

Solutions

August 2006

Newsletter of

African

AIDS

Foundation

SOLUTIONS:

Giving children

homes, hope

and a future!

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WELCOME TO SOLUTIONS

It has been my privilege to once again visit South Africa.

These visits are a great way of encouraging the people we support and properly understanding the situations they face. As well, it is important for us to ensure that your donations are being used to the best effect.

For this trip Rosalie and I were joined by our friend, Richard Daniel. Richard has a flair for video production. We are keen for fresh material to show AAF's supporters.

On this visit we certainly gained challenging new insights to the situations people face as we accompanied Phumzile on some housecalls. Phum works with Philakahle Wellbeing Centre in Bergville.

As we spent time with Phum I was again struck by the contrasts of the 1st and 3rd worlds.

So often we hear of the problems of accessing our healthcare system here in Australia. As a doctor I see some of these problems on a daily basis. However, I was to be confronted once again with the chasm that is between the world's rich and poor.

Leaving Bergville, we travelled by car for over an hour, along a very rough road. We came to a river which made access to the other side extremely difficult and treacherous. Carefully traversing the river we then continued on foot for another hour along a steep and difficult walking track. The purpose of the journey was a weekly visit to people impacted by AIDS.

One young man we visited had recently lost his wife to AIDS and was himself suffering from the disease. He had no food and little water. He could vaguely remember having eaten some food the previous day, brought by a neighbour. (How often do I need to wonder whether or not my neighbour is hungry!) There is almost no way that he can journey

to Bergville. There is very little chance of receiving adequate and consistent care. Weak and pretty much bedridden he faces a grim future.

I was profoundly moved by the incredible trials such people face. It is practically impossible for these folk to access even the most basic services, taken for granted in Australia.

And yet in the midst of this shocking state of affairs, I was again blessed by volunteers from Philakahle who are visiting such people, attempting to do what is almost humanly impossible—bring hope and love to those forgotten by the world.

It is a world of such extraordinary



Dr John Schwarz visits a patient with Phumzile

contrasts. Yes, I am often frustrated by the disparity between need and service in the Australian health system. Yes, I constantly face sad and difficult circumstances as I care for my patients.

But my trips to Africa continually challenge my view of things. You and I really have so much and are in a position to bring about positive change and to support wonderful people who sacrificially work to address these injustices daily.

Dr John Schwarz
Chairman-AAF

Joanne Gadd, volunteer with AAF, writes from God's Golden Acre

Joanna Gadd is a young woman who has been studying for a degree in Communication in Sydney. In February, she took time out from studies and headed to GGA in South Africa for 7-8 months.

Joanna writes:

South Africa is a place of huge extremes. One moment I am in a mud shack in the valleys sharing a meal with a very hospitable, if slightly nervous, Zulu family. The next I am in a Church surrounded by white affluence, discussing the cricket. Mostly I am in a world somewhere in the middle, at GGA, where Zulu children make a home amongst the Zulu grandmothers and Aunties, a few white South Africans and the foreign volunteers.

I love being with the children, learning about the Zulu culture, and spending time with the other volunteers.

But there are also plenty of hard things, like hearing that the last surviving relative of one of the children has just died; or watching one of the boys go to live with a family that doesn't really want him, in an area with lots of violence and gangs; or seeing the ongoing legacy of racism and hatred.

I am working in the Rural Outreach program in the valleys surrounding GGA. We are trying to ensure that the focus is on self-sustainability, rather than dependency on the food-packages families receive each month. Helping families to access the grants they are entitled to from the government, providing vocational training and income-producing projects such as making craft, enabling children to attend school and encouraging people to have vegetable gardens are just some of the strategies being employed.

It is in these valleys that the poverty is most confronting. Most of the families we help have no source of income, or perhaps a pension received by a gogo (grandmother) that is barely enough to survive on. One family we visited comprised a 94 year old gogo looking after 6

orphaned children. I was haunted by the look on her face, one of such pain and suffering, and yet with determination to hang onto the threads of life and do everything possible for her grandchildren. Providing food parcels and school uniforms to these families is so important, if all it achieves is to relieve a little of the hardship and suffering they face every day.

I recently spent a weekend with a Zulu family in one of the communities. It was a good cultural experience, eating copious amounts of beans and putu (a traditional African food, similar to cous cous) by candle light, washing out of a basin and conversing in my limited Zulu. It was encouraging to see such a well functioning family with happy, healthy children, even though they had very little.

