

Granny Bulletin

July 6, 2007

*The **Granny Bulletin** is an update on the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, intended to keep grandmothers' groups across Canada informed about, and connected to, the grandmothers and grassroots projects in Africa, that are supported through their dedicated fundraising and awareness-raising efforts.*

Happy Summer Friends!

We have promised to keep you up-to-date on the excellent work being done in Africa by and on behalf of grandmothers. We remember and appreciate that this is something you need as you continue to organize brilliantly in your communities. In this bulletin, we will share three profiles on different, yet equally inspiring projects in Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania. These projects represent only a small sample of the many incredible projects supported by the Foundation (through your fundraising and solidarity) across sub-Saharan Africa.

Ranchod Hospice – Busy Bees, Zambia

Zambia, like other countries in the Southern Africa region, has not been spared the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS. In fact, this region remains the global epicentre of the pandemic. According to UNICEF figures, there are currently over 700,000 AIDS orphans living in Zambia alone! It is against this backdrop that the **Busy Bees** came into existence and continue to work. If you've seen the SLF film "Grandmothers: The Unsung Heroes of Africa", you've seen Matilda and the **Busy Bees** honoured.

Housed on the *Ranchod Hospice* compound in Kabwe, Zambia, the **Busy Bees** is an ever-growing support group for and by women, mostly grandmothers, who are infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. A great number of them are caring for their orphaned grandchildren. They meet every day in the shade of a leafy tree and together they share their worries, their grief, their strength, their skills and their talents. Since the formation of the group in 2004, they have soothed each other's sorrows, allayed each other's fears, listened to each other's worries and shared in their triumphs - both individual and collective. They have also produced mountains and mountains of crafts - everything from knitted sweaters to beaded necklaces; from ornate dolls to embroidered food coverings - all for sale mostly in local-area markets.

The group's resourcefulness is limitless, inspired by their need to create a sustainable source of income - income that will feed, clothe and shelter their families, income that will allow them to buy the necessary medications for their orphaned grandchildren and send them to school, income that will perhaps ensure that the children in their care will not be left destitute after they are

gone. It is in this spirit of resourcefulness that the **Busy Bees** have been enthusiastically looking to the future, continually thinking about and planning for more creative and reliable sources of income.

Through their discussions, they identified Kabwe's need for more professional tailors. They also recognized the collective wealth of experience they have in vegetable gardening. Long-term plans were made, research was undertaken and the Stephen Lewis Foundation is happy to have responded to their request for a grant that has allowed the group to:

- get training in advanced sewing skills
- purchase sewing and knitting machines
- purchase materials that will allow them to successfully fulfil sewing contracts
- get agricultural training
- purchase equipment and fertilizer to help tend their vegetable garden

Since then, the **Busy Bees** have been hard at work; here are a few words from our project colleagues in Kabwe:

Mary:

"I went with the Busy Bees to visit their agricultural project on Saturday and was very impressed with their efforts. They have a large cabbage patch also green beans, spinach, onions and tomatoes all ready for eating. Tomorrow we are going to buy seedlings for their extended patch already cleared and ready for planting. There is an excellent supply of water on hand, they cycle there 3/4 times weekly to water and weed."

Hilary:

"They are so excited at what they are accomplishing together ... All that to say the SLF funding has certainly made a remarkable difference to their confidence and livelihoods (without even getting into the tailoring and knitting they are now doing!)."

Reach One Teach One Ministries (ROTOM) – Uganda

ROTOM has been in operation for four years and in this short time has established itself as a highly effective organisation meeting the needs of impoverished older persons in Uganda. Traditionally, Ugandan social structure was built around extended family and community. This network provided a safety-net for the society's most vulnerable members. With the AIDS pandemic eroding much of this structure, and with no other formal system to fill the gaps, the elderly and orphans have been left particularly impoverished and neglected. According to ROTOM's figures, 64% of Uganda's elderly live in absolute poverty and over 50% of seniors in their program are caring for orphaned grandchildren.

