

# HAITI STRONGER

OVERTURE INTERNATIONAL BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER



## A Focus on Empowerment

Welcome to our semi-annual newsletter, where we keep you updated on our most current mission activities focused on protecting and empowering Haiti's most vulnerable children and communities in the south. This issue is filled with stories of resilience, growth and hope as we strive to build a sustainable future for Haiti's children.

We're excited to continue sharing with you the evolution of our Les Cayes campus that was once an orphanage and is now serving as a community-based center, offering essential social services rooted in family and community strengthening, healthcare and education. This change has been a journey of cooperation between us, local organizations, the Haitian government and community members, continually adapting to meet evolving needs.

While foreign organizations often have their interpretations of addressing poverty, we believe in the power of strengthening families and communities. We are firm in our stance that **orphanages are NOT the answer!** Instead, we invest in long-term resources, focusing on family and community

empowerment to bring about lasting change.

Our commitment to empowerment also **extends to the agencies in place to protect families and communities**, such as IBESR, Haiti's child welfare agency, and other agencies that have the potential to protect and strengthen communities.

Despite the challenges of economic hardships and prevalent psychosocial issues, we're committed to preventing family breakdown. By focusing on education, job training, mental health services and community development, we're building safety nets for families and creating opportunities for a better tomorrow.

Remember, **we cannot do this work without support.** Our services and community-based center in Haiti are essential for maintaining impact and offering a glimmer of hope for the future of Haiti's child welfare system. Throughout this newsletter, we hope you'll find information that not only educates but motivates you to join us in empowering families, thereby illuminating the path towards a brighter future for Haiti's children.

## Message from Executive Director

With each passing month, it feels as though Haiti slips deeper into chaos, clouding the vision for restoration. But this is precisely when we must lean even more firmly on our faith in God and His plan for Haiti. We know that out of total destruction, new life can emerge. **Just as Noah persevered, trusting in God's plan** (Genesis chapters 6-9), **so must we.** From Noah's story, we are reminded to **be obedient** to God, **trust** in His plan, **remain righteous** amidst evil, **hold hope** in uncertainty and **listen** to His calling.

Overture was born out of a deep passion and calling to protect Haiti's children. Our mission has evolved beyond mere crisis response. We are not only rescuing children from perilous situations, but also ensuring they thrive in safe, nurturing environments. This holistic approach includes education, empowerment and investment **in their caretakers**, be it adults in families, leaders in communities, government child protection agencies, and the children themselves, so they understand and assert their rights.

Given Haiti's dire state, Overture's role has never been more crucial. With orphanages closing, organizations halting operations, professionals fleeing for safety and food insecurity reaching unprecedented levels, the demand for our services has skyrocketed. Despite these challenges, the support from the philanthropic community is at an all-time low, making our work even more arduous. Every member of our team has made significant sacrifices, but we continue steadfastly, knowing that God will provide what is needed, even at the last moment.

It's understandable why many hesitate to invest in Haiti, swayed by the grim news. However, these reports do not capture the full picture. Families are the very roots of Haiti, and by empowering them, we are laying the foundation for Haiti's future. As Jeremiah 29:11 assures us, *"For I know the plans I have for you,"* declares the LORD, *"plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* And Romans 8:28 echoes this sentiment: *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*

Since 2020, in collaboration with IBESR, we have closed four orphanages, reuniting nearly 400 children with their biological or foster families. By the end of this year, we aim to close five more orphanages, helping an additional 200+ children begin their journeys home. Our crisis care center continues to provide immediate support for children in urgent need, ensuring they find a safe family environment as quickly as possible.

These actions represent only a small portion of what has been made possible with your support – more importantly, we are developing leaders at all levels to surround children with those who will protect them from harm and pave the way towards prosperous futures.

We extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support. Because of you, we have made significant strides in transforming child protection in southern Haiti. We ask you to continue praying for Haiti, and if God leads you, to make a donation today.

With heartfelt thanks and blessings,

Lisa Hyatt

Executive Director, Overture International

### VISION

We envision a Haiti transformed by strong, independent, self-sufficient Haitian communities.

