

Introduction

Grandmothers in Lesotho are living under horrific conditions as a direct result of the AIDS pandemic that is sweeping the African continent. Their dreams of entering old age surrounded by their children and grandchildren and enjoying their final years have been shattered.

these dear ladies are poor and alone with no support or opportunity to talk about their struggle and loss. The situation is overwhelming and the need is great.

In response, Help Lesotho (HL) has created the Granny's Child Fund and the Grandmother Relief Fund to address the needs of grandmothers and their orphaned grandchildren.



Two Sefapanong residents

As grandmothers grieve the deaths of their children, they must suddenly find extra money to feed, clothe and educate sometimes as many as 12 orphaned grandchildren. Yet



Sefapanong Guardians—groceries purchased with Grandmother Relief Fund donations

In December 2007, HL hired 'M'e Mapoloko Leteka, a full-time Grandmother Support Officer funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation, to manage HL's Grandmother Support Program.

As well, HL launched monthly grandmother days in three villages offering food, training and support to the neediest women. The initial planning of grandmother days included a visit to the homes of hundreds of needy grandmothers. The stories collected by 'M'e Mapoloko were heartbreaking.



Three residents of Thaba Tseka, the youngest of whom is sponsored via HL and lives with her grandmother and 10 other children

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Editor's Message

When Carolyn Kennedy Vanderheide asked me to help with a newsletter she was starting for Help Lesotho's Canadian grandmother groups, I leapt at the chance. Compared to the business reports and annual plans I usually write or edit, this task makes me feel as though I have stumbled into something profoundly meaningful.

Indeed, it is an honour to contribute to a publication for women who are doing extraordinary things across the country, from those who quietly and independently donate the proceeds from sales of their handmade creations to those who organize large, public fundraisers. Diverse as you are, the one thread that ties you together is your determination to raise money for impoverished women halfway around the world.

When my husband and I volunteer for HL in Pitseng, Lesotho this coming November, December and January, I will be able to tell some of the Basotho grandmothers about the industrious women working on their behalf in Canada.

You have accomplished much, and I hope you will find this first issue of the new grandmother groups' newsletter an informative and useful reflection of that. I salute each and every one of you.

Patty Freeman
(pef10@shaw.ca)



Start Small, Go Big: Kingston Grandmother Connection

Since March 2006, the Kingston Grandmother Connection (KGC)—formed to raise funds to provide needy African grandmothers and orphans with food, home cooking oil, school fees and uniforms—has grown from four members to 192. In its first year, the hugely successful KGC raised \$80,000 and in its second year about \$65,000, a total of almost \$150,000 in just that short time.

One might be easily intimidated by such an incredible achievement. However, KGC's founder and chair, Anne Richards, a clinical skills coordinator at Queen's University's School of Medicine and a sister of HL's founder, Peg Herbert, emphasized that people need not be disheartened. Anyone can do it, she said.

How does KGC raise so much money? Keep it easy, keep it simple, for one thing, said Richards. "You don't have to start with 200 people. You can start with your bridge group.... We're not doing anything fancy." For example, she said she and her husband had recently held a "soup and bread" party, a spontaneous, casual meal over simple soup and bread, with 40 friends. They raised \$2,000 in three hours.

For a KGC "chair affair," Richards bought 30 end-of-season, half-priced wooden lawn chairs at her local Canadian Tire store and then asked 30 local artists to paint one each. The resultant "art gallery of chairs" sold well, some for as much as \$2,000 each.

Often, instead of special-occasion gifts, members of KGC will ask friends to make a donation to the organization, to be passed to HL or the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Richards noted, "A lot of our stuff is not big, public stuff. It's people thinking about what they can do—it's people taking the initiative." Thinking creatively is vital.

Another key to KGC's success, she stated,

is that "we're specific. It's for the children and their school supplies.... And we don't sink any money into anything we don't know anything about. We're very concrete.... We are very clear about our goals...." Richards emphasized that KGC is not a religious group and is unambiguous about what it is to members of the public who want to become involved.

KGC's structure allows for maximum earnings, because it acts as an "umbrella" organization for smaller units. The grandmother group as a whole organizes about six events annually, but individuals and smaller units raise money throughout the year; people work on their own specific activities after obtaining permission from KGC's "core" group to fundraise on the organization's behalf. The units then donate their proceeds to KGC, which in turn sends the funds to either HL or the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Although Richards originally established KGC to raise funds for Lewis's not-for-profit, she eventually modified it to include HL, with money raised at various events going specifically to one or the other. As well, each new member's one-time membership fee of \$15 does not stay with KGC but is passed on instead to either HL or the Stephen Lewis Grandmother to Grandmother Campaign.

