

## Independent Day School Drives *Change for Haiti*

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What started as a humble fundraiser seeking loose change, quickly spiraled into a school-wide movement that raised over \$3,000 dollars for Haitian relief efforts while raising the awareness of hundreds of students empowered to make a difference.

In the wake of the devastating earthquake, teachers at Independent Day School brought this real-world situation to the foreground of their classrooms and turned it into a service-learning opportunity for their students.

In a PreK3 classroom, fondly nick-named *The Flower Patch*, teachers Lauren Bronson and Leah Gucciardi told their three and four year old students a true story: “Something has happened in a place far away and there are children and grown-ups, just like you and me, that need help.” They explained the phenomena of earthquakes and “a hush came over the students as they leaned in to learn more.”

Pointing out where Haiti was on the globe in relation to Florida and the rest of the world, Ms. Gucciardi continued, “Right here, on part of this island, there are families who lost their homes. Let’s help them!”

“Yes!” They all chimed in.

“You could see the wheels turning in their heads,” Ms. Gucciardi reflected later, “the tables were turned, people were asking for *their* help, and they were visibly intrigued, readying themselves to rise to the occasion.”

And so the brainstorming began, “*What are some things the children and the people of Haiti might need?*” The answers given by these young pupils were heartfelt and surprisingly practical. From band-aids to books, from blankets to new schools, the list continued as the students became increasingly excited at the prospects of giving.

This feeling of excitement became a trend all over the school’s campus, spreading tangibly from the east side to the west, from PreK3 through Middle School, the message was clear—working together, we can all make a difference.

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**Independent Day School Drives *Change for Haiti****continued*

The kick-off began when *The Flower Patch* marched from classroom to classroom, delivering a container to store loose change—hand-painted flower-pots with words decoratively displayed around the brims: empathy, caring, responsible and open-minded—reminders of the meaning behind their cause and a visual reminder that little things can add up.

In the weeks that followed, the response was overwhelming. Kids brought in their piggy-banks, emptying their contents amid cheers and applause. Middle-schoolers created an entrance-way clad in *Change for Haiti* posters. Parents were thanking teachers for creating this campaign and exemplifying the importance of being active global citizens with international concerns. WIDS-the school's student-led media channel made announcements on the schools' broadcasts.

As an International Baccalaureate school “with a global mindset”, the learning opportunity included parents too. “They volunteered to help sort and count the change; offered a hand where ever they might be needed— all so supportive,” remarked Lauren Bronson.

“People were donating from the heart and the goal was to ensure that every penny would be sent to the people of Haiti.” said Mrs. Bronson. “And this happened because Suncoast Schools Federal Credit Union agreed to waive the standard coin processing fee.”

Leadership opportunities abounded all over the campus. At a school-wide gathering, PreK3 students stood before the entire student body and performed their newly-created “Caring Superheroes” cheer. Ms. Gucciardi proudly stated, “This is a great opportunity for all of us to learn how little things and people big and small can make a BIG difference.”

This statement echoed that of Middle School social studies teacher Dave Freeman, who talked about his students' response, “The *Change for Haiti* drive came right after our People Fair, which celebrates heroes from history, people who made a positive impact on the world around them. Our students were really quick to make a connection: That they could be present-day heroes, positively impacting the world by actively promoting *Change for Haiti* in addition to participating in it. They were especially energized by the fact that a small sacrifice on their part could really have a strong impact on someone's life.”

“The enthusiasm of the students made this campaign a huge success in many ways.” noted Marie Massara, teacher-assistant.

The Independent Day School PreK3 students will soon present a \$3,036.59 check to the American Red Cross for Haiti relief efforts.

The experience and satisfaction that came from helping those in need, is perhaps just the beginning of a lifetime of giving service and feeling empathy for others.