

Hello!

I'm back from the beautiful Blue Mountains of Jamaica to the tundra of Michigan! I spent an amazing two weeks building relationships with over 60 children at City of Refuge Children's Home in the Jamaica. It was such a blessing to be a part of these children's lives.

The orphanage is on the top of a ridge, around 4,000 feet high, overlooking the city of Kingston and the ocean beyond. It was a beautiful view- one that I never got tired of looking at! In the picture above we are standing in an open porch where we would eat our meals. This is also where we would have church and the Wednesday night worship. The lower level was the school and the offices. The blue house you see is where the older girls lived, mostly 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 16 years old. The second roof to the right is the toddler house where boys and girls ages one to around 6 or 7 lived. The white house with the green roof is where the directors lived. And the far yellow house with the red roof is where the older boys lived. As you can see it was quite the climb from top to bottom! We became stair masters by the end! Each of the homes has house parents which take turns staying with and caring for the children 24/7.



We would get up every morning for breakfast at 7 o'clock. Mrs. Bough was an excellent cook, and we never lacked for good Jamaican cooking! One of my favorite meals was the Jerk chicken with coconut rice and peas, a common Jamaican dish. The kids started school at 8. Some mornings I would go into the classrooms and help out for a while, keeping the kids on task and answering questions. The school was divided into 3 rooms: Kindergarten (14 students), 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade (approx. 20 students), and 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade (15 students). Other mornings I would spend in the toddler house, taking them on walks down the driveway or

playing games with them in the small open patio they had to play in. They were so full of energy and I usually left the house exhausted after a few hours, but always with a smile on my face.

Thursdays and Fridays I was in charge of the PE classes. I found some pool noodles to play tag with and the parachutes with water balloons were a hit.

After school it was time to get the older kids active. We ran up and down the steep driveway which curved around the mountain below the houses. They had fun learning the Tango and the Swing. We played limbo, did circuit workouts, and the girls loved to jump rope! We had limited space to work with since most of the orphanage is on the side of the mountain!



The second week I was joined by my mom, my friend Hope, and her mom, Pat. My mom and Pat went to town on some of the storage closets, organizing and labeling. They found a bunch of new flip flops (called slippers in Jamaica) and gave all of the toddlers a new pair. They loved them and marched around their play room singing, "We're in the Lord's Army." Hope and I were also able to teach the kids some CPR, First Aid, and fire safety.

I was very blessed by this trip and the children there. They will always have a place in my heart. I'll never forget the joy on their faces as they ran down the hill with their arms out, singing, "I believe I can fly," or the way they said "Miss Rachel" in their Jamaican accents, or the swarm of hugs I got every time I walked into the toddler house. I want to give a special thank you for all of your thoughts and prayers while I was in Jamaica. Please continue to pray for these children and their own futures as children of God!

God Bless,

