“It is our responsibility to use our knowledge and our skills to heal our country in the way we know how.”

~ pcH Medical Team

The Foundation for International Development Assistance
Fondation pour le soutien du développement international
It was understood when I accepted this role that I was to focus on developing a broader constituency and to begin branding the organization. Every fundraiser-in-training is schooled to know “when to make the ask”. Wanting to set FIDA/pcH apart, I thought, “What if we never made the ask? What if we had a vision so inspiring that would simply move people to give?” I recall trying this out on my first “candidate”. His response, “What if you have inspired me to give nothing?” I countered, “Then I must check my story as I am only a voice for others and if I have failed to inspire, I have failed to represent their desire to realize the fullness of God’s creation.” The man laid a cheque on my desk that was double his usual contribution and returned the next day with a cheque that tripled the previous one. I aimed to stick to the strategy.

“FIDA/pcH is really different,” a newly inspired donor said to me recently “It makes sense to invest in people who are motivated to provide for themselves instead of thinking you have to always be helping them.”

Now, in these current difficult times, I am often asked, “How are we able to do what we do?” This response from the pcH Medical Director, Dr. Jeudy, expresses it best:

“In my many years of experience working with other NGO’s, I have never encountered a more unique philosophy as that of pcH. This respect-driven vision is not only an expressed mission, it is central to the entire strategy. The organization is not judgemental. It is not distinct. It is not bureaucratic. This allows it to respond nimbly and efficiently in any given situation. The facilitation of the mobile clinics to the earthquake-stricken area in the south is one such example. Large organizations could not have achieved this so quickly and so effectively. The unique aspect of pcH is that it truly embodies the community. It can be said that it is the community incarnate.”

And that is how we do it.

Betsy Wall, Executive Director
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My name is Jean Felix Jean (center). I am the archivist for the Fon Batis Health Cooperative clinic. I create and classify patient files and retrieve them when the nurse requires.

In August I had a fever and very high blood pressure. I received an injection to ease my pain but it continued. Dr. Holly (right) performed another assessment and discovered I needed surgery that could not be performed at our clinic. I also needed further exams. The cost for this is very expensive. However, I am a member of the Fon Batis Health Cooperative. As surgery is not entirely covered in the insurance policy, pcH staff met with the other members about what to do. Did they want to make an exception? They all said “no”. Rather, they agreed for each member to contribute 50 HTG to offset the cost. Respecting this decision, pcH agreed to meet the balance of the cost and my surgery was then done in Port au Prince.

I am a member of the Health Cooperative because I know when any member of my family is sick, we will be taken care of. I tell my story to many people who have now joined. I explain to them all the benefits. Every person who joined because of me, paid their annual fee in full. This makes me very happy because this clinic is us and we are responsible to make it work for the benefit of all.
“We are born in Haiti. We are raised here. We are educated here. We are Haitian… being here for those who stand all day in the sun, is what we can do. It is our responsibility to use our knowledge and our skills to heal our country in the way we know how.”

Chatter and laughter can be heard at the first grey yawn of morning. Thus begins the day: a generous breakfast, a circle of prayer that God will guide our hands and hearts. This is the pcH medical team in post-earthquake zone returning for three clinics following four clinics the previous month that treated 1,577 patients. We are 17 in all: 4 doctors, 8 nurses (2 local), and 5 logistical staff; each declining compensation. We fly on a twin prop plane from Port au Prince to Les Cayes to avoid the gang-controlled areas. We are met by two drivers and vehicles. The clinics are a cooperative activity and are responsible for each site plus three clean work areas with tables and chairs: space for registration and taking of vital signs, a consultation room, and area for pharmacy. A midday lunch is not expected, but it is prepared. We are equipped with an extensive pharmacy of quality medicines appropriate for the needs we know we will face. While the setting is rough and bare, we carry the tools of telehealth technology. And then they came… Day One: 443 patients. Day Two: 353 patients. Day Three: 368 patients. I observe that each man, woman and child is treated with dignity and respect, and given medication for a full round of treatment. This is not their usual experience. It is one more block in building a foundation of trust.

