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Audiology, Audioprosthesis, and Speech-Language Pathology Services in Haiti

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L'Équipe/Team Canada Healing Hands (TCHH), is a humanitarian and registered charitable organization, (charitable Reg. No. 849016340 RR0001), which promotes quality rehabilitation services by local citizens, fostering a spirit of self-determination, non-dependency, and dignity. Our volunteers have a record of success working with various partners throughout Haiti and other low-resourced regions, to strengthen local capacities in rehabilitation for children and adults with disabilities.

Since 2005 TCHH has been actively working to improve access to audiology services and facilities. The project was initiated by Huguette LeFrançois, a speech-language pathologist in charge of the project. It first started with the acquisition of sound isolation chambers, audiometers and other hearing instruments. The first chamber was completed at l'Hôpital de l'Université d'État d'Haïti (HUEH) in 2007, and the second one at Centre St-Vincent pour Enfants handicapés (CSVEH) in 2009, both centers in Port-au-Prince.

Following a request from a ENT at HUEH, a formal training program has been created, which includes: (1) Training of audiometry technicians for diagnostic hearing testing (excluding interpretation of the results, which would be reserved to the audiologist or ENT) and, (2) Training of hearing aid technicians for hearing aid fitting and maintenance. Dr. Christine Turgeon, audiologist, accepted to be in charge of the audiology aspect of the project, including the audiometry training program. With a group of three audiologists, she developed a manual, used for the theory part of the training. A manual for the training of hearing aid technicians has also been created by two audioprosthetists, Francis Garnier and Marilyn Émont-Rancourt.

Our mission is to be a model for audiology and audioprosthesis services adapted to the context of Haïti. We aim to develop and provide quality services for hearing testing and hearing aid fitting, understand the community needs, and work so they become independent and self-sustainable for hearing services (screenings and diagnostic hearing tests, hearing aid evaluation and dispensing, hearing aid repairs), and ultimately, to establish in the near future a permanent hearing clinic at Centre St-Vincent pour Enfants handicapés (CSVEH). We also commit ourselves to two site missions in Haiti per year, with professional audiologists and audioprosthetists.

In October 2011, it was agreed to add to our project the training of a Communication Disorders Assistant at Klinik Kay Kapab following a request by Healing Hands for Haiti (HHH). Catherine Tomassin, a speech-pathologist, agreed to be in charge of this part of the project. Over the years, a neuropsychologist, a visual rehabilitation professional, and an ENT also joined the team.

The TCHH Audiology and SLP special project has made significant advances in the past 7 years, and has benefitted from a dedicated team of volunteers and community support. We have now trained four audiometry technicians, capable to perform hearing testing, and two audioprosthetists

technicians who will finished their training in April 2014. Following some requests, we are presently planning to initiate another training program at Institut Brenda Strafford, in Les Cayes, and we are collaborating with Université d'État d'Haïti (UEH) and Université de Montréal in the development of a master's degree program in Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology at UEH.

We invite audioprosthetists, hearing instrument specialists and audiologists interested in our project and who would like more information or make a donation towards this project to contact Christine Turgeon at turgeon.christine.2@courrier.uqam.ca.

"Never underestimate the ability of a small group of committed individuals to change the world. Indeed, they are the only ones who ever have."

From the book: ***Mountains beyond Mountains: The quest of Dr. Paul Framer, a man who would cure the world. Author: Tracy Kidder, Random House Trade Paperback Edition 2004.***