

Haitian kids face uncertain future

By David Crary
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

Six months after a chaotic airlift to the United States, 12 Haitian children remain in a Roman Catholic institution near Pittsburgh, their fate in limbo while U.S. and Haitian authorities struggle to determine which nation should be their future home.

Their case is complicated and politically sensitive, and all parties say they want the best outcome possible for the children. Yet impatience in some quarters is growing.

"It's astounding to me that the bureaucracy can't get this done," said Pennsylvania Gov. Ed Rendell, who took part in the airlift. "It's unfair to these children. Let's get them adopted by loving families."

Unlike some 1,100 other children flown out of Haiti to the U.S. after the Jan. 12 earthquake, the youths at the Holy Family Institute in Emsworth, Pa., were not part of the adoption process prior to the quake and — according to some legal experts — shouldn't have been eligible for the emergency program.

There are American families eager to adopt them now, including some who've been screened and approved by adoption agencies. But there's been little in the way of public updates on the case as federal agencies, the Haitian government and the International Red Cross try to determine whether the 12 should be put up for U.S. adoption or returned to relatives in Haiti.

The State Department, which oversees various aspects of international adoption, is deeply involved in case — but has not

issued statements about it. Two staffers — authorized by the department to brief a reporter only if they not be identified — described the case as very complex and said there was no time-frame for resolving it as efforts continue to verify information about the children's families in Haiti.

They said no decisions would be made that were not acceptable to the Haitian government, which has been wary of some post-quake efforts to send children abroad. In May, the leader of an Idaho church group was convicted of arranging illegal travel after the group tried to take children out of Haiti without government approval.

The 12 children at Holy Family were part of an airlift of 54 children from the Bresma orphanage in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, where two Pittsburgh-area sisters, Jamie and Alison McMutrie, had been volunteering for several years. The sisters' urgent post-quake pleas for help were aired — participants in the Jan. 19 airlift included Rendell, officials from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, and a local Democratic congressman, Rep. Jason Altmire.

At Holy Family, the 12 children have been shielded from public view, and from the media, since their arrival, but by all accounts are receiving excellent treatment. They experienced their first snowfall during the winter, made field trips to Pittsburgh's zoo and children's museum, and have enjoyed the swimming pool during recent hot weather.

"The children had typical reactions to being whisked out of their country. ... We had bed-wetting and tantrums," said Sister Linda Yankoski, the institute's president.



John Heller/Associated Press

Orphaned Haitian children arrive at Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh following the earthquake in January.

"We're not seeing that now. ... They appear to be very well-adjusted."

Ranging in age from 15 months to nearly 13, the children have been living together in their own residence, kept apart from the dozens of troubled youths who make up the institute's regular population.

The staff has been supplemented with Creole-speaking volunteers.

In hindsight, it's clear that including the 12 children in the airlift has created a long-running dilemma. Yet federal and state officials have defended the decision not to leave them behind in the confusion at the Port-au-Prince airport — saying the alternative would have been to send them back to an understaffed,

underequipped orphanage in a devastated city.

When it became clear that the 12 children were not part of the U.S. adoption process, an adoption service provider affiliated with the Bresma orphanage compiled a list of qualified U.S. families willing to adopt them.

Among them were Sherry and Sherry Cluver of Forsyth, Ill., who'd been contemplating adopting from Haiti long before the earthquake.

The Cluvers — both high school teachers — flew to Pittsburgh on Jan. 21 to meet briefly with two of the 12 children who, later that day, were moved to the Holy Family Institute.

Since then, according to Sherry Cluver, she and her husband have been prohibited from further visits

or any other contact with the children, and the last update they got from any federal official was June 15.

"We're here, praying for you, loving you, and writing and calling important people for help — to bring you home," Cluver wrote in a recent blog entry, addressing the children even though they were unlikely to read it.

"We pray that your hearts might somehow know that we have not left you behind."

Among those Cluver has contacted is her congressman, Aaron Shock, R-Ill. His spokesman, Dave Natonski, said Shock plans to write to Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius inquiring about the status of the case and the welfare of the 12 children.

Gas well employer had past violations

By Joe Mandak
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

PITTSBURGH — The employer of two workers killed in an oil and gas well explosion last week had paid nearly \$10,000 in federal workplace safety fines for two other well fires, including a 2007 explosion that burned an employee, records show.

