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## Local News

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### Fueled by 'love and desire to help'

#### Local News

By Martha Tanner -- Kingston This Week

Updated 20 hours ago

There are two things that Tammy Babcock never takes off; both encircle her left wrist. The two bands of black rubber are 'bracelets' given to her by young Haitians whose lives were turned around by Babcock and her aid organization, Help Tammy Help Haiti.



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Babcock has worn the rubber bracelets on an official visit to the Haitian parliament, to a gala Christmas fundraiser for Help Tammy Help Haiti, to her job as a security supervisor at Queen's University. The bracelets, likely scavenged in the slums of Haiti's poorest neighbourhood, are a reminder of the power of giving from people who have nothing to give. And, although she needs no reminding, they are tangible reminders of the "family" she has left behind in Haiti, whose trust in her is rewarded each time she returns, bringing medicine, funds, hope.

Babcock, 34, has been going to Haiti every two months since early 2008. In 2009, she and former schoolmate Cari Wolsey founded Help Tammy Help Haiti. They have been threatened, held up at gunpoint and narrowly escaped being kidnapped. They have provided medical treatment to gang leaders and, in return, achieved a truce of sorts: gangs have been known to pause mid-fight to allow Babcock and her volunteers to pass by safely. But Babcock doesn't take risks. As much as the people like her and look out for her, they're desperate, Babcock says. You can't blame them.

Growing up on a farm near Hartington, Babcock wanted to be a police officer. But her desire to do the right thing led her in another direction. In 2004 she flew to Thailand to help victims of the Boxing Day tsunami. Over a period of 18 months, she flew in and out of Thailand three times, working with other volunteers from around the world. She was used to physical work and that, combined with her "love and desire to be there and help", proved useful in helping victims rebuild their lives.

It also changed the course of her life. Back at home, Babcock felt an irresistible call to do humanitarian work in another country. She had been thinking about Haiti when a misfired text message sealed her fate. Babcock texted a new acquaintance named Patrick to wish him a happy birthday. He texted back that he was in Haiti, working with the UN. Babcock wrote that she was thinking of coming to Haiti. Could he pick her up at the airport and find her an organization that would take her for a week? Weeks went by before Patrick responded that he would meet her at the airport and that he had found a young Haitian activist named Robinson Remedor with whom she could work. So, in January 2008, Babcock boarded a plane for Haiti, her luggage stuffed with bandages and medical supplies, hoping that Patrick would keep his end of the bargain.

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He did.

One of dozens of Canadian police officers helping to train Haiti's National Police, Patrick introduced Babcock to other Canadians in Haiti, as well as to Robinson Remedor. Remedor, then 23, walked the streets of Cite Soleil, Haiti's largest and most dangerous slum, daily, breaking up fights, feeding hungry children and organizing development initiatives. But Patrick warned them that he could not provide any protection, since Robinson was working in a "red zone", one so dangerous that Canadians working with the UN are advised not to enter under any circumstances.

Babcock felt safe with Remedor, whom she describes as "an incredible soul". Together they treated children and adults for wounds and scabies, administered eye drops and antibiotic creams.

When Babcock realized that many people in Cite Soleil don't have access to clean water, she used the money she had raised to bring in truckloads.

"Sister, that's my dream, to give my people clean water," Remedor confided.

"We figured out pretty quick my commitment to Cite Soleil," said Babcock. "After a time I felt comfortable going there. I knew I was going to be there a long time."

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Babcock returned in late 2008, when she and Remedor had an engineer draw up plans for a water tower. The next time she travelled to Haiti, in early 2009, she was accompanied by Wolsey who had heard about what she was doing in Haiti and wanted to help. Together they formed the non profit organization Help Tammy Help Haiti which raised \$25,000 to build the water tower in Cite Soleil. It was completed that same year and turned over to Haitians who run it and provide security.

"It's different from other water towers," explains Babcock. "The population takes care of it. Some 1,500 people a day are getting their water there. And the people drinking there don't have cholera. It's clean water."

Completing the water tower fulfilled the first "pillar" on which Help Tammy Help Haiti is based. Its mission is to provide aid and relief to the people of Cité Soleil through sustainable development projects focused on rebuilding three pillars of a workable society: access to clean and affordable drinking water; access to free medical care; and access to education for those who cannot afford it.

Six months after the catastrophic earthquake that struck near Port-au-Prince, Help Tammy Help Haiti purchased land in Cite Soleil and started to erect its second pillar: a free medical clinic. When it is complete, in 2011, it will be staffed by a Haitian doctor and international volunteers.

Next, Help Tammy Help Haiti will turn its focus to education. But that doesn't mean building a school. Babcock's vision is to find a sustainable option, one that creates jobs for parents so that they can afford to send their children to school. "It costs about \$130 U.S. for a uniform, book and shoes," she says.

After that, who knows?

"I can't ever see myself being out of Haiti. Maybe I won't go as often, but it will be difficult to let go. They are my family."

Babcock was supposed to go to Haiti last month, but Remedor asked her and Wolsey not to come because of the elections. But the pair is determined to go in January, despite the risk of violence.

Recently, Babcock was awarded the YMCA's Peace Award in recognition of her work in Haiti and was given an honorary diploma from St. Lawrence College. In both cases, Babcock was nominated by people she didn't know.

"For a stranger to do that is touching," she says. "It's something special. I just love Kingston, how giving everybody is and supportive of what we do."

Babcock and other volunteers with Help Tammy Help Haiti pay their own way and their own expenses each time they travel to Haiti. Every penny they raise for Help Tammy Help Haiti goes directly to work in Haiti; every donation of bandages or antibiotic ointment is personally delivered by Babcock.

The organization needs to raise another \$15,000 to complete construction of the medical clinic and then will work on finding furnishings and equipment and then the means to ship them to Haiti.

The next fundraiser is Bowling for Haiti, to be held January 24, 2011 at Cloverleaf Bowling Lanes from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The cost of \$3 per game includes shoe rental. Donations for Help Tammy Help Haiti will be accepted at the door. Receipts will be issued for tax purposes for donations of \$20 or more upon request. Donations may also be made online at the Help Tammy Help Haiti website, where Babcock has also posted a list of medical supplies that may be donated, as well as drop-off locations in Kingston.

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