

Guardian angel for children of Haiti

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They're called "Restaveks," the Haitian children who have lost one or both parents and who must "reste avec" ? stay with ? other families. Moved by the plight of "Restaveks," orphans and other vulnerable children in Haiti, Tulane alumna Megan Boudreaux founded Respire Haiti, a nonprofit organization to aid these children. And she has taken custody of two girls, Michaelle and Jessica, herself.



Concerned about the plight of endangered children in Haiti, Tulane alumna Megan Boudreaux has become the legal guardian of two Haitian girls, Michaelle and Jessica, whose mother died. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Boudreaux, a native of Lafayette, La., graduated from Tulane in 2008. She lives in Gressier, Haiti, where she established Respire Haiti in October 2010. The

organization is building a school for about 350 children in kindergarten through the eighth grade.

Most of the Restaveks are actually child slaves, says Boudreaux. "It is such a difficult and tricky form of slavery. The children are given to or bought by families, and they spend all day doing dishes, laundry, cooking, getting water, cleaning, whatever. However, because they are given a place to live and food, many Haitians say it is not slavery. The only way to combat it is through education."

Through Respire Haiti, children receive financial help and have the opportunity to go to school. In addition, the organization has two food programs on Saturdays: one for approximately 350 children housed in a tent city near Gressier and the other for nearly 300 other children staying on Bellevue Mountain, which is near the school.

"After visiting Gressier in August of 2010 for only 45 minutes, I knew that there was a lot of work to be done there and I realized that the person to do the work was me, initiating it and working with the community," says Boudreaux.

All of the employees of [Respire Haiti](#) are Haitians. Future plans are to build a high school and a medical clinic and to open a bakery that also will employ Haitians.

"Respire Haiti desires to empower the people of Gressier," Boudreaux says. "Because of this, we try to make everything as self-sustaining and community empowering as possible."