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Recovery in Child-Friendly Spaces

Child-friendly spaces provide safe places for children in the aftermath of the earthquake



Photo: Rebecca Gustafson, USAID

The January 12 earthquake in Haiti changed everything for Sandy, 15, and now the relief process is changing her world again—this time for the better. After school each morning, she heads to a USAID-funded “Espace Timoun,” or child-friendly space, in Jacmel, Haiti, where children from ages 3 to 17 partake in age-appropriate activities and play with friends.

Child-friendly spaces were established across Haiti to provide safe places for children while their parents engage in relief-related activities, such as gathering water, rebuilding homes or reestablishing livelihoods.

Sandy reflects on the impact the safe atmosphere has on children. “A lot of kids were very shy at first, but now they even dance in the middle of the circle,” she says in reference to an activity at the child-friendly space. She also sees a link between her time at the child-friendly space and her success in school. “My heart is so happy when I leave the child-friendly space, it helps me study more,” she explains.

“I saw so many ugly things in front of me. Now I come to the child-friendly space and have fun.”

—Sandy

Counselors at these sites use many different types of activities to help children feel safe, express themselves, and begin the healing process. Educational activities keep children’s minds active, while psychosocial games help counselors assess children’s emotional needs in the aftermath of the earthquake. Creative activities help children express ideas and emotions that they often don’t have the vocabulary to communicate.

Sandy continued, confident and passionate about what this place has meant to the children: “A space like this is important because we’ve learned so much about the world that we never would have. Before we would fight with each other, but now we are friends. On the first day, there was a lot of fighting, but the counselors explained to us why that isn’t good, and we’ve been able to reconcile.”

USAID has provided more than \$3.8 million to organizations running child-friendly spaces across Haiti, in addition to implementing other child protection activities.