



St. Joseph Family Haiti

Child Health & Safety Policies

ST. JOSEPH FAMILY OVERVIEW:

The St. Joseph Family was created in 1985 as a haven for the disadvantaged children of Haiti. The St. Joseph Family consists of three homes for children. St. Joseph's Home for Boys (est. 1985) is located in Port-au-Prince. Trinity House (est. 2000) is located in Jacmel. Both St. Joseph's Home for Boys and Trinity House are homes for former street boys and former restavek (child slave) boys. Wings of Hope (est. 1994) is located in Fer-mathe. Wings of Hope is a home for children and young adults, both boys and girls, with physical and mental disabilities. The St. Joseph Family also includes Lekòl Sen Trinite, an outreach day school that operates out of Trinity House in Jacmel. Also a part of the St. Joseph Family is the Resurrection Dance Theater of Haiti, a professional dance theater made up of residents and graduates of the St. Joseph Family, as well as additional Haitian artists.

The St. Joseph Family is managed by the St. Joseph Family Board of Directors, made up of leaders of the homes and programs, graduates of the SJF program and full-time SJF volunteers. The primary responsibilities of the St. Joseph Family Board of Directors is to ensure the health and welfare of the children, as well as to be their voice throughout the world.

The St. Joseph Family is deeply rooted in prayer, service, responsibility, education and the arts. How those values are expressed and shared differs by house, but all homes and programs use those core values and beliefs as a base. Center to the mission of the St. Joseph Family is to give these downtrodden children lives of resurrection, and to allow them to bask in the new opportunities they are offered.

Children come to the St. Joseph Family in many different ways. The St. Joseph Family is in good standing with the Haitian department of social services — Institut du Bien Etre Social et de Recherches (IBESR) — and many of our children at the three homes come as referrals from IBESR. Other children find their way to the St. Joseph Family in various ways — through referrals from pastors, priests, nuns and other non-profit organizations who know the St. Joseph Family and who have identified a child who is at-risk or who is abandoned or orphaned; through referrals from hospitals and clinics who have working relationships with the St. Joseph Family and who have children abandoned at their facilities; from the parents and families of disabled children who cannot care for them at home; and some of our children were abandoned on our doorstep. Each child's story is unique.

The in-residence populations at the three homes are kept relatively low so that the maximum positive impact on the lives of the children can take place. The boys in-residence at St. Joseph's Home for Boys and Trinity House graduate from the St. Joseph Family when they are 21-years-old, or the summer following their twenty-first birthday so that they can finish the school year. Following graduation from the program the young men are expected to move out of the homes and become self-sufficient. Some may be subsequently employed by the St. Joseph Family. The children in-residence at Wings of Hope will never be able to live independently, but the leadership and staff at Wings of Hope strives to help the children and young adults develop as many independent living skills as possible given the limitations of their particular disabilities.

DEALING WITH THE HAITIAN HISTORY OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT:

The children who become a part of the St. Joseph Family come from some of the lowest rungs of the socio-economic hierarchy in Haiti — children of the streets, child slaves and children with disabilities. Their life experiences prior to coming to the St. Joseph Family often involve histories of abuse and neglect in many forms. These are experiences that most people cannot imagine and have difficulty accepting. They are often psychologically, emotionally and physically scarred, frightened and unsure of what being a part of a family, particularly a loving and supporting family like the St. Joseph Family, means.

The leadership at each home is made up of graduates of the St. Joseph Family program and they come from the same types of backgrounds as the current residents. This gives the leadership an unique understanding of the issues the children are dealing with and a heightened sensitivity to treating the children with the utmost respect.

Because of our experiences with the children, the psychological problems they suffer from because of past abuse and neglect, and Haitian culture, no intake interviews are conducted with the children when they enter the care of the St. Joseph Family. They are accepted openly and unconditionally. The one thing that is their own and they have control over is their personal stories and they guard those very carefully. It is only after months, and sometimes years, as they begin to understand they are in a safe, loving and supportive environment that the stories of their past experiences are shared. However, even years later, the stories some of them tell are variations of their own, true stories, as they seek to maintain some privacy and some control over how others see them and how they see themselves.

