

**How Do I Help?**

 Thanks to *Taking Shape*, I have been fortunate enough to help make a difference in some children’s lives locally, in Kansas City, and overseas in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. I travel with Tracey Wozny, my former dance studio owner and director of *Taking Shape*, and I get the privilege of experiencing different lifestyles and helping people.

 I spend my time in Haiti helping to sustain Lephare Orphanage (which was in danger of destruction after the earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010), playing with and teaching dance to the 15 orphans who live at LePhare, leading skill-based camps (3 days at a time) to more than 300 kids who live on the island, immersing myself in the Haitian Creole language, and traveling halfway up the central mountains to help deliver a weekly supply of water for still-recovering earthquake victims.

 The largest chunk of my efforts in Haiti is spent working on the 3-day long camp. This is conducted by separating kids into age groups and participating in different stations (each station is a different “art”). My best friend (and Mrs. Wozny’s daughter) Savanah and I are in charge of the dance portion. We teach a warm up, basic skills, fun across the floor combinations, how to use props (hula hoops, parachutes, balls, streamers, etc) follow-along dances (baby shark, YMCA, cupid shuffle, limbo, etc) and a real combination (style of dance depending on age group) which they get to perform in an “end-of-camp” showcase - complete with colorful costumes and an audience filled with friends and family. The other stations for the kids to enjoy include: sports (soccer and softball), Bible study, singing, arts/crafts, and leadership training.

 There is much to learn while in Haiti, but it is when I’m back in the States that I realize I have learned more about myself living in a first-world country. Being a part of this amazing organization has affected me in many aspects of my everyday life - I can speak conversational Haitian Creole, I have even more experience with kids (to help with teaching), I have gained a whole new understanding of gratefulness, I have grown in my faith as a Christian, and I appreciate philanthropy … because nothing compares to the feeling of making others happy, especially when it seems impossible to them.

 Besides the frequent international mission trips, *Taking Shape* is also active in our own country and community (thus our mission: Here, Near, Far). My position in *Taking Shape* is called a “Star Leader”. The Star Leaders (both American and Haitian), appointed by Mrs. Wozny, are in charge of helping to lead the organization, merging the gap between both the Haitian and American crews, teaching free camps/classes to underprivileged/disabled children (“A Chance To Dance” - event created by *Taking Shape*), providing meals to the homeless during the holidays in Kansas City, hosting fundraisers (5K run/race, dance showcase, etc), and running multiple leadership workshops for future Star Leaders.

 Collectively, *Taking Shape* has inspired me to view the world with endless potential. I can only hope that through strength in values and hard work, I can continue to make a difference in the world every day - whether it be here, near, or far .