### MISSION

We empower Haitian families and their communities to be active and engaged in building full, hopeful and independent lives.

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# Milestones from January to June 2024

## Dory Dome Community Center Grand Opening

We recently celebrated the grand opening of the Dory Community Facilitation Center, a truly transformative project for the community of Maniche and its surrounding communities! Built with a multi-purpose vision of providing safe shelter during disasters, central meeting spaces for community events and secure storage for essentials like food and medical supplies, the dome center is already thriving and acts as an integral part of building community and strengthening families. Described as a “beacon of light” in southern Haiti, the center is drawing people in and shining a light on what is possible when children are protected and individuals and families are empowered.



## 83 Children Reunified with Families

In partnership with IBESR, we've had the privilege of reuniting a total of 83 children from surrounding orphanages with their families this year. 60 of these children have been reunified with their biological families and the other 23 children have been placed with loving and qualified foster families committed to their safety and care. In preparation for these reunifications, we held multiple education seminars to raise awareness around the harm caused by orphanages and the urgent need to make the foster system in Haiti a reality.







## Two More Orphanages Successfully Closed

We are continuing in our unwavering commitment to remove children from orphanages and other harmful environments because orphanages cause more harm than good. And because children thrive best in their own homes with their own families. We've witnessed this firsthand, which is why we are so adamant that orphanages are never the answer. Since the beginning of the year, we've helped with the successful closure of two more orphanages in southern Haiti, removing nearly 100 innocent children from harm's way. Now the hard work begins as the families of each of these children will require both immediate and long-term support and resources to keep their families intact.

### FEATURE STORY

## *meet* Betina.

**Meet 14-year-old Betina**, the youngest of four daughters. Tragically, Betina was only three months old when her father died unexpectedly, leaving her mother (Marie) alone to care for all four children. Marie did everything in her power to raise and support these girls on her own, but after five grueling years, Marie relinquished her girls to the orphanage so they could each receive an education she'd never be able to afford on her own.

Betina was six years old when she was placed in the orphanage. Unfortunately, the promises made to her mother by the orphanage for an education, daily nutrition and loving care were far from the reality. Neglect and abuse were constant, and oftentimes, Betina would go days without access to food. Furthermore, the education she received was poor at best. Betina is currently four years behind where she should be at her age.

Fast forward to 2024. After eight traumatic years in the orphanage, Betina has been reunited with her mother and is living back at home! And there's no place she'd rather be. Overture is committed to walking alongside this family with a support plan that includes school scholarships and continued education around child protection to ensure Betina and Marie are never separated again.





# Empowerment

Empowerment in southern Haiti can take on many forms. Overture's Young Adult Empowerment Program, now named "Rejuvenation," focuses on empowering the most vulnerable members of our communities – *young adults* – so they can overcome the challenges they face and learn to thrive independently as contributing members of society. These young people often find themselves entangled in gang activity, incarcerated or homeless, facing

rejection from their communities. In partnership with IBESR, Overture's Rejuvenation program provides these individuals with a promising fresh start through intervention initiatives such as access to education, morals training, vocational skills, nutritious meals, healthcare and mentorship.

Our Rejuvenation program is already transforming and empowering the lives of several young Haitian adults. Valcourt, one of Rejuvenation's

participants, shared his gratitude for the program, stating, *"This training made me realize I was leading my life without a plan. I decided to be a different person and organize my life differently. I now have hope for a better life."*

Valcourt, alongside other program participants, is making significant strides towards becoming a self-reliant and productive community member.

## FEATURE STORY

### meet Mendy.

Mendy, a lead Protection Agent for IBESR in southern Haiti, has been devoted to child protection since joining the agency in 2012. Overseeing the foster care system, crisis response and family reunification, Mendy has witnessed firsthand the transformative impact of the partnership between IBESR and Overture International. *"The partnership between IBESR and Overture is invaluable. Overture is always there to support us, whether it's for kids in foster care, separated children or those referred by the BPM (Brigade for the Protection of Minors). They consistently assist us in our work. Before our partnership, we struggled to find suitable foster families for kids with special needs. Overture's involvement has been a game-changer, providing us with professional support and expertise,"* says Mendy.

