

# City of Refuge



welcomes the children

BY JANET WALKER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AUBRA GEORGE



Steve and Kim Puffpaff with City of Refuge children

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ifty-one children, ages 6 months to 12 years, live at City of Refuge, a children's home directed by missionaries Steve and Kim Puffpaff on the northern Caribbean island of Jamaica. The 26-acre campus sits on a mountaintop about an hour's drive from the capital city, Kingston.

These children, prior to coming to the home, were counted among thousands in Jamaica who are abused, neglected, abandoned and some left on the streets without any shelter or provision.

The Puffpaffs, missionaries to Jamaica since 1989, began their ministry in the nation as church planters. In 1997, while they were pastoring a church in inner-city Kingston and operating a Latin America ChildCare School, street children and youth began attending their church. In talking with them, Steve and Kim realized that at night these children were returning to the streets and sleeping in boxes or other makeshift shelters. They had nowhere to go and no one who cared.

"We began to minister to them," Steve says. "We fed them once a week, let them come inside and take showers, and gave them a clean set of clothes. Some of them had been hurt; they had knife wounds which we treated. But then they walked out the door, and we didn't know if we'd see them again the next week or if they would even survive."

Through this process, Steve and Kim knew God was speaking to them to be His hands extended to these children.

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*Kids from Trenchtown — one of Jamaica's poorest and most dangerous neighborhoods. Many of the City of Refuge children come from areas such as this.*



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The name City of Refuge, according to Kim, comes from Joshua 20 where the Bible says there should be cities of refuge established in Israel where people could go to escape violence.

“We felt we should take in these children whose lives are being ravaged by Satan himself who wants to destroy them,” Steve says.

The Puffpuffs opened City of Refuge four years ago, and today they and 16 staff members provide 51 children a safe and loving environment, where their lives are being transformed through nurturing, training and mentoring.

One of the children lived near the city dump when she was only 1 year old. Another child was discovered when her mother was arrested while living on the street. Officers heard a sound coming from an old, dirty blanket. When they unrolled it, they found the baby. One of the boys in the home had a mother who was a prostitute and a crack cocaine addict. She dragged him with her day after day on the streets.

Because of City of Refuge, these children now have a safe home and plenty of food and are receiving an education. In this atmosphere, they see Jesus’ love for them demonstrated every day and they learn more about Him.

“We just love these kids,” Steve says. “It’s not complicated. We just hold them and tell them ‘We love you,’ and really it’s not long until you begin to see them respond.”

What the children really need is a pattern in their lives, according to Kim.

“Our goal here is to nurture them in the Lord, to show them the love

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For most of the home’s 51 children, Steve and Kim are the only parents they have ever known.



Two boys carve a boat from styrofoam in a fishing community outside Kingston.

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*Kemar, the oldest of the children, is setting a wonderful example.*

*He helps lead the worship services, prays for people and has even preached his first sermon at the age of 12.*



*Steve and Kim hold two services a week at City of Refuge for the kids and staff.*



of the Father and provide them with the comfort, love and security of a home,” she says.

The children rise at 6 a.m. and do their assigned chores. They eat breakfast at 7:30 and begin their classes at the school on campus at 8. Classes end at 2:30 p.m., and the children enjoy recreation on the playground, on the soccer field or at the basketball hoops until dinner. All activities include the supervision and mentoring of the Puffpaffs and the staff. Following dinner the children have homework, devotions and baths, with bedtime at 7:30.

Sunday and midweek church services are normally held on campus at City of Refuge. About once a month, the staff takes the children to visit services at the nearest Assemblies of God church, 50 minutes away.

The children at City of Refuge are continually growing in Christ.

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The ministry at City of Refuge is vital to the Jamaica Assemblies of God. Conrad Pitkin, AG national superintendent and chairman of City of Refuge’s board of directors, predicts one day the children at City of Refuge will make up the freshman class at the resident Bible school. Pitkin and the national church have helped the Puffpaffs locate teachers and other needed personnel for their ministry.