Officials at Northeast Energy Management Inc. of Indiana, Pa., did not immediately return a call for comment Tuesday about the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration records.

The explosion and fire Friday was the third since September 2007 involving Northeast Energy Management workers at a western Pennsylvania well. OSHA spokeswoman Lenore Uddyback-Fortson confirmed.

Huntley & Huntley Inc. of Monroeville, the drilling company that owned the well, has a clean OSHA record, Uddyback-Fortson said.

Northeast Management was cited for 10 serious violations, and one other violation after the September 2007 explosion and fire at a well near Sligo in Clarion County, OSHA records show.

Workers at a natural gas well "were exposed to an unsafe air mixture environment resulting in an explosion and fire causing injuries," OSHA said.

A piece of equipment called the



Associated Press/WPI

The July 23 natural gas well explosion left two workers dead.

blowout preventer had been removed, causing the well to spew natural gas for two hours before an attempt was made to cap the well, the records show.

OSHA proposed \$12,442 in fines, and Northeast Energy eventually paid \$5,965 to settle seven of the 10 serious violations, records show.

In November 2008, the company was fined \$4,000 for a drilling rig fire in Charleroi in Washington County.

"No employees were injured, and we cited them for electrical wiring and equipment that was not approved for hazardous locations," Uddyback-Fortson said.

OSHA and other investigators have yet to determine the cause of Friday's explosion in Indiana Township that killed Northeast Energy employees Andy Yosurak Jr., 56, of Creekside, and Kevin Henry, 46, of New Florence.

It is known that at least one of the workers was welding an oil tank at the shallow well and natural gas well when the tank exploded and set the well on fire, according to Helen Humphreys, a spokeswoman for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

The tank rocketed 70 yards

away, and the workers were badly burned and hurled dozens of feet by the blast, investigators have said.

They've yet to pinpoint the cause of the explosion.

DEP Secretary John Hanger said he hopes the agency will report on the cause of the blast within 45 days.

The law gives OSHA six months to do that, Uddyback-Fortson said.

Huntley President Keith Mangini defended Northeast Energy.

"We've used them frequently, and we believe they've been a good company. We continue to believe they're a good company," Mangini said Tuesday, adding that Huntley expects to issue a statement about the subcontractor.

The Allegheny County Medical Examiner has yet to release the cause of death on the two workers, saying that is pending the outcome of investigations into the explosion's cause.

The well is in Indiana Township in Allegheny County, about 15 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Northeast Energy company is based in the Indiana borough, about 45 miles northeast of Pittsburgh in Indiana County.

Pa. one of 18 states competing for grants

By Christine Armario
and Dorie Turner
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITERS

ATLANTA — Eighteen states and the District of Columbia were named finalists Tuesday in the second round of the federal "Race to the Top" school reform grant competition, giving them a chance to receive a share of \$3.4 billion.

The states are Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and South Carolina.

The competition rewards ambitious reforms aimed at improving struggling schools and closing the achievement gap.

Dozens of states have passed new education policies to foster charter school growth and modify teachers evaluations, hoping to make themselves more attractive to the judges.

In a speech announcing the finalists at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Tuesday, Education Secretary Arne Duncan said a "quiet revolution" of education reform is taking place across the country.

"It's being driven by great educators and administrators who are challenging the defeatism and inertia that has trapped generations of children in second-rate schools," Duncan said.

Thirty-five states and the District of Columbia applied dur-

ing the second round of the competition so that they could advance.

Applications were screened by a panel of peer reviewers, and finalists will travel to Washington in coming weeks to present their proposals. The department expects 10 to 15 states will ultimately receive money, depending on whether large or small states win.

"Just as in the first round, we're going to set a very high bar because we know that real and meaningful change will only come from doing hard work and setting high expectations," Duncan said.

All finalist scored higher than 400 points out of a possible 500 points in the initial evaluation. Duncan said the average score rose by 26 points between the first and second rounds.

In the past 18 months, 13 states have altered laws to foster the growth of charter schools, and 17 have reformed teacher evaluation systems to include student achievement, among other things.

New York, a finalist in the first round that did not win money, lifted its cap on the number of charter schools that can open from 200 to 460.

Colorado passed laws that would pay teachers based on student performance and can strip tenure from low-performing instructors.

Georgia, a current finalist, didn't change any laws to its system but already had one of the most open charter policies in the country.

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