KGC's extensive website, www.g2gkingston.ca, follows the theme of "friendraising" as well as "fundraising": everyone pitches in. The site includes ideas about making money, help for people who are considering holding an event, step-by-step information about how to join or host a party and templates for a fundraiser invitation and donation form. The site even provides a link to connect helpers to hosts. At the moment it has a call out for knitters and bridge players. It also includes a donation page with information about giving to KGC as well as a current tally of funds raised in the past year. As the site says, "All ideas are worth considering and No amount is too small."

One fundraising suggestion on the website, for example, is to invite out-of-town friends to a "virtual" party—one that you have no intention of hosting. Make the party seem as expensive and bothersome to attend as possible, and then ask guests instead to simply mail in a small cheque.

Real KGC fundraisers are indeed varied. During its week-long "party for Africa" blitz in April 2008, when many festivities were held simultaneously, the group raised \$20,000.

KGC meets as a whole every few months. However, a core group of 15 people does most of the work and meets every six weeks. Anyone working on a project is invited to attend the meeting. Richards sends a synopsis of the meeting to all KGC members. Richards and three other KGC co-chairs, a treasurer, a secretary, a membership chair, a creative and promotions chair, four people from the ideas committee, and three people from the education committee comprise the core group. The education committee of eight to ten members is trained to make consistent, well-prepared presentations to community groups on behalf of KGC about the plight of African grandmothers and their orphan grandchildren.

Richards said, about starting KGC, that she had always intended "to do this sort of thing, even when I was young." Inspired by a four-day Stephen Lewis Foundation conference and her husband's suggestion in February 2006 after reading a *Globe & Mail* article about the foundation that she volunteer for it, Richards decided to get involved.

Her first step was to "call someone at the [Stephen Lewis] Foundation in Toronto" to find out what she could do. They convinced a reluctant Richards to start her own fundraising group. When she asked three good friends, "Do you want to do this?" all three said they were in.

The second step came soon after: the four friends held a meeting in June 2006. "Everyone invited four persons," said Richards. "So we started with 16 people, and it's grown from there.... We have a lot of smart women. When people retire, they want to choose what they do. They don't want a routine." One month later, fundraising began.

KGC has several plans in the works for upcoming months, including collecting magnifying glasses (not eyeglasses) to send to grandmothers in Lesotho. In June, Alexander McCall Smith, author of the well-known *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, will be receiving an honorary degree at Queen's University. His group of choice for that occasion is KGC.

The group intends to host a sales table at an art gallery in September and a one-of-a-kind market at Kingston's St. George's Cathedral, with African-themed items as well as one-of-a-kind donated "creations," on November 8.

In January 2009 KGC will have a potluck supper, with possibly a speaker, for all members.

"The grandmothers across this nation are a formidable force," says a Stephen Lewis quotation on the *About Us* page of KGC's website. The organization's energetic members prove that this is so.



Women in Khanyane come from miles around to the HL office and wait their turn



Some Grandmother Stories

Maselai Khotolo, 72 years old

"I am 72 years old, I had 10 children they are 5 girls and 5 boys. I am staying and caring for 8 orphans, all their parents died of HIV and AIDS. They were born on the following years: 1998, 1996, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1996. Two of them are at high school they attend school at Hlotse High and Mount Royal. The second born is in Form B, the first born in Form A and the rest are at primary school. The two who are at primary school are being assisted by the government, while all the rest are on my shoulders.

"I struggle so much for their education needs, specifically school uniforms, fees and food. As you can see my health is not good I am also sick, I cannot do any physical job any more. I used to do part-time jobs for my neighbours but now it is so difficult. I only depend on the government pension, which does not cater for all the needs. Yes, I have fields, but I don't have money to plant anything, I used to do share cropping with my neighbours but the challenge is that they were cheating me just because they know I don't have anything.

"I have so many challenges one of my major problem is food in this family, sometimes I get so bitter when they cry for food, "... I always say, "God why are you punishing me!" (As she says this, Maselai's eyes are closed). "I had one of my sons who just died last year. He was not [HIV] positive; unfortunately he was shot by unknown people. His wife left to South Africa and left me with all their children. Last year she died and her corpse was sent home I didn't have enough money to bury them.

