

Summary Report:

A Six-Month Update on the Humanitarian Parole Program for Haitian Children



Background: Six days following the devastating January 12, 2010 earthquake in Haiti the United States government, led by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), launched an unprecedented effort to provide permanent families and a safe environment for Haitian children. Using their authority, the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) granted humanitarian parole to Haitian children who were in the process of being adopted by American citizens prior to the earthquake. The heroic efforts of USCIS and the NGO community resulted in the removal of over 1,100 children from harm's way by placement with the families who had intended to adopt them. It is

Joint Council's belief that granting Humanitarian Parole for this unique group of children was in the best interest of the children. The granting of Humanitarian Parole removed many children from life-threatening situations and placed them in safe, secure homes, allowing aid to be directed to other children in need in Haiti.

Humanitarian Parole – Going Forward: Although in the best interest of this unique population of children, Humanitarian Parole did not automatically grant citizenship to the children upon arrival in the United States. Additionally, the children were placed with families as sponsors rather than as adoptive parents, therefore, requiring adoptions through the courts at a later date. Currently, for children under the age of sixteen, the path to citizenship involves a two-year process. For those children over sixteen no clear path to citizenship currently exists. Since January Joint Council has been working with the Center for Adoption Policy, U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS), USCIS,

Joint Council's Post-Quake Work in Haiti

A brief synopsis of Joint Council's work:

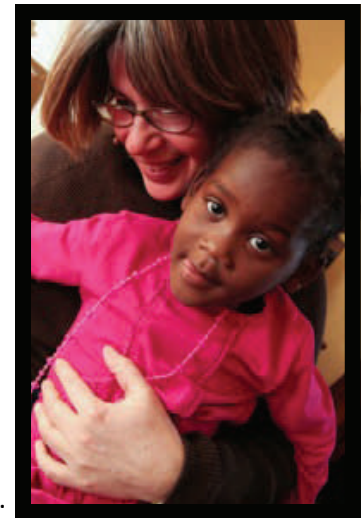
- Joint Council and its partner organizations have served over 45,000 children and families through hospitals, medical clinics, child care centers, adoption and food distribution programs.
- Worked with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), United States Department of State (DOS), United States Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Haitian government to ensure 1,100 children were placed with adoptive families in the United States
- Educated and directly informed over 51,00 individuals, adoptive families and professionals
- Coordinated emergency response to orphanages and institutions in Haiti immediately following the earthquake
- Created and distributed a database used to identify children, families, emergency relief needs, and permanency options
- Assisted with the development, coordination, and implementation of the USCIS Humanitarian Parole Program for children
- Continuously educated and informed government policy makers including DOS, USCIS, and HHS
- Raised awareness of plight of Haiti children and families through 37 interviews with media such as CNN, *The New York Times*, and BBC which reached over 5.3 million viewers
- Traveled to Haiti in January and June to assess the safety and quality of orphanages, gauge the conditions of children, and to aid with the Humanitarian Parole process.

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Members of Congress and other leading advocates, including CCAI, EACH and NCFA, to ensure that the adoptions can be finalized in a U.S. court and the children can become US citizens as quickly as possible.

What Sponsoring Families Can Expect: Recently, the first-steps were taken to ensure that the children can legally be adopted by the families who currently sponsor them. In the coming weeks, sponsoring families should be receiving the following:

- A letter from USCIS outlining what documentation was used to determine the availability of the child(ren). A sample copy of this letter can be found by clicking [here](#).
- A letter from Health and Human Services providing the consent from HHS (which currently has legal custody of the children) for the family to adopt.
- For children who were in Category 1 and have a full and final adoption, detailed information regarding the steps in the adoption/citizenship process for those children.
- For children who were in Category 2 and DO NOT have a full and final adoption, a letter from USCIS outlining the adoption/citizenship process for those children. A sample of this letter can be found by clicking [here](#).



With these letters families should be able to go through the local court system to adopt the children they are sponsoring.

To address the issue of U.S. citizenship, the help HAITI Act was recently introduced into Congress. This legislation would provide a path to citizenship for most of the children in the Humanitarian Parole program. Regrettably, a small number of children would not be included, resulting in continued uncertainty regarding their U.S. citizenship. Efforts are under way to resolve this issue for all children.



On Thursday, July 15, 2010 at 2 p.m. eastern Joint Council will be hosting a free webinar for adoption service providers and adoptive parents regarding the process for which families can currently process adoptions of these children and begin the citizenship process. Detailed information regarding registering for the webinar will be emailed to families directly.

Joint Council would like to take a moment to thank those individuals who ensured the success of the Humanitarian Parole program. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, the dedicated staff of US Citizenship and Immigration Services and the Department of State in both Haiti and the United States, as well as, Health and Human Services, the Haitian government, and, last but certainly not least, the sponsoring families.