

Shaina Gilbert
Steppingstone Class of 2000
Boston Latin School 2006
Brandeis University 2010

It is not every college senior who can say that her proudest accomplishment is the founding of an educational camp for Haiti's neediest children. But Shaina Gilbert can.

Prior to the summer of 2009, Shaina had not visited Haiti since she was eight years old. But her parents, both born and raised in Haiti, spoke often of their country and of their relatives still living there. During her junior year at Brandeis, Shaina describes feeling a calling to visit Haiti: "I decided if I was going to go back, I was going to go with a purpose." Soon enough, Shaina had recruited her father, who is a teacher in the Boston Public Schools, and four of her classmates from Brandeis to spend their summer vacation with her in Haiti, establishing a free educational camp called Empowering Through Education (ETE).

In May of 2009, Shaina departed for Hinche, her mother's hometown in Haiti, with the \$6,000 she had raised to start the camp. She chose Hinche, a city of about 50,000, because of her family ties and because, like so many other cities in Haiti, it is over-populated and under-resourced. There is no electricity in Hinche. While this would deter many, it inspired Shaina, and she knew that Hinche was the perfect place to start ETE Camp.

She was right. The people of Hinche were grateful and embraced her fully. A church donated space to host the camp, and while her goal was to recruit 30 eight- to 11-year-olds, ETE Camp actually hosted 43 children. Lessons were taught from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. every day, but students would start arriving at 7:00 a.m. because they couldn't wait to get started. The six teachers—Shaina, her father, and the four Brandeis students—taught four different classes each day, focusing on math, reading comprehension, English, and leadership development. Students were served breakfast and lunch, and time was built into each day for singing, dancing, and celebrating learning. ETE Camp ran for five weeks. The campers' enthusiasm reminded Shaina of how much she looked forward to Steppingstone classes when she was their age. She realized that in a way, she was creating a version of Steppingstone in Hinche. As camp came to a close, Shaina and her team promised to come back the next summer.

A lot has happened since Shaina made that promise, and the need for ETE Camp is even greater. This summer, the camp will take on 27 new students—refugees and orphans who have relocated from Port-au-Prince due to the recent earthquake—while continuing with all 43 of the students who participated in the camp last summer. To serve all 70 students, Shaina is recruiting new teachers and planning to train more native Haitians as teaching assistants. In addition to her father's help, Shaina's sister Gabriella, who is a tenth-grade Steppingstone Scholar at Boston Latin School, will also head to Hinche as a teacher.

When Shaina talks about ETE Camp, it's hard to remember that she is only a senior in college and that she has a full load of classes, homework, and exams to contend with. When asked how she does it all, Shaina just laughs. "It's a family affair—even my grandmother helps pack boxes of school supplies for ETE Camp."

It is Shaina's dream that ETE Camp will become a lasting part of Hinche and that someday ETE's campers will become ETE's teachers. In the meantime, Shaina will still have her summers free to continue to build ETE Camp: she has been accepted to Teach For America and starting in the fall of 2010, will be teaching for Boston Public Schools, just like her father.

To learn more about ETE Camp, please visit <http://etecamp.blogspot.com/>