Assistance has come from the U.S. Assemblies of God as well. The original buildings on the City of Refuge property included a historic hotel

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and a couple of older houses. During the past four years, several U.S. Assemblies of God MAPS (Missions Abroad Placement Service) teams have helped remodel the existing structures and build a director's home. The next construction phase to begin soon is a three-story, multipurpose building that will provide classrooms, space for skills training, and more housing for teachers, houseparents, missions interns and other personnel.

City of Refuge needs more elementary and special-ed teachers willing to live on campus and teach in the school. Monthly sponsors are also needed to help with the children's educational costs.

The Puffpuffs and staff are constantly aware of the responsibility to prepare the children to be productive citizens in their communities. On the 26-acre campus, they have started both a vegetable and coffee farm, tended by nine Jamaican workers, where production is steadily increasing. Soon some of the children will enter middle school and high school and will begin working on the farm. They will gain valuable work skills while pursuing their education. The Puffpuffs hope to add other skills training in the future such as computer, carpentry and sewing.

"We are investing in the lives of children who we believe are going to change the world," Steve says. "Some of them will go out and become world shakers."

About 65 percent of the children at the City of Refuge were homeless, became wards of the court and were referred by the government of Jamaica. (City of Refuge is registered with the government in Jamaica as a

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*A simple hug becomes a channel of communication and an avenue for ministry.*



private children's home.) The other children came through private requests of people who had heard of the home's good reputation.

Some of the children's parents visit them. But the majority of the children at City of Refuge have never been contacted by their parents. They don't even know if their mother and father are alive.

"To see these children begin to learn, change, grow and love God makes our every effort worth it all," Kim says. "We sometimes dare to consider the thought, 'Oh, God, what if no one had ever put anything into their lives?' Where would they be?" **tpe**

JANET WALKER is assistant editor of the *World Missions Edition of Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).



*A girl cries during a worship service at City of Refuge.*

*Steve Puffpaff looks out over the valley beneath the City of Refuge children's home in the Blue Mountains.*



## God rescued me

Steve Puffpaff looked out the window as the convertible he was riding in at 100 mph hit a wet spot and began to slide. The car was headed toward a ravine. Steve braced himself as the car began to flip and roll, glass shattered from the windows, and the hood flew off.

"I'm going to die," Steve said to himself. He knew he was not right with God and was facing eternity. He was a college dropout who felt like his life was going nowhere and as a result had become a drug user. He and a friend were on their way now to buy drugs in a nearby city.

Only a month earlier, his cousin and her husband had given their hearts to Christ. They had witnessed to Steve, and he saw the transformation that had taken place in them.

They shared a Scripture with him, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, KJV).

Steve wanted to believe that was true. He was tired of the life he was living and didn't like the person he was becoming. But pride and peer pressure kept him from making a commitment to Christ.

When the car finally stopped on its side after seven rolls, his friend was unconscious and Steve didn't have even a scratch. He couldn't believe it! At that moment,

he prayed, "Lord, I don't know why You spared my life, but I know that from this day on I'm going to live for You."

The next week Steve went to an evangelism crusade in his home town of Saginaw, Michigan, and made a public profession of his commitment to Christ. A few weeks later he was baptized in the Holy Spirit.

"God radically changed my life," Steve says, and that experience motivated him to believe God can do that for others.

He enrolled at Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. A few months before starting college, Steve participated in an Ambassadors in Mission outreach at the 1972 Olympic Games in Germany. That experience turned his heart toward missions — which became his focus.

While attending CBC, Steve participated in a summer missions internship to Jamaica. He worked with missionary Cyril Darrel-Huckerby, and by the end of that summer Steve knew God was calling him to return there someday as a missionary. (Cyril Darrel-Huckerby served 37 years in Jamaica prior to his death in 1981.)

Steve and Kim Puffpaff have been missionaries to Jamaica since 1989, active in the work God is doing to transform people's lives in that nation, and especially the lives of children.

— Janet Walker