I came to Africa with so many plans of all the things I could achieve, new projects that I could



Joanna with her young friend, Slee.

initiate, new ways to make the work here more effective. But something I have learnt, or am trying to learn, is that just being here is probably the most important and effective thing I can do. The kids here need love and care, and one of the best ways to do that is to spend time with them. Obviously they do need so much more – money for education and medical care, food, clothes, etc – but they, like everyone, need love. A really helpful thought I recently heard is that God does not call us to be effective; he calls

us to be faithful.

And I am realizing more and more how important the little things are, the things that we so often take for granted. Growing up I always had someone to ask how my day was at school, to celebrate small victories (like getting everything right on a test), and to remember important events in my life. It struck me the other day that many of these kids don't have that, and it is easy to forget about the little things when there are 85 kids in the orphanage!

But I am learning that it is these little things that matter so much. Remembering to ask a child how they went on their spelling test, or how their sick Aunty is doing, may not seem much, but it can make a world of difference for that child.

Love, Joanna.

... with grateful hearts ...

Saying thanks to our supporters

African AIDS Foundation acknowledges the willingness of volunteers to make a difference.

We regularly receive enquiries from people about volunteering with our partners in Africa, as these groups seek to stem the tide of heartache, dislocation and death, which is AIDS in Africa.

Recently, a group of 11 people from Camden Uniting Church spent time in Bergville, South Africa. Two members of the group spent several months at Door of Hope, an orphanage. The other 9 members joined them for 3 weeks in July. They, too, assisted at Door of Hope in Winterton as well as at Philakahle Wellbeing Centre in Bergville.

The trip was the vision of Steve Hutchings who had felt burdened for several years about taking a group people to see firsthand the awful impact of AIDS and also to meet and work with many wonderful people who are sacrificially doing so much for their communities.

Christine Mennell, a long-term AAF volunteer at Philakahle, coordinated the team's stay. Their presence had a terrific effect on the staff of Philakahle and the community, who were amazed at what the group was able to accomplish in such a short time.

They attended to some much-needed maintenance around the Philakahle property and were able to contribute to the community gardens project, building fences, repairing a water pump and assisting with preparation for planting.

At the height of World Cup fever, a soccer match was played between the Australians and a community team. This was the cause of such good will on both sides that there was a rematch. In the process, they were also invited to a Zulu wedding and a graduation ceremony. The group were touched by the genuine welcome, wonderful hospitality and generosity from the people they were assisting.

The team contributed much through their work and also communicated a message of care through their presence.

Before leaving Australia the group had run fantastic fundraising events which resulted in over \$10,000 for AAF. This money has now been sent to Philakahle to provide for housing, to support the work of the home based carers and to establish more community gardens.

The willingness and availability of this group to volunteer has made a fantastic contribution to their understanding of AIDS, as well as allowing them to assist in very practical ways. AAF is inspired by and grateful to such people for their vision and effort.

... with grateful hearts

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The Camden Uniting Crew

... with grateful hearts ... with grateful hearts ...

Jonna Gadd, whose letter appears on page 2 of this newsletter, wrote of her impressions on meeting Stembile for the first time and of the hope that love can bring.

Stembile's Story:

She looks so frail with her stick-thin arms and legs hanging from the pretty white dress. Her dark eyes are filled with uncertainty and aloneness. They speak of sorrow that I could not even imagine. Her parents are dead, probably of AIDS. I wonder if the deadly venom runs through her veins. Her grandfather is elderly and sick, and he is all she has left. I am sure his eyes fill with tears as he kisses her goodbye for the last time, and returns to the hospital... to die.

She is lost and alone as she steps uncertainly into an unknown world. My heart breaks for her, and yet I see a quiet resolve in her eyes. She is a survivor. Slowly, hesitantly she reaches out. And when Stembly smiles for the first time it fills the whole world with sunshine.

And a few weeks later:

Stembile has turned into a real little chatter-box (after not speaking for the first couple of weeks). She is as mischievous and as lively as the other kids, and always laughing and smiling. It warms the heart to see. However, her future here [at GGA] is not settled so we have been unable to enrol her in school.



***Stembile,
at God's Golden Acre***

Please pray for wisdom for the social workers and others who are making decisions about what will happen for her.

Like to help? Please fill in the form below and return it to AAF.



TO AAF K.I.D.S Fund, PO Box 701, Narellan. NSW. 2567.