The St. Joseph Family allows the children to control if, how, when and to whom they tell their stories. The children decide who they tell their stories to and what stories they choose to share. Often stories are only shared

with their peers or trusted adults, little by little over a long period of time. To ensure their privacy and safety, guests are not allowed to interview the children about their lives prior to joining the St. Joseph Family.

The St. Joseph Family recognizes the fact that many of the children in its care were often physically, psychologically, emotionally and sexually abused prior to becoming a part of the St. Joseph Family. We abhor this reality and do everything in our power to help the children in our care to heal from past wounds, both physical and psychological. It is also paramount to the St. Joseph Family that once they become residents of one of our homes, that they live in safe and supportive environments. Negative treatment in any form against the children is not tolerated by any member of the staff, leadership or guests. Any instances of abuse in any form, perpetrated by any individual on a child in the care of the St. Joseph Family are dealt with swiftly and severely.

The St. Joseph Family also recognizes that when children with a history of abuse find themselves in a safe place, they often are finally able to acknowledge internally and externally their past abuse, however how that takes place is often not in truthful and accurate ways. Children with histories of abuse often accuse people in their lives they feel safe with of abuse, abuse that was actually committed by others, because that is the only way they feel safe acknowledging their past experiences. Because of this, we have policies in place not only to protect the children of the St. Joseph Family from any abuse, but to also try to protect members of the St. Joseph Family leadership, staff, volunteers and guests from false, and misdirected, accusations of abuse.

The St. Joseph Family cannot, through any policy, guarantee against abuse of its children; the existence of rules alone cannot insulate the adults of the St. Joseph Family and its guests from assertions of abuse. However, the St. Joseph Family wishes to make its condemnation of abuse of children, in any form, clear and absolute and pledges to put the health, welfare and safety of the children paramount in all situations.

Through education, openness and vigilance, the St. Joseph Family seeks to provide a safe and healthy environment for children and young adults to live and grow in. Because of these efforts, the St. Joseph Family hopes to minimize and eliminate actual or perceived instances of abuse against its children and youth, to respond appropriately to those that might occur and to guard against misinterpretations of actions and misdirected accusations against its leadership, staff and guests.

CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- The children of the St. Joseph Family have the right to live in loving, affirming and supportive homes. They have the right to live with dignity and respect.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family have the right to live in safe environments and report any incidences where they feel unsafe. Reports may be made to members of the St. Joseph Family Board of Directors.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family have the right to education, therapy, religious and recreational activities, as appropriate.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family have the right to nutritious meals, appropriate clothing, daily living supplies and safe shelter.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family are expected to treat one another and the adults in their lives — staff, leadership and guests — with respect and dignity.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family are expected to live by the rules of the home where they reside in terms of expectations, schedules, chores and responsibilities.
- The children of the St. Joseph Family are expected to participate in family activities and respect the curfew at the homes.
- Corporal punishment is not allowed in any St. Joseph Family home or program. Discipline involves the use of motivational systems and earning or losing of privileges.
- All disciplinary practices are event specific and delivered within a short time frame following the occurrence of the disruptive or inappropriate behavior.
- As a part of a disciplinary process, a youth is expected to apologize, admit responsibility and, if practical or nec-

essary, make restitution to the “injured” parties.

— The children of the St. Joseph Family are taught to care for themselves, their belongings and their home. The purpose of such instruction is to equip them with the skills necessary in a family and independent living and to prepare them for future adult responsibilities.

— Chores that the children are assigned to do will not interfere with any educational activity or deprive them of rest or sleep and will be age and ability appropriate.

— The residents of the St. Joseph Family homes are paid for any service they do for the home, especially as it relates to guests — washing dishes, sweeping and mopping, carrying water, etc. The leadership at each home maintains savings accounts for the children to help them learn responsibility. The children are allowed to take money out of their accounts to spend as they wish.

— The residents of St. Joseph’s Home for Boys and Trinity House all attend outside educational institutions and are monitored by the teachers and staff of those schools.

— The residents of St. Joseph’s Home for Boys and Trinity House are allowed and encouraged to develop outside support systems at churches, athletic activities, social activities, etc. This gives the boys and young men not only the opportunity to create their own social networks and support, but also aids them in the transition to independence when they are no longer living in one of the St. Joseph Family residences.

