

ASBURY PARK PRESS

Red Bank charity runs Haiti clinic, hosts fundraiser



Andrew Goudswaard 5:41 p.m. EDT June 10, 2015

(Photo: APP)

It looks like a regular doctor's office. Except that it's not.

It's an air-conditioned building staffed with a doctor and two nurses. There's an examination room, a laboratory and even an X-ray machine. Except, this "doctor's office" is actually made of three large shipping containers and it's located in L'Acajou, in the northeast of Haiti, one of the poorest areas of the most impoverished nation in the Western Hemisphere.

The L'Acajou medical clinic is run by Aslan Youth Ministries, a Christian-centered Red Bank nonprofit that has been active in Haiti for nearly 20 years. The clinic is designed to give residents of L'Acajou access to medical care they'd otherwise never receive.

Joseph Israel, who heads Aslan's Haiti operation, said the nearest doctor is 70 miles away. Even if the residents were able to travel that far, he said most could never afford to see a doctor, they live on as little as \$1 a day.

Craig Bogard, Aslan's co-founder and leader, said the only way to describe it is "overwhelming poverty."

"There are mothers who mix mud with their children's food just so it feels like they have more in their stomach," he said, "They're gradually starving to death."

Workers install Aslan clinic in L'Acajou. (Photo: APP)



The night the clinic arrived, Bogard said there were people singing and dancing, "many were in tears."

Israel, who grew up in this part of Haiti said Aslan had "changed everything" for the people of L'Acajou.

The clinic is designed to treat patients for burns, infections, broken or sprained bones and help alleviate the symptoms of diseases like malaria and dengue fever, which are rampant in Haiti. It opened in January when the first team of American doctors arrived to treat patients. However, it now sits idle.

It costs \$100 per day to run the clinic. Money that Aslan does not have. So, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 714 Herbertsville Road in Brick, is trying to help. They have organized a strawberry festival from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. this Saturday that will feature all sorts of strawberry dishes, chocolate-covered strawberries, strawberry butter, tarts, pies and more with all proceeds going towards the operating costs of the clinic.

St. Paul's held a similar festival in 2008 and raised \$3,000. Bogard hopes to raise enough money to open the clinic for one day a week to start, with the goal of expanding to seven. There are also plans to add a fully sterile operating room, as well as a church and school to the property.

Mission worker Kori Schiess poses with a Haitian child. (Photo: APP)



Aslan began working in Haiti in 1996, setting up medical stations under mango trees and starting day camps for local children to sing songs, play sports and learn about the Bible. There was a child in one of the camps named Daniest Adrien.

He, like all the children in L'Acajou, seemingly didn't have a future to look forward to.

However, he received funding to go to medical school and packed all his earthly belongings in a suitcase to study across the border in the

Dominican Republic. He eventually graduated and now Dr. Daniest Adrien runs Aslan's clinic in L'Acajou.

It's success stories like that, Bogard said, that keep him hopeful even in a country as troubled as Haiti.

"If we were to look at the magnitude of the problem in a place like Haiti, we'd quit," he said, "But you don't look at it like that. The way to help them is to look at it one person at a time. Those people are the real heroes."

Bogard would know.

Back in Monmouth County, Aslan has been working with children in impoverished neighborhoods in Red Bank, Long Branch, Neptune and Asbury Park for 40 years. With a network of more than 300 local volunteers, they offer tutoring and a "right choices" program which teaches children about faith and making responsible decisions.

Aslan actually got involved in Haiti through taking Monmouth County children down there to see their own struggles in global context.

"It teaches them the lesson of: Don't cry when you don't have shoes, because you're going to see a man that has no feet," Bogard said.

How you can help

Donations to the clinic can be sent to: Haiti Medical Clinic Fund, 714 Herbertsville Road, Brick, NJ 08724.