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FLORIDA TEAMS HELP MORE THAN 1,500 SURVIVORS RETURNING TO THE U.S. FOLLOWING THE HAITI EARTHQUAKE

TALLAHASSEE- -As of 9 a.m. today, teams from Florida's state agencies and volunteer organizations have aided in the return, or repatriation, of 1,518 U.S. citizens arriving from Haiti at airports throughout Florida.

"Our State team continues to work closely with federal officials to make sure that the needs of returning earthquake survivors are met," said Interim Director David Halstead. "I am very proud of Florida's responders who have, once again, answered the call when there are people in need."

State officials from the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), Department of Health, and Division of Emergency Management, along with members of the American Red Cross and Second Harvest joined local and federal law enforcement, U.S. Customs and EMS personnel to receive the individuals.

Of these 1,518 citizens, 375 required services from the Department of Children and Families, including transportation, accommodations and other miscellaneous needs. 50 of the repatriated citizens required medical attention and have been admitted into various South Florida hospitals.

"As flights bringing Americans back to our country arrive at airports in Miami, Homestead and Sanford, our staff is on hand around the clock to supply assistance," said Department of Children and Families Secretary George Sheldon. "These needs may include transportation, medical assistance, mental health counseling and sadly, all too often, the basic needs of fresh water and a meal. Department employees are offering the friendly face of a welcoming home and the sincere interest in helping them to meet their most pressing needs."

DCF translator connects with family while helping survivors in Sanford

Valery Dambreville, a DCF investigator working as a Creole translator at Orlando Sanford Airport received a welcomed news yesterday when his aunt, Francia Bernavil, stepped off the relief flight from Port-au-Prince to Sanford. Dambreville and his relatives had not been able to reach Bernavil, who splits time between Haiti and Miami, since Tuesday's earthquake.

"When I saw her, I dropped what I was doing and I ran to her and starting calling her name," Dambreville told the *Orlando Sentinel*. "Hopefully, the same joy I received I can help someone else to get it."

What is repatriation?

Repatriation is the procedure by which American citizens are officially processed back into the U.S. after an evacuation from overseas. This process is done with federal, state and local agencies as well as volunteer groups to help citizens with basic needs such as documentation, transportation and medical assistance where applicable.

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(Florida Helps pg. 2 cont.)

The Department of Children and Families is also offering help to Floridians affected by the disaster.

"While the devastation in Haiti is apparent to everyone, the pain is shared by many Haitian-Americans including a number of our fellow employees who have either lost loved ones or are anxiously awaiting word of their status. We are actively working with local, private mental health service providers including school counselors to help those in Florida who are suffering," added Sheldon.

For more information on the Florida Department of Children and Families please visit http://www.state.fl.us/cf_web/ . To learn about the Florida Division of Emergency Management and to GET A PLAN!, please visit: www.FloridaDisaster.org. All students, teachers and parents can find educational information and free downloadable materials at: www.KidsGetAPlan.com. And for the latest situation and flash reports go to: www.YouTube.com/FloridaSERT.

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