— The residents of St. Joseph’s Home for Boys and Trinity House are allowed to come and go from the homes as they wish during free times during the day and before curfew.

— The children of the St. Joseph Family are provided appropriate and on-going medical care. The St. Joseph Family welcomes medical, dental, vision and mental health professionals on a regular basis to screen the children for any problems or to address specific problems that may exist. Any necessary follow-up care is provided by medical professionals in Haiti, through visiting professionals or, when possible, in the United States and Canada when the members of the St. Joseph Family travel abroad. Wings of Hope employs a nurse six days a week to address the specific medical issues of the children in residence at that home and any medical issues are addressed on a daily basis for the children in our care who have compromised health issues. The St. Joseph Family has several medical professionals they turn to for advice via the internet if a need for consultation should arise.

— No child or young adult is forced to stay at a home if they do not wish. Often it is a hard transition for a child who is used to living on the street with no rules or responsibilities to exist in a family where rules and responsibilities are taken seriously. If a child does not wish to follow the rules or live up the responsibilities in the home, or if they are disruptive or abusive to the other residents they may choose to leave, or may be asked to leave. In the future should that child wish to rejoin the St. Joseph Family, they are counseled by the leadership and allowed to return if the leadership thinks it would be a positive experience for the child and for the rest of the residents.

— The children of the St. Joseph Family are encouraged and supported to learn English so they may better communicate with non-Kreyol speakers.

— The children are allowed to have personal computers and cell phones. Internet access is available, both in the homes and at local cyber cafes. The children are allowed to have personal email accounts, participate in social media and make phone calls, none of which are monitored by the St. Joseph Family.

— The St. Joseph Family promotes leadership development to empower the children and leadership members. Leadership training courses teach about their self-worth and rights. Empowering the children is important because of their past experiences of being abused, neglected and powerless.

ST. JOSEPH FAMILY POLICIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN:

— The protection of the children is the first priority for all leaders and staff of the homes. Employees are mandated to report abuse, or even the suspicion of abuse, to the leadership, regardless of who the perpetrator may be (lead-

ership, staff, guest, volunteer or another child).

— If an employee is found to be an abuser, in any form, immediate termination will take place, along with possible legal action. If an employee knows of abuse taking place but does not immediately report it, sanctions will occur.

— Employees are allowed to report allegations of abuse or inappropriate behavior to a member of the St. Joseph Family Board of Directors or a member of the leadership at one of the homes in a confidential manner. The matter is then to be brought to the attention of the full board of directors for investigation and action.

— Children are empowered to report any abuse to a trusted adult. The St. Joseph Family and all homes have multiple people in leadership so that a child can choose who to report any instances of abuse. The leadership of the homes meet with the children regularly to explain their rights and their options for reporting any misappropriate behavior. The matter is then to be brought to the attention of the full board of directors for investigation and action.

— No reported or suspected incident of abuse is ignored. Any suspicious activity, observed abuse or victim allegations that are brought to the attention of the leadership of the St. Joseph Family will be investigated in a timely and thorough manner.

— Instances of abuse are handled swiftly and severely.

— All interactions between the children of the St. Joseph Family and adults (leadership, staff, volunteers or guests) are done in public areas. No staff member or member of the leadership is allowed to be alone in a room with a child with the door closed; except to aid in bathing and toileting at Wings of Hope. All meetings between the leadership and the children are done in public areas, or in open-door meetings.

— Whenever practical, a minimum of two adults are present during activities involving the children. All activities that involve both children and adults are done in open, public areas.

— The St. Joseph Family is registered with IBESR (the Haitian department of social services) and they send inspectors to the homes yearly to meet individually with the children and monitor living conditions.

— The children and young adults at Wings of Hope are taught about boundaries, appropriate behaviors and actions through an educational system based on the “Circles: Intimacy and Relationship Education” program that is used mainly for children with developmental disorders. It uses six colored concentric circles to represent the different levels of social distance. Within each circle the child learns the appropriate behaviors and actions. The program that is taught at Wings of Hope is based on this model, but modified for life at Wings of Hope and in Haiti. Despite the fact that it was developed as a program for those with disabilities, this program also works well with the students at Lekòl Sen Trinite, who are not yet of an age to learn directly about sexual education, but can learn how to value themselves and others.

