RESILIENCE IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY

Report 2020/21



## The impact of Covid

**In many ways, the L'Arche communities in Haiti are approaching the COVID crisis with their usual resilience, creativity and energy.**

There are activities every week to keep everyone engaged and healthy: sports, gardening, cooking workshops, crafts, birthday celebrations. Life goes on despite the disruption of routine.

The ability to celebrate is still very much a part of daily life. And both communities and the board of directors have adjusted to the demands of the technical world, ensuring people have the technology they need to keep in touch or meet on-line.

Health care is a challenge. Several members have significant health needs, and medical care is not easily accessible for either communities. All possible precautions are being taken. Assistants and members with intellectual disabilities stay at home and visits are forbidden. There is also concern about the rising cost of living. Thankfully, no one has contracted COVID, and overall people have kept a positive attitude, welcoming each day and looking for its beauty.

# A vision for the future

Eleven years on, it is still impossible to talk about Haiti without referring to the earthquake that struck on January 12, 2010. It was the most devastating natural disaster ever to hit the country; the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. Roughly 250,000 lives were lost and 300,000 people were injured. The epicentre close to the capital Port au Prince, meant about 1.5 million individuals were forced to live in makeshift camps. The country faced the greatest humanitarian need in its history and is still struggling with the consequences.

The L'Arche community of Carrefour was devastated by the quake. While the community of Chantal escaped much of the immediate physical impact, it was hit by the cholera epidemic that followed, and in October 2016 by Hurricane Mathieu.

Through the support of L'Arche International and the swift generosity of donors around the world, interim buildings were constructed almost immediately after the quake and the Port-au-Prince (Carrefour) community was able, not just to continue but in many ways to become a place of relative stability and support for the immediate neighbourhood.

The community used the opportunity created by the quake to think strategically

and to envision a re-foundation plan. This plan involves a move away from the fault line, to a safer part of the city, while still remaining deeply rooted in local culture and meeting needs in Port-au-Prince.

Now more than 11 years on, the community's vision is taking shape. Thanks to the generosity of donors, in spring 2019 the community were able to buy a large piece of land in a quiet neighborhood close to the airport and a hospital. The new community design is inspired by the traditional Haitian Lakou Model in which extended families in rural Haiti would organize themselves into groups of homes surrounding a central courtyard. The new site has space for this approach along with fruit trees and a garden. As soon as Covid-19 allows, the board of directors are ready to call for construction tenders.

Meanwhile both the community homes in Chantal were heavily damaged by the hurricane and despite repairs there are significant problems with leaks in heavy rain. Neither meet the needs of the core members – most have mobility issues. The bathrooms are not accessible and there is an overall lack of space. The community is developing a building renovation plan and further income-generating activities.

Today 60% of the population live below the poverty line. There is still a great deal of stigma associated with children with intellectual disabilities, particularly in the mountainous interior. Post the earthquake, in the Carrefour district one in 6 families has a member with a disability.

The social and political crisis continues in Haiti, with dramatic consequences for its population. Episodes of "peyi lock" (blocked country), demonstrations and blockades in the streets, have made travel practically impossible. The level of insecurity has increased, partly due to an upsurge in kidnappings - even of children in the Port au Prince area.



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# Communities at a glance

## L'Arche Carrefour

- Founded in 1975 in Port au Prince (Capital of Haiti)
- 20 children and adults with disabilities attend the community's education and therapy centre.
- 13 adults and children with learning disabilities live in family-like homes operated by the community.
- A further 5 adults with disabilities join the community to work in entrepreneurial projects (including peanut butter, honey, moringa and cremasse production).
- The community supports a group of families of adults and children with disabilities nearby – some who attend the therapy centre and others who don't, through deliveries of food and medicine.
- The community welcomes university students for volunteer work every year. (Though this has not been possible since the beginning of the pandemic.) Youth visits are organized with the Haitian Education & Leadership Program to share the gifts of people living with disabilities.

## L'Arche Chantal

- Founded in 1980
- In the south, a more rural community
- 17 people with disabilities live in the family-like homes operated by the community.
- A further 4 people with disabilities work in the communities and peanut butter production projects.
- The community has a garden, henhouse and egg production project.
- They are planning to reopen their woodworking activities.



**Eunice the community leader in Carrefour says:**

**“On a day-to-day basis, all of this is very challenging: the frequent kidnappings, the currency fluctuations... but every time I connect with L'Arche International, for training or formation or support, my energy levels shoot up. It helps so much for the communities here to connect and reflect, be heard and be seen.”**



## Looking forward

For the moment the pandemic is affecting community revenues. The long-term ambition is for the communities to deliver more of their operating costs from a mix of local fundraising and production sales. Inevitably, the rise of political tension over the past 18 months has meant plans have had to be put on hold. However, L'Arche in Haiti continues to build for a future in which the communities are places of safety, belonging, creativity and productivity with a vision for what the human family can look like as each member is given a full place.

**In the words of Marie-Anne, one of the people with disabilities who lives in Chantal says "L'Arche is my family. We all – we make one. L'Arche is my home forever."**

## Testimony of Marie-Anne

Marie-Anne Jean was born in 1973. Orphaned and blind, she lived with an aunt until she joined L'Arche Chantal in 1989. She is seen as the "sage" in her community and shares her experience of neighbourhood and parish life in the L'Arche International series **Words of the World**.

<http://wordsoftheworld.larche.org/en/portraits/haitienne-marie-anne/>



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