A striking example of this cooperation is the case of a 17-year-old girl found on the streets and referred to IBESR. Overture took her in at our transitional center and played a crucial role in her eventual reunification with her family. Despite initial resistance, the Overture

Rejuvenation team's dedication and professionalism facilitated her safe return home, even after multiple relocations and a period of mistrust.

Through this collaboration, IBESR and Overture are making significant strides in protecting and empowering vulnerable young adults in Haiti.





## Casting a vision.

In the United States, we appreciate the ability of data to help us understand and solve the most challenging problems like hunger, poverty and homelessness. And while we take for granted the ability to collect, manage and analyze this data, in Haiti there is literally no database system in existence to gain insights into the unique challenges, threats and opportunities inherent in the communities we serve. That's why Overture is working with IBESR to build a database system to formally track all children in orphanages, promote accountability and provide insights to help us improve our programs and approaches to protecting and empowering children and families.

In addition to our focus on the database project, Overture is intensifying its efforts to assist IBESR, the Haitian social services agency, to close five more orphanages by the end of this year! This is a critical and monumental challenge that will impact hundreds of children in southern Haiti. These efforts follow our successful closing of several orphanages in our region in partnership with IBESR. As these orphanages close, we have an urgent need to support and reunify children with families, ensuring they can thrive in a loving home environment. Because many of these children are unable to return to their birth families, we must continue to work diligently to establish a robust and sustainable foster care system in southern Haiti. This initiative will provide safe and secure homes, offering stability and care to the hundreds of children who will be transitioning out of orphanages over the next year. Your investment is crucial and necessary in this transformative period, as it directly supports building strong foster families for these vulnerable children who have already experienced so much trauma in their short lives.

**Join us in our mission to build a brighter future for Haiti's children. Invest today to make a lasting impact!**







# Education

We believe education means LIFE for the children of Haiti. That's why Overture International is making significant investments in advancing education for Haiti's youth, particularly through the school at our campus in Les Cayes. This educational hub serves nearly 1,000 children from vulnerable communities, offering a critical lifeline to a brighter future. But our campus is more than just a school; it's a safe haven where children can learn, grow and dream beyond their current circumstances.

While the space at Les Cayes is able to accommodate these children, we face ongoing challenges in securing the necessary funding to support their education through scholarships. These scholarships are vital, enabling us to cover the costs of educational materials, qualified teachers and essential services that nurture each child's potential. **Your support is essential to ensuring that every child at our campus can access the education and resources they need to thrive.** Together, we can empower Haiti's future leaders.

## FEATURE STORY

### meet Scheidena.

Sheidena is an 18 year-old young woman who has attended the school at Overture's campus in Les Cayes since kindergarten. Her consistent and successful experience is not the norm for most young girls in southern Haiti. Because families are required to pay for their childrens' education, it is not unusual for children like Sheidena to be deprived of an education. In addition to her own hard work and dedication, scholarships from Overture helped make this empowering education possible for Sheidena. Because of her educational experience, she is able to realistically plan to pursue an advanced degree, with a dream of working in the medical field as a doctor, a surgeon or a dentist. For many of her peers, just surviving childhood, much less succeeding in school, is a challenging goal to achieve. So for Sheidena to realistically imagine a future that could include a career in medicine is truly incredible. She expresses her gratitude for the opportunity this way, "I am so grateful for my education. So many others have not had this opportunity and I don't take it for granted."

*I want to take full advantage of what I've been given and for which I've worked so hard to accomplish. I hope other children will have the same opportunity and take it seriously."*





# SPOTLIGHT.

Sheidena is just one of many success stories in Overture's work in Haiti. Rebecca is 21 years of age, and thanks to the guidance and support of Overture social workers, she has realized her dream of becoming a nurse! She is the first member of her family to earn a college degree, obtain a professional career and provide for herself. And because she has succeeded, she can now contribute to providing for her family and the other children in her community, which she so dearly loves. Realizing this dream was only made possible because of Rebecca's hard work and the availability of Overture scholarships funded by our generous supporters to pay for her early education and prepare her for college and her nursing career. We celebrate her success and salute her desire to give back to her family and her community.