The day ends as it begins, with chatter, laughter, and gratitude for the opportunity to share their gifts with their fellow brothers and sisters.
The response from a recent candidate for the pcH Adult Literacy program was without hesitation: “We do not trust each other. We do not love each other”. This may seem incredulous to those who see Haitians otherwise. But for those of us who live and work here, we also know the dark underbelly…. the violence, corruption, and most notably, the recent kidnapping of 17 missionaries. We are told that absolutely no one can be trusted. Let me posit: It is not just the times. It has always been there. We just did not acknowledge it. And now we grieve. And pray. We know little else to do.

So, what can be done? The literacy candidate responded: “It is through education, not just reading and writing, but education that opens the mind to possibility, that develops critical thinking, that nurtures confidence and dignity, that values trust and transparency. Only in this way can our country hope to be changed.” We hired him.
There is something about “getting on the road” to visit donors that draws up a ton of feelings for me. It makes me think of my grandfather who cultivated these relationships so many years ago going door to door; simple faith and a powerful vision. Those who opened their doors to him became the foundation of what we are able to do in Haiti today. How would they now receive me? Will they invite me in when I knock on the door? Will I be accepted with the same graciousness and trust? I so want them to know how personally connected I feel to them. I want you to hear that I know your name even though I have not met you. For you have been part of my family in a way that you may not truly understand. In this way, you give me confidence and energy. You have known my grandfather. You have known my mother. And now, I am hoping you will know me. You understand the simple mission we carry out. I so love that you give to something that I represent and respect what it is we do in Haiti. You are such an unexpected joyful part of my life because I believe we share the same values. For those who have received me as family, I thank you. It is like we have come full circle. And I look forward to each day I am on the road again.

Our first adult literacy program in 2001 addressed the psycho-social obstacles that hinder every man, woman and child in this country, namely, “the twin demons of fear and mistrust”. These demons are so culturally embedded and so debilitating that it can be said they are the root of all that is wrong with Haiti: corruption, revenge, greed, poverty, illiteracy, lack of infrastructure. The effect is crippling and the root of Haiti’s myriad of failures. Despite our noble agendas and callings, we foreigners are not without blame but neither are Haitians. Recognizing that they still remain in the same place after a century of aid has a few of the brave, standing up and just saying “no”.

As can be expected at any Haitian celebration, there is loud, tuneful singing, often of original compositions. At one graduation, a song went like this: “If we work hand in hand, we can go far. We must trust each other because we need each other to go on.” This profound awareness of what was understood, and the knowledge that literacy gifted, is such that we print it on the bottom of our handwritten receipts.

Presently, over 1000 cooperative men and women are engaged in the pcH literacy program, each one pressing onward to own their future.

Alexis Barkman, Country Director
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This past September, FIDA hosted a fundraising event at the Falk Family Farm in Niagara-on-the-Lake that realized a record revenue of over $70,000. This was the first event organized by Alexis Barkman, the daughter of Betsy Wall and the third generation of founders, Jack and Anne Wall. Her remarks are here, in part:

“I remember my mother once saying, if all else failed in her career, Haiti would be the last possible resort. I didn't want my thinking going the same way. My mother actually did land up working in Haiti but not because it was a last resort. She chose it. And then so did I. Who would have thought? But here I am, formally taking on the role of Country Director for FIDA Canada as my mother takes on the role of Country Director in Haiti. It scares the living daylights right out of me but then if you want to change the world, then that is what you feel like everyday when you wake up. And I do.

I believe we get to where we get because we inherently know what we want and who we want to be. We all have had different journeys. But today, at this moment, we are at the same place because we have something in common... a value, a belief, a hope, an inspiration that we can change a life, that we can make some corner in this world a better place.

So, today… in a thousand different ways, through a thousand different twists and turns, we have all come to this exact same place. And I like that.”

To those of who so generously have affirmed this vision, may we say, on behalf of the 8,000 or so cooperative members we currently work with and the 56,000 family members they represent, that your gifts will be so honoured. They will be multiplied and the stories will be for the generations that follow...