

FSU Alum starts theater program in Haiti  
FSU Alum Shelah Marie uses her love of theater to better Haiti

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Staff Writer

Shelah Marie, a 2008 graduate from Florida State's Communication and Theater Departments, has taken her passion to a whole new level to better the world. From July 30 to Aug. 18, Marie led a Sustainable Theater Workshop for children in Haiti.

"The summer before this one, I was visiting friends there," said Marie. "It's common in those cultures to employ people of lower classes. One of the girls serving us was six, and I was really struck by her. Her name was Rose. She was working like an adult, and it's like, this is her life. This is what she does."

Marie works with children as a private Drama Coach in New York, so seeing a girl about the same age as the children she works with on a daily basis in the United States sparked her interest in pursuing teaching theater in Haiti as well.

"The access to creative arts is not a privilege, it's a human right," said Marie. "I don't know how to build infrastructure, I only know theater, so I decided to go back and do what I can."

Marie brought the basic tools needed for the children in Haiti to write and perform their own play. She then took the written play back to the US to publish it.

"Theater is supposed to be performed, but performance is ephemeral," said Marie, "so I wanted it written and published because that would hold more weight."

While Marie was happy with the results of the Sustainable Theater Workshop Program, it did not run as smoothly as she had expected.

"There were many factors that I didn't take into consideration, like the dynamic of a female from America coming to start this program," said Marie. "I encountered a lot of push back, and I had to shift my expectations. Do I have a script? Yes. Was there a performance? Yes. Was it what I expected? No."

Marie believes she accomplished what she set out to do, but that the program needs to be longer, so she plans on coming back to Haiti every summer.

"I saw clear changes in the kids," said Marie. "They opened up and I saw changes in the micro community, and that to me is a huge victory."

One of the best experiences for Marie was learning on another level what it means to be grateful, by seeing for herself what the culture is like in Haiti rather than on television.

"It gave me a different experience," said Marie. "We have excess here, extreme, disgusting excess."

Marie's other favorite experience was the last day of working with the children.

"The last day of class, we had a free flowing final performance," said Marie. "We were all singing, and they were giving speeches and me how much they love me. It was a lot to go through over there, and that day, it was all worth it."

Anyone who wants to help with the efforts in Haiti can contact Marie and she will set up an opportunity to help. She can be contacted through her website, [shelahmarie.com](http://shelahmarie.com), or by email at [shelah@shelahmarie.com](mailto:shelah@shelahmarie.com).

"There are kids who do need help and I can't do it all on my own," said Marie. "So if you want to help, contact me."