## Casting a vision.

Unlike in the U.S., Haitian families are required to pay for their child's education, and in the most rural communities where Overture serves, access to functioning schools and trained teachers is a rarity. This is where Overture enters the equation. We offer scholarships to give children like Sheidena and Rebecca the opportunity to attend school and receive an education in southern Haiti, striving to place Haitian children on a path to ultimately end generational poverty and create a generation of independent, self-sufficient Haitians. In addition to scholarships at our campus, Overture donors fully support hundreds of scholarships in communities throughout southern Haiti for children who have been reunified from orphanages, placed in foster families, or to prevent separation from their families.

To further ensure children in these communities have a place to learn, Overture has built classrooms in some of the most remote areas of southern Haiti. Until every family can afford to provide an education for their children, we will continue to make scholarships and access to schools a priority.

**We invite you to join us in equipping these young people, the future leaders of Haiti, to have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed for themselves and for the generations to come.**



# Nutrition

In Haiti, which has an estimated 11 million people, nearly half of the population is facing extreme food insecurity. This issue is even more acute in southern Haiti due to its remoteness and distance from ports. That's why Overture focuses on nutrition as a key pillar in our Social Support Model. Beyond the essential need for food, building a robust and sustainable food production infrastructure is vital for fostering community, independence and autonomy, eliminating the need to rely on external aid. That's why we've developed and implemented programs like Community Farming and Diri Lavi! that provide the tools, training and opportunity for individuals to provide for their families, build up their communities and overcome food insecurity through their own means. This year, we've seen great progress in these programs with more than 60 community members participating in the Community Farming program, meaning that each one of these men and women were able to provide a consistent income for their families and contribute to bolstering their economic infrastructure. And our Diri Lavi! food packaging program provided a consistent purchasing partner for many farmers as well as dozens of income-producing jobs for young adults in the community giving them work experience and an opportunity to contribute to their family's income.



## FEATURE STORY

### meet Smick.

48 year-old Smick is a proud father of five. He lives with his wife, Stanne, and their family in a community near our campus. Through Overture's Community Farming program, Smick farms five plots of land with his family. This opportunity allows him to utilize his agricultural skills to financially provide for his family. Alongside his farming and livestock raising, Smick is also a mechanic, while Stanne runs a small shop. Their combined efforts and the supplementary support from Overture's programs are helping them build a more secure and self-sufficient future. Smick's story is a testament to how the right resources and support can empower families to thrive and grow within their communities. *"Having land through the Overture community farming program has been a huge blessing for my family and me. Cultivating our plots has provided us with a reliable*

*source of income and food. Even if it's not a lot, it makes a significant difference in our lives. We can afford to buy books and supplies for our children, and we can pay for their schooling and other needs. Our gardens are the foundation of our support and stability."*





## Casting a vision.

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world and continues to be pummeled by natural disasters and human-generated crises. Our current times are a perfect example of the devastating impact on the food supply from internal and external forces. Externally, Haiti's dependence on outside organizations to provide staples like rice was caused by countries like the U.S. that exports rice which sells at a much lower cost to help its own farmers while decimating the market for Haitian-grown rice. This displaced thousands of farmers and created a dependence on outside aid. Internally, the current violence led by gangs in Haiti has led to the takeover of ports and roadways, crushing the ability to safely move supplies, including food, to communities beyond the capitol. Overture's response to this is to focus on empowering and equipping Haitians to produce and sell food to Haitians, strengthening their economic infrastructure and promoting better nutrition and self-reliance. Our Diri Lavi! (Rice for Life!) food packaging program has proven to be a model program for exercising this approach.

