



Humanitarian group reaches out for help

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After 10 years of providing relief efforts to storm-ridden parts of Guatemala, Mother Nature has not ceased to cascade the region with powerful rains, so the Canadian Central American Relief Effort (CCARE) needs the public's help.

CCARE, a non-governmental organization run by volunteers, provides economic development, education and health initiatives in the Merendon Mountains region of the country where approximately 22,000 people in 36 villages have been hit by heavy storms and left homeless over the past decade. Many have been left without livestock or possessions and many of them died.

CCARE, based out of Peel and Halton, is currently providing relief efforts to seven of those villages. On Nov. 10 they will ship a 40 ft.-long container with goods and they need people to donate items to fill the shipment. Things of particular need are used suitcases or gym bags, blankets, plastic containers with lids, sheets, towels, dry food such as rice, pasta, flour or milk powder, non-electric tools and money donations. CCARE needs these items before Nov. 2.

The organization was founded by Hilda Rossi, the current president of CCARE. A Guatemalan herself, she left the country in 1998 after Hurricane Mitch hit. "My conscience was getting to me. It was time I did something for my people," she said.

Rossi stresses that the people are living in misery. They eat and sleep on dirt and have no way to build themselves proper beds or tables. "They're not lazy people. They're intelligent people but they don't have the tools to build anything."

CCARE's efforts have been concentrated in the north-east mountainous area of Guatemala because there have already been many other organizations helping in the larger towns. In fact, Toni Primavera, a member of CCARE, on her first visit said her police escort officer told her that he didn't know how bad the situation was in the remote area until he went there with CCARE. "Even the locals don't know how bad it is there," she said.

CCARE does not rebuild or feed the people. "We're trying to make them self-sustaining so they can help themselves," Rossi said.

In one initiative CCARE bought chickens and handed out five each to families. Those families were taught to feed and breed the chicken. Eventually the locals were able to produce eggs and chickens for personal consumption, and even had an excess to sell in markets.

There is no electricity in this region and people live in mud huts. When it rains hard, their homes crumble. CCARE has been helping the locals rebuild the villages for the past decade, and now rains are again washing away the shelters.

Primavera said the container will be received by a CCARE member and the items distributed by the organization, so that no items will go missing in a region notorious for theft.

CCARE gets funding through several fundraisers throughout the year.

If you would like to donate to CCARE's relief efforts contact Primavera at 905-812-7699.

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