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Students dig deep for Haiti orphans



Grade 6 student Emily Johnston looks on as kindergartner Gideon Porter hands over a goody bag to Langford firefighter Lieut. Glenn Cooper at Lighthouse Christian Academy. Students filled 46 bags for the fire department's Haiti orphanage initiative.

Erin McCracken/News staff

By [Erin McCracken - Goldstream News Gazette](#)

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It's the kind of lesson that can't be learned in a classroom.

Four Langford firefighters left for Haiti Wednesday on a nine-day mission to help a suffering Haitian orphanage.

But thanks to elementary students at Lighthouse Christian Academy in Langford, the firefighters will be bringing a lot more than hope and possibility.

Students, staff and parents at the school recently filled personalized cloth bags with items regarded as luxuries for the orphanage kids and grown-ups who get to open them.

"We can't teach kids compassion. It's not in a textbook," said Helena Prins, the kindergarten teacher who prompted the school's involvement. "But by doing this you really raise the awareness. We have it so easy

here.”

She was inspired by the work of Langford firefighters to turn things around for an earthquake-ravaged Port-au-Prince orphanage, home to 38 children and six adults.

After contacting Langford fire Chief Bob Beckett with an offer of help, homemade bags were supplied to the school, each featuring the name of an orphan.

Each Lighthouse elementary grade from kindergarten to Grade 7 filled eight bags with clothing, deodorant, small toys and stuffed animals and French reading books — 46 in all. Even the two nuns who run the orphanage were thought of. Their bags include mini first aid kits.

“We have it easier than they do,” said Grade 6 student Emily Johnston. “I think it’s a really good idea because the people in Haiti need them.”

To provide a personal touch, the students created homemade cards for each bag to share a little bit of their lives with the Haitians they are helping. Johnston proudly decorated her card with soccer images, music notes, dancing shoes and sunshine and smiley faces.

“It’s so wonderful for our school to get involved,” Prins said. “I think it touched everyone who filled a bag.”

As she spoke, her eyes filled with tears and Langford firefighter Lieut. Glenn Cooper couldn’t help but be touched by her sensitivity and compassion for a project that has meant a lot to his firefighting community and that mobilized many others in Langford.

“I got emotional listening to her,” said Cooper, one of the four firefighters going to Haiti. “It hits you right where it counts.

“It reinforces that you’re going (to Haiti) for the right reason.”

Just before the Grade 6 students toted the bags out to a waiting fire truck Nov. 4, Prins handed Cooper an envelope with money with which the orphans can buy sweets or anything else they don’t have.

“We’re just the couriers,” Cooper said. “This is between these (Lighthouse) kids and those kids (in the orphanage) and I think this is just phenomenal.”

Once on the ground in Haiti, the firefighters hope to get as much work done as possible even though their time is short. Another challenge is the weather. They’ll be arriving in the aftermath of Hurricane Tomas last weekend.

More trouble isn’t something Haiti can deal with, considering hundreds of thousands of people are still homeless after the Jan. 12 earthquake, and with a recent cholera outbreak that has killed about 500 people.

Part of the work firefighters will be doing will include lining up contacts in Haiti so that building materials from here can be sent over to help rebuild the orphanage that was toppled in the quake. Everyone has been living in tents since then.

They also hope to fix up the orphanage’s primitive washroom and either build a proper fence or enlist local contractors to replace the few tin panels that form a flimsy makeshift enclosure.

“They have so little,” Cooper explained. “It’s a good lesson. We have everything here.”

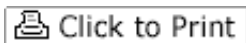
For more on Langford’s Haiti orphanage project, see www.teamhaitichildren.com.

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