I would love to support the African Aids Foundation K.I.D.S. (Kids In DiStress) Fund

Name: _____

Address: _____

I want to make a donation I want to support the program by giving \$35 a month

Enclosed is my cheque/money order for \$ _____
or

Please debit my VISA Bankcard MasterCard for \$ _____

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Name on card: _____ Telephone: _____

Signature: _____ Expiry Date: _____

Peter and Ruth Wanjohi work for the Baptist Church in Nyeri, Kenya. Nyeri is about 120km north of Nairobi with a population of over 100,000 people. Nyeri Baptist Church is on the edge of a shanty town in Nyeri with over 10,000 people.

John and Rosalie Schwarz were able to visit Nyeri with Peter and Ruth when they were in Kenya for the AIDS workshop last year. Peter and Ruth had attended the workshop to be better able to respond to the AIDS pandemic and its impact on their community. One of the issues they have been passionate to address is the plight of orphaned children and street kids in the shanty town. Their best estimate is that there are at least 500 children who have been orphaned or abandoned. These kids are left to survive as best they can, often with relatives who are themselves abjectly poor, sometimes on the streets.



Ruth and Peter with Rosalie and John Schwarz

Peter and Ruth, with assistance from Bernard Kabaru, have initiated a project to support these children and their carers. Each Saturday they feed the children and run some activities for them. The program commenced in March with 340 children in attendance including 25 street kids. That number has now swelled to over 500 children. Peter and Ruth are supported by some of the people from the church. Also a retired nurse/social worker has help with basic health care such as tending cuts and wounds and helping with pain relief. (The group has been able to purchase some basic medicines.) As a registered social worker she is known by many of the street children. This is assisting with contacts and building relationships. She is willing to help and to continue running a small clinic for the kids, as she is available.

The great need for these children is to have someone who cares for them. Most of them wish to return to school. Peter and Ruth are considering how this might best be achieved with children who cannot afford the school fees, for others who are too old to return to school and for parents who would also benefit from improved education.

Peter and Ruth are a passionate and loving couple making a real difference in this town. They have asked AAF to pass on their love and gratitude to all their supporters in Australia.

Philakahle Wellbeing Centre in Bergville, South Africa, is involved in a number of development initiatives. It supports a home based care program which is integral to the antiretroviral rollout and support of patients on these medications.

As well, Philakahle has been able to establish 24 community gardens.

Philakahle has negotiated with landholders for placement of the gardens, the fencing and irrigation requirements, the setting up and support of management committees, and assistance with small enterprise skills. It has also run workshops on healthy eating.

It is hoped that these gardens will not only provide fresh vegetables for consumption by the participants but that they will be able to generate income from sale of surplus food.

AAF has been the major sponsor of this project which involves over 100 families.

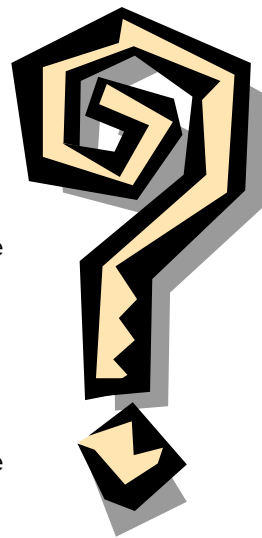
A number of these gardens are run by children orphaned by AIDS. Philakahle has helped them to plant and tend their gardens. Several of the gardens are actually in the grounds of schools.

This is a fantastic work with least 222 orphans currently being directly assisted through the gardens project. There are plans to establish another 20 gardens this year, significantly expanding the impact of the project.



One of the community gardens sponsored by Philakahle

How can I help



Playing your part in the solution

You can help African AIDS Foundation to help by:

- ◆ Giving financial support - every cent you give goes to those in need;
- ◆ Praying for AAF and the organisations it assists;
- ◆ Telling others about AIDS, AAF and its work;
- ◆ Inviting AAF to address your church, club or school;
- ◆ Visiting Africa as a volunteer to experience firsthand the needs and the solutions at work;
- ◆ Handing on your copy of **SOLUTIONS** to others.



MY RESPONSE...

YES. I would love to support African AIDS Foundation!

Name: (Mr. Mrs. Miss. Ms) _____

Address: _____

_____ **Postcode:** _____

Enclosed is my cheque/money order for \$ _____ for the work of AAF.

Please debit my VISA Bankcard MasterCard for \$ _____

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Name on card: _____ **Telephone:** _____

Signature: _____ **Expiry Date:** _____

I would like more information on:

- African AIDS Foundation
- Volunteering in Africa
- AIDS in Africa
- Ken Allen's book, *Africa's Heart*

Please send me regular updates

Please remove my name from the mailing list

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