

# Children of the Americas

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When news reports out of Haiti this summer revealed that the director of an orphanage had been kidnapped, they prompted the question: What happened to the children?

On a trip to the troubled Caribbean nation, The Miami Herald visited the orphanage in the village of Simonette and discovered that the children of the Tytoo Gardens orphanage had been left alone for more than a month. They did not go hungry, thanks to another nearby orphanage, which ensured the delivery of food. But with no adult supervision, Tytoo Gardens was in disarray, even as the children did their best to take care of each other.

Although Haiti has the highest rate of orphans in the Western Hemisphere, it is not alone in failing to meet the needs of the region's most vulnerable population: its children.

The Miami Herald hopes to take a look at several of the issues affecting kids in a series titled Children of the Americas, from extreme poverty to illiteracy. The orphanage story out of Haiti is the first installment of the series, which will take readers to various nations around the hemisphere.

The series will not only highlight problems but also profile some of the efforts that offer solutions, such as the orphanages featured in today's story.

"The vision that the mission has for these children is not for us to change Haiti, but for the children to change Haiti," said Travis Smith, co-director of Mission of Hope, the agency that reached out to the orphans at Tytoo Gardens while their director was in the hands of kidnapers.

"Sure, we're a scratch on the surface here, but we're gaining experience in what works and doesn't work."

Whether they have lost parents, been abandoned or abused, are the victims of armed conflicts or don't have access to healthcare or education, there is one underlying reality that affects all the Children of the Americas: today's victims are tomorrow's future.