Once again, we wish to thank the Child Health Foundation for the support of the Dominican Republic Outreach Project. The last year has been a busy one, with significant gains as well as new challenges. Construction of the bathroom was a major contribution which has had a synergistic effect encouraging additional support and understanding of the plight of these and the thousands of other Haitian children living in the Dominican Republic. The following is an overview of the recent events – both good and bad – which have lead to the current status of the Project.

The Current Political Situation. Following the one year anniversary of the earthquake in Haiti, the Dominican military and police have resumed large scale involuntary deportations of Haitians. The cholera outbreak in Haiti and continuing flow of illegal Haitians into the country are perceived as a threat to the health, safety and economic well being of the Dominican Republic. Road blocks have been established and trucks and public transport vehicles are routinely searched. Newly arrived Haitians are thrown into the back of trucks along with those who were born in the country or have lived in it for many years. Over 3,000 Haitians, including unaccompanied children, were involuntary departed in January alone.

The growing tension between Dominicans and Haitians has had significant impacts on the Project. The mission school in Javillar, were about half the children attended school, was closed in August as a result of threats from the Junta de Vecinos (neighborhood association) against Blanco and the children. It was reopened by a local pastor as a community center for Dominicans only. Our children were sent to Puerto Plata to a Haitian mission school until Christmas. When it came time to begin school in January, it was no longer safe to transport the children via local public transport (gua gua vans) due to the fear they would be stopped and the children removed and taken to Haiti. As a result, we have set up a small temporary school at Blanco’s Place. Recently, the military rounded up the congregation of a small Haitian church in Javillar and forced them into the back of a truck for deportation. One of Blanco’s Kids was a part of that group. Fortunately, Blanco was successful in going to Haiti and paying the necessary bribes to find and return her home.

The most recent disturbing event also occurred in Javillar. A self proclaimed Haitian religious leader (who calls himself “The Prophet”) took five children, two of whom were critically ill, into his church to conduct some type of religious curing rites (apparently over a number of days). The two children died and he was discovered
burying their bodies behind the church on the river bank by Dominican neighbors who called the police. The bodies were autopsied and the children were found to have died of cholera. The three other children also were infected and subsequently treated. This lead to an angry neighborhood uprising in which the pastor and his followers were attacked physically and forced out of the barrio. Shortly after this incident, (early February) the Puerto Plata building inspector came to Blanco’s Place (about 2 miles from Javillar) and informed us that we had to cease construction based on a complaint from the local Junta de Vecinos that they do not want a Haitian orphanage in their community. (As discussed below, we are in the process of building a new dormitory room and adjacent covered outdoor kitchen.)

**Project Support and Growth.** On the positive side, the project has experienced growth and achieved some economic stability. This is due to the continuing support of UMDNJ students and the growing involvement of Costambar residents and visitors who learn about Blanco’s Kids during their visit to the Dominican Republic. One local businessman and a gentleman from Canada have each pledged donations of $500 per month to cover the cost of the feeding and school programs. Other long and short term visitors have sent donations to the Project after they’ve visited the bateyes and barrios where some of the children still live. In addition, the Costambar community has had a number of fund raising events. One group planned and ran the first annual “Costambar Olympics” replete with torch runner and aluminum foil gold, bronze and silver award platforms. Crime tape was used to delineate lanes for the various egg throwing and similar “games”. Another group held a number of beach sales of used clothing and household goods.

**Current Status of the Project.** This generous support has given us a modest economic base – sufficient funds to cover the food and education program for the next 6 months as well as to buy construction materials to expand Blanco’s Place. The existing structure (on right) consisted of a single building with two sleeping rooms and the bathroom. Thanks to the Child Health Foundation the bathroom has been completed (see below) and is gratefully used. However, as is always the case, we have found the quarters to be too small (except the bathroom). The bunk beds
completely fill one room with no space to move or for closets or other storage space. The second room is used as a combo bedroom for Marilyn and the smallest of the children and as a kitchen/storage room.

The foundation footprint and partial walls of a second structure were completed at the same time as the house to serve as a future school. We came to realize that a school would require both neighborhood and Puerto Plata government approval, which we were not likely to get. As a result, we decided to complete the building for use as a dormitory and to add a cement roof and floor extension between the new building and bathroom to serve as an outdoor kitchen and play/meeting area. Eriberto, the contractor who build the original site at cost, again helped by buying materials at commercial rates and supplying a building supervisor to guide the project. We were extremely fortunate to have the help of two volunteers – a New York contractor and one of his employees - who worked as a part of the construction team for almost four weeks in January. They were assisted by a carpenter from Canada who built the back door for the bathroom and reinforced the bunk beds. We employed Eriberto’s maestro a Haitian worker to complete the walls, cement roof and floor of the building plus the kitchen extension. It was at this point that we were ordered to stop construction.

Fortunately, the dormitory and kitchen extension are sufficiently complete to provide space for the temporary school and to serve as a covered out door eating area. The future is uncertain. The complaint that halted construction apparently was initiated by one wealthy (relatively speaking) Dominican businessman and a foreign expatriate who is building a home in the area. As far as we are aware the local neighbors, all poor Dominicans, were not a part of this action. In fact, the local Dominican kids occasionally play in the yard and a number of them, along with some adults, come to the Saturday English classes. We hope to work this out informally. If unsuccessful, we will explore the possibility of becoming a “legal” orphanage but are concerned that further exposure of the project will result in retaliation. Setting aside this concern, to meet government regulations would most likely require us to hire only legal Dominican workers for child care destroying the type of “natural” community we
have striven to maintain with Haitian women voluntarily caring for their own children as well as others. Meanwhile, we strive to gain and maintain local neighborhood support. For example, we do de-worming in a number of rural schools in the mountains because a nearby Dominican family comes from that area and requested that we do so.

The pictures below show the construction during and following completion of the cement work. The temporary school meets in side and outside, depending on weather. Our teacher is a friend of Blanco’s who initially volunteered his efforts. We currently are paying him a modest wage, which he has more than earned from his efforts and the children’s respect for him.

![Images of children and construction site]

**Project Budget and Expenditures.**

At the time of the interim report, the bathroom was near completion. We anticipated the cost of completion as follows:

- 2 outside steel doors $300
- 2 inside toilette doors $120
- 3 window frames and louvers $270
- Shower rod and curtain for the door.
- Cement entrance area to connect to the future kitchen and house walkway
- Roof

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The bathroom has been completed. The actual expenditures differed from those we
proposed earlier. We received a donated door that was rebuilt by our volunteer
carpenter for use in the rear of the bathroom. The shower rod and other appliances
(towel rods and toilet paper holders) were contributed by students. We have
purchased a steel door for the front of the bathroom ($175) but it has not been
installed for fear of damage during the construction of the new dorm and kitchen
extension. The remainder of the grant award ($825) was used to purchase cement
for the walkway in front of the house and for the kitchen floor.

**Future Plans.** We are in an awkward position with respect to “marketing” the
project. On the one hand, we want people to know what has and is happening with
these children. On the other hand, when we expose ourselves locally we may risk
retaliation against the children. Blanco has been threatened and I’ve had two home
invasions that may or may be not associated with my work in the project. I’ll be
returning at the end of the month with a student group coming in April. Claudia
Dockor, a full time Costambar resident, continues to oversee the project on a day in
and day out basis. I will be spending more time in the Dominican Republic following
my retirement next year.

Thank you again for your assistance.