According to Overture Program Manager Pierre Peronneau, Diri Lavi! is having a dramatic impact on nutrition, farmers and the economy. *"Diri Lavi! is empowering Haitian*

*communities by providing consistent, nutritious food while fostering local economic growth. By sourcing supplies from local farmers and employing community members, we are building self-sufficiency and sustainable livelihoods. This initiative not only nurtures health and independence today, but also paves the way for future agricultural development and economic prosperity in Haiti."*

**You can ensure that Diri Lavi! continues to be a transforming force in southern Haiti and beyond by investing in this and similar future programs Overture has planned for the communities we serve, including a fishing program for communities near the southern coast.**



## SPOTLIGHT.

Overture empowers the local economy and independent food security. Farmers often lack adequate land to produce enough crops to provide for their family. Overture meets this need through its Community Farm program that enables farmers from local communities to use land managed by Overture to grow crops and raise animals to generate income and help build up the community. The economic instability of Haiti hinders farmers from having a reliable and sustainable market for selling their crops. For rice farmers specifically, they can not compete with the foreign imported rice prices, essentially forcing them out of business. Overture is helping farmers to overcome this challenge through its Diri Lavi! food packaging program by providing rice farmers with a stable channel to sell their goods and create food security for their communities so they do not have to rely on foreign imported food aid ever again. The Community Farm and Diri Lavi! programs are working so well that we're exploring

ways to expand and replicate the model across other types of markets and industries to strengthen the nutrition and economy for even more individuals and communities throughout southern Haiti.

Denord, a farmer in Les Cayes, is just one of the hard-working beneficiaries of our Community Farm program - *"Overture has provided me access to the land I farm. This land offers me the opportunity to earn an income for my family. If I invest 50,000 gourdes (approx. \$450) in growing corn, I can earn 125,000 gourdes (approx. \$1,200). And when I grow melon, I can bring in 500,000 gourdes (approx. \$4,500). This income allows me to take care of my family, pay my child's school tuition and pay for our healthcare. These are all things that were impossible for us before we began farming."*



# Healthcare

The ongoing violence and unrest in Haiti is making every aspect of life in southern Haiti more difficult and challenging. This is especially true for providing access to healthcare for all levels of care. While we are seeing some opportunities to strengthen access through partnerships with IBESR and other organizations, even our combined efforts and resources are simply not enough. Because we're serving more children than ever now, as a result of recently closed orphanages, there is an increased need for mental health services and foster families. Caring for these children who are so often abused and have special needs is

especially challenging. And creating a viable foster care system requires considerable time and resources from social workers, psychologists and other professionals who are already in short supply. Overture must continue to deepen our bench of such professionals to ensure these children from the orphanages are given the best possible opportunity to recover from the abuse and neglect to which they were subjected and to have safe, welcoming homes in which to be nurtured.

## FEATURE STORY

### meet Stanley.

For 13-year-old Stanley, born with special needs and abandoned to an orphanage, his life was transformed when a generous and loving Haitian woman, Jacqueline, chose to foster him after being trained as a foster parent by Overture and IBESR. Despite his challenges, Stanley found a loving home where he was embraced and cared for like a true member of the family. And Jacqueline, a dedicated volunteer for children with disabilities, provided Stanley with the love and care for which he'd longed for so long. Their story of connection and belonging highlights the profound impact that a thriving foster care system can have on the lives of children and families. Overture's work in this area is proving that every child deserves the warmth of a home and the embrace of a family. Stanley's journey with Jacqueline stands as a testament to the transformative power of love and acceptance.





## SPOTLIGHT.

Partnerships are at the heart of much of Overture's work in southern Haiti. We're deepening our relationship with IBESR and initiating new relationships that, in some cases, seem unusual and unexpected. But when working in Haiti, thinking outside the box is a must to have the best chances of success. Case in point is our partnership with a local healthcare organization that provides care to HIV adults. Overture led the initiative to form a partnership between this organization, Overture and IBESR to identify foster families for HIV children with foster parents who also have HIV. Our social workers felt strongly that these adults, who are demonstrating their responsibility for their healthcare, are potentially the best foster option for children who need the mentoring and compassion from those who truly understand what they are going through. And so far, this unique approach is proving to be a success. As parents are currently being identified and trained, they will soon be able to share their own experiences and strength with the children. In turn, children will be able to experience true compassion instead of rejection or being ostracized by the public. This combination of healthcare and foster care is truly proving to be a life-changing experience for everyone involved.