ROTOM exists to provide support to the elderly. This ranges from social, spiritual and emotional support to economic and physical support. More recently, ROTOM has also taken on an advocacy and lobbying role which has included the organizing of the first ever *National Symposium on Aging in Uganda* and petitioning the speaker of Uganda's parliament to put "elder issues" on the table for discussion.

Some of their achievements in the last four years include :

- Over 3500 hot and nutritious meals delivered
- 16 funerals sponsored for families unable to afford the costs
- over 2500 home visits to the elderly and the children in their care
- over 115 mattresses provided

Recently, ROTOM established a grandmothers support project in the Kabale district, located in southwest Uganda, for a group of 100 grandmothers. This support will not only improve the mental and physical health of the grandmothers, but will also directly improve the lives of the orphans in their care. With funding from the Stephen Lewis Foundation, the project's aim is to provide food, counselling, routine medical checkups, income-generating projects plus school fees and educational support to at least 200 orphans in grandmother care.

The project has taken off beautifully and the delivery of food is well underway as is medical treatment. Support groups that meet every two weeks have been established and are proving to be highly useful and meaningful to the grandmothers. They decided to raise animals (chickens, goats, sheep, pigs) as a source of income, and already the grandmothers have been trained in this area and the animals have been purchased. A few words from our colleague at ROTOM :

The work of grandmothers' support project is going on well and on schedule. Last Wednesday I was in the project area and while driving in the village we met a group of girls in school uniform coming from vocational classes in tailoring, cookery, etc. I was overjoyed when the project officer (Erican) quickly asked to stop so that we could say hullo to them. these girls are among the 31 teenage orphans ROTOM grandmothers support project sponsors to attain vocational skills.(there is also another 70 in primary schools) When the girls saw us, they were all happy and proud to be back in school. Some of them had been out of school for long because their parents died of AIDS. I jokingly asked each of them to make for me a shirt when they finish their course and they were quick to say; "yes sir!"

Combating HIV/AIDS in Tanzania (CHATA)

According to the December 2006 UNAIDS Epidemic Update, Tanzania is one of the countries most affected by HIV/AIDS. There are 1.1 million AIDS orphans living in Tanzania. UNAIDS projects the number of new HIV infections in the rural areas, where close to 75% of the country's population live, could be twice as high as in urban areas by 2010. According to CHATA's reports, the situation is getting worse in the rural areas where they work, (Arusha and

Manyara) due mainly to a lack of proper HIV/AIDS education, high levels of stigmatization of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS and increasing poverty. Furthermore, access to social services and health care services is very limited. CHATA's work focuses on these issues by focusing on HIV/AIDS prevention and care, poverty alleviation and advocacy and support for vulnerable children and grandparents.

With the support of the Stephen Lewis Foundation, CHATA has launched a project that focuses specifically on the health as well as the social and economic status of AIDS patients and their families. This will be done through three main areas:

- Improving accommodations for the elderly and for orphans
- Creating a strong and sustainable infrastructure around which the community can provide home-based care to the ailing
- Provide education, social-economic and humanitarian support to orphans and vulnerable children

One of the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Field Representatives went to visit a typical household that would directly benefit from CHATA's services. It is a child-headed household with 14-year-old Christina as the caregiver to her two younger brothers: 8-year-old Simoni and 7-year-old Tobias. They have been living alone since 2002, which means Christina was only nine or ten and looking after two toddlers! They live in a small, damp, windowless mud hut with a leaky roof. Their day-to-day lives are extremely precarious – no food security, no fuel to cook what little food they occasionally have, no blankets to protect them from the cold and damp. An excerpt from Lucy's report:

I was told that several family members offered to take in one of the children, effectively splitting up the family group, but Christina has always refused. When I asked Christina about this, she confirmed what I heard. "Yes," she said. "I promised my mother that I would not leave this house and I would not leave my brothers... Also, my mother and father are buried just to the side of the house and I don't want to leave them." By repairing their home, CHATA would not only improve the health of these children but would also allow Christina to fulfill her promise to her mother.

For more information on the situation of orphans and grandmothers in Africa, get copies of our films **Grandmothers: The Unsung Heroes of Africa** and **A Generation of Orphans**.

Visit www.stephenlewisfoundation.org for more information.

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