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## LOCAL NONPROFITS STEP UP HAITI RELIEF EFFORTS

05.17.10 - 10:48 pm



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DURHAM -- A little more than four months ago in Haiti, the earth shook.

April Perry and Kathy Walmer are still trying to pick up the pieces.



The two Durham women head local nonprofit organizations that worked in Haiti before the devastating earthquake of Jan. 12 and that have been working harder since to rebuild what was there and what has been lost.

It's not been easy, they admit.



"Progress is just so slow," said Walmer, executive director of Family Health Ministries, which has run clinics and schools in Haiti for the past 10 years.

"It's been tough," she said, more than a hint of weariness in her voice. "People are still in temporary houses and there sometimes seems to be little progress in getting them out. A lot of the rubble is still being removed by hand, by hammers, wheelbarrows, shovels.



"With our people down there, we're seeing tremendous stress. Not a sense of hopelessness exactly, but they are frustrated, tired and worn out. It seems like we take two steps forward then three steps back."

Many Haitians are still living in tent cities, said April Perry, head of Luke's

Mission, the Durham-based organization that runs medical missions in the devastated Caribbean nation. "They still have no sanitation and no access to clean water. A lot of the economy is still not functioning. Things are not a lot better than they were."

Still, said Perry -- who will be going to Haiti again next month -- life goes on there.

"They don't have the option to just stop their lives," she said. "They don't have the option not to be resilient or they will die."

And though it's sometime difficult to see, both Perry and Walmer admit, there has been some progress since the earthquake.

"We've been able to provide monthly stipends for our people to purchase food and water," Perry said. "At the orphanage we run, which was pretty much completely destroyed, they have built a very rudimentary shelter. We have provided food for the orphanage and have been able to purchase 50 beds for the children who were sleeping on the ground for two and a half months."

FHM's programs are running, including medical clinics in the towns of Blanchard and Leogane.

"The clinics are now operational, since about the last month," said Walmer, who was last in Haiti about two weeks ago. "We are moving forward and we're back to providing basic primary medical care and the kids are back in school. I really should be rejoicing in that."

Still, it is difficult to rejoice, she acknowledged, because so much still needs to be done.

"I think we'll be doing well if we get back to a sense of normalcy in two or three years," Walmer said. "But in Haiti, I really hesitate to use the word 'normalcy,' because that's never really been the case."

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