



Maryse Adonis of Newington

Humanitarian with a Heart for Haiti

Maryse Adonis emigrated from Haiti when she was 16 years old, but it's clear that she left her heart in that beautiful – but troubled – Caribbean country, which shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic.

You see, for more than 15 years Maryse has been working as a humanitarian, providing the most essential elements of life – food, clothing, education, health care – to the often-forgotten people of Haiti and the Bateyes region of the Dominican Republic, so named because of *bateyes*, or shantytowns, where many Haitians live in squalor while working in the sugar cane fields of the DR.

Outraged by the near-slave-like conditions, Maryse started a non-profit in 2005 called Arm2Arm, which is based in her home in Newington but attracts supporters from across the state. In addition to building and maintaining a one-room schoolhouse in the Bayetes region, the Arm2Arm volunteers – including health care workers, high school students, and church youth groups – also deliver supplies, offer basic medical treatment, and provide general support, including underwriting the school's lunch program and paying the teachers' salaries. Donations come from grass-roots fundraisers, some of which are run by teenagers, and from her neighbors and friends.

If you looked at photos from Arm2Arm mission trips, you'd never guess they were taken in the poorest country in the world; they are replete with beaming faces and exuberant hugs. Maryse's nominator says that is a reflection of Maryse herself: "I have never met a person like Maryse, who has never forgotten where she comes from, whose purpose and true passion in life is to care for the world's poorest and maintain an aura of joy."

When disaster strikes her beloved Caribbean, as it seems to do with disproportionate frequency, Maryse and Arm2Arm spring into action, organizing relief efforts – like in 2019, when Hurricane Dorian devastated the Bahamas, or last month, when a 7.2-magnitude earthquake shook Haiti to its core. Maryse coordinates donations of essential supplies as well as funds to cover the cost of shipping them.

Mind you, these humanitarian efforts are what Maryse has chosen to do in "retirement," after finishing her 30-year career at Aetna. She concedes that she is probably busier now than when she was working for a living.

"I love it," she says, adding that the humanitarian work is what makes her life worth living. "We are all children of God, and we are here for a purpose," she reflects. "To be able to give a pair of glasses to a man who has not been able to see well for many years, and for him to tell you 'now I can walk home' ... that is what makes me feel like I am making a difference."