— The residents at St. Joseph’s Home for Boys and Trinity House are taught about sexuality, appropriate behaviors and actions through a program called Voyage de l’Espoir (Journey of Hope). This program was originally developed by Johns Hopkins University to counter the AIDS pandemic in Africa. The Haitian Ministry of Public Health adapted and published its own version with Haitian-centric story lines and proverbs. The baseline mission is to teach sexual education and health through a three-pronged approach of abstinence, fidelity and condoms. It is sensitive to personal religious beliefs while using scientific data and practical advice.

TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN THE FALL OF 2011.

— Each home has 24-hour security guards employed to control who comes into the house.

— The leadership of the St. Joseph Family, and the older youth who are being trained in leadership development, each have mentor from outside the St. Joseph Family who can affirm, listen to and mentor them to increase their self-confidence, help them develop their problem-solving skills and become better leaders.

— Pornography-blocking technology exists in the internet systems at all three homes.

TO BE INSTALLED IN JULY 2011.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH VISITORS AND VOLUNTEERS:

— No child is allowed to enter a guest's room. No guests are allowed to enter the children's bedrooms at St. Joseph's or Trinity House. At Wings of Hope, guests are only allowed to enter the children's rooms for volunteer service when a staff member is present. At Wings of Hope the staff/guest house is separate from the children's house and children are not allowed to enter the staff/guest house. In the new construction at St. Joseph's Home for Boys and Wings of Hope the living areas for the children and the guest areas will be separate.

— A significant number of guests to the St. Joseph Family homes are mandated reporters of child abuse in their home country — priests, pastors, teachers, medical professionals, social workers, etc. — they are trained in the detection of abuse and are encouraged by the St. Joseph Family to share any observations of questionable behavior or suspicions of abuse to the St. Joseph Family leadership.

— All observations and questions of visitors are welcomed by the St. Joseph Family leadership and an open dialogue about the health, safety and living conditions is encouraged.

— The St. Joseph Family has several long-term mission partners who visit the homes on a regular basis. Through their repeated visits these mission partners develop friendships with the children and follow their progress both during their visits and through communication with the children after they return to their home countries. These mission partners also have an understanding of the St. Joseph Family, its philosophy, its mission and its challenges that allow them to be supportive of the organization and its work over the long-term. The mission partners have expressed their support for the mission and the children, but not any one individual, so that if any person in leadership needed to be removed for any reason, their support for the children and organization would remain in place. Many of these mission partners include individuals who are mandated reporters of abuse in their home country.

— There are several non-Haitian and Haitian visitors to the homes who live and work in Haiti who have known the children over a long period of time, who can speak to them in their own language and who the children consider trusted adults.

— Many of our guests are female and have strong mothering instincts toward the children. This allows the children to develop positive and healthy relationships with trusted adult women and be nurtured.

— Any public displays of affection beyond hugging are discouraged. Hugs are a staple for the St. Joseph Family, but any more intimate actions (even involving two consenting adults), especially in front of the children, are not appropriate

— The children of the St. Joseph Family are encouraged to develop healthy friendships with visitors. This gives them an opportunity to know they are supported by people outside the St. Joseph Family and should any need arise, they have trusted contacts outside the St. Joseph Family whom they can go to.

— When journalists ask for interviews with the children, the leadership does not monitor those interviews. There are restrictions on the journalists to not probe into the child's experiences prior to coming to the St. Joseph Family, if the child has indicated he does not want to share those experiences.

— All long-term volunteers (serving for a month or more) go through an application and screening process. They are subject to background and reference checks. All long-term volunteers who are serving the St. Joseph Family for a month or more are required to sign a code of conduct contract and verify they understand, support and will abide by the St. Joseph Family child protection policies.

CONCLUSION:

The St. Joseph Family is dedicated to the safety, health and welfare of the children in its care and does everything in its power to make sure the children grow up in loving, supportive and stable homes. The rights of the children are respected and they are given the skills and opportunities to become productive citizens in the Haitian society.