## Casting a vision.

There is a critical need for foster families in southern Haiti to provide safe, stable homes for these children. And currently, the foster care system in Haiti is just beginning. Overture, in partnership with IBESR, is leading the way in establishing this bold new foster care system from the ground up to ultimately end the orphanage system and provide alternatives for vulnerable children. That's how Haiti Love is taking hold in southern Haiti!

Thanks to the generous support of Overture donors, and against all odds, we've made significant progress in supporting the implementation of the foster care system in southern Haiti. This includes beginning the search for foster families for 63 children from orphanages who have formally asked for our help in finding them safe, loving homes. Thus far, Overture and IBESR have identified and trained dozens of qualified families to become foster families. This includes expanding the program to include children

with special needs. Parents of children with special needs usually lack access to social supports and are alienated by the community, essentially forcing them to hand over their child to an orphanage or leave them in a hospital alone and forgotten. **Overture is creating a system to train foster families and parents of special needs children so they won't ever have to make the difficult choice to abandon them.** We're also educating communities so they can be better prepared and equipped to support the family and the children. This requires significant resources, which will require significant investment from our Overture family.

**We hope you will prayerfully consider helping us build up this incredibly needed program.**



# Infrastructure

The Dome Community Center in Dory, one of our priority communities, is now officially open! These domes are an integral part of building community and strengthening families. The dome structures were completed late last year while other facilities for the center were completed earlier this year. Our dome structures have played an integral role in our work in southern Haiti. They provide safe shelter during disasters, central meeting places for community events and secure storage for food, medical and other critical supplies. Additionally, these domes are built entirely by local community members who not only earn an income, but are taught marketable skills including masonry, block manufacturing and painting. These projects often act as a catalyst for additional economic development in communities like Dory. This project also resulted in building the only public hygiene facilities in the area. Since most families don't have toilets in their homes, these facilities will create a more sanitary and healthy environment for families and the community.



## FEATURE STORY

### Dory Dome Grand Opening.

The Dory Dome Community Center grand opening was truly a celebration for the community members who have contributed so much to making what was once a seemingly far fetched dream a reality. And it was the community members themselves who invested the sweat and labor to build the domes that have become synonymous with safety, security and support in the region. They are now ready to be a refuge during crisis, a place for learning and a place for building community.

During his speech at the grand opening, Overture's Empowerment Manager, Wijems Sainval shares how important the Domes are to this community: "The new Dory Dome Community Center is a beacon for the Dory community, fostering collaboration, support, and development. This facility provides a space for

local associations to unite in addressing challenges and devising solutions. It offers vital psychological, social and health services, especially for disadvantaged individuals and youth. Moreover, the center serves as a protective haven for children and a resource for emergency situations, strengthening the community's resilience against natural disasters. The Dory Domes are a cornerstone for nurturing growth, unity and a brighter future for all our community members."





## Casting a vision.

Now that the domes are completed and officially open, what is next for the community? The Dome Community Center is designed to support a wide variety of development initiatives and provide the ability to respond rapidly in times of crisis and disasters. Described as a "beacon of light" for the community, the center is drawing people in and shining a light on all that is possible when children are protected, individuals and families are empowered and people are given hope – all things God desires for us all. This project has transformed the way the region operates in a number of ways. They now literally fight to keep their community free from gang violence and influence because they see a future that includes opportunity and promise instead of chaos and

dependence. And we're truly just getting started! We have audacious plans for leveraging the Domes Community Center to continue to build up the people and communities in and around Dory with empowerment workshops, education and healthcare clinics. We can and will do more with your help.

**We invite you to join us in keeping this beacon lighted for the Haitians who before could only see darkness and for guiding the next generation to a brighter future. Visit our website to learn more about the power of domes at [www.overture.international/domes](http://www.overture.international/domes).**





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*journey* with us!



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