"I have a lot of problems in this family the first problem is food, we

sometimes sleep without any food in this family. I am always touched when it comes to these children, because they always keep on crying. I am also sick; I have high blood pressure, I have never gone for checkups from December because I don't have money. My grandchildren wear torn clothes."



People wait in Khanyane for assistance from HL.

Mapalo Hlabana, 66 years old

"I am 66 years of age. My children were 14 in number, 12 of them died. Among them 8 died of HIV and AIDS. Two of my children are still alive even though they are very sick, they are suffering from TB and their legs are swollen; they have never been so open to me to tell me about their sickness. I am staying and caring for 7 orphans; 4 of them attend school, 2 boys and 4 girls. The eldest is 15 years, then 12, 10, 9, 5, 4 and 2 years. The three who are 2 – 5 years don't attend school.

"All these children who died had all returned from their marriage, it was my responsibility to bury them all, they were not buried with coffins they were just covered with blankets." (Mapalo cried aloud as she said this, she was so touched.) "Whenever I remember all these things I become so touched. Yes, my grandchildren are at school but

without uniforms. I don't have any source of income in my family, I don't even get the government pension because I am under age, I am so depressed and stressed. I used to do part-time jobs for people in my village, like working in the fields, but now I can't do any part-time jobs. Some people donate clothes for my grandchildren.

"Food is a problem to me and my grandchildren, we sometimes spend some days without eating we end up drinking water. One day one of my grandchildren stole food from my neighbour's house, he was not punished because my neighbour knew that we are suffering and poor, I apologised and she forgave me."



Grandmothers work the garden at Paray Public School

Introducing HL's Five Grandmother Groups

Meet your counterparts across Canada: five diverse and energetic groups of women, from Alberta to New Brunswick, dedicated to raising funds for African grandmothers who are supporting orphaned and vulnerable grandchildren.

Solar Grannies

Edmonton, Alberta



Solar Grannies spread their own sunshine

In the summer of 2006, when one of the ten or so members of a Bible study group in Edmonton announced that she wanted "to do something," the idea caught on with others. But what to do? There were so many volunteer organizations to choose from.

Group member Elisabeth Quinton had heard of Peg Herbert at an Ottawa conference in 2004 and subsequently joined a prayer chain for HL. When the idea of raising funds arose two years later in her church group, she immediately thought of HL.

From the start, the women decided to sponsor solar ovens for Basotho grandmothers, "to make life easier for them and to give them more time," said Quinton, "so they don't have to go out collecting sticks and twigs to start a fire." With one brief diversion a year ago, "because there was an urgent need for seed and garden tools," the group has always raised funds for solar cookers. Hence their appropriate name: Solar Grannies.

But they fundraise slightly differently from the other HL grandmother groups: rather than finding a time when everyone is available for an event, each "Solar Granny" works independently. She chooses how she will raise money and then does so independently of the other group members, sending her proceeds directly to HL in Ottawa under the group's

project number. "We're kind of low key," said Quinton. "We work quietly, with no big razzamatazz at all."

The system works. In its first year the Solar Grannies earned almost \$20,000. One member made and sold beautiful tea cosies; another sewed baby bibs. One woman raised hundreds of dollars simply by collecting and returning empty bottles, and another earned close to \$600 by splitting 60 orchids from her garden and selling them to a local greenhouse. Quinton herself has given HL a percentage of the royalties from her late husband's book. She has also obtained a corporate donation and is planning to "try that again," she said. A church gave a portion of its offerings on one occasion.

The Solar Grannies did once raise funds together. At a church craft sale, each donated whatever she wished to the event, such as homemade jam or "colourful, funky socks," said Quinton.

They have created buttons to give out, with a picture of the sun in the middle and the words "Solar Grannies" circling around the outside.

Their next plan is to have an apron sale soon, not of ordinary working aprons but of beautifully sewn ones.

The Amazin' Mamas

Guelph, Ontario

At a bridge weekend "up north" Judith Danby, who had just retired from nursing, told her friends that she would like to volunteer. Jean McNabb and Judy Gray chimed in.

The three Amazin' Mamas, as they dubbed themselves, decided to fundraise for HL by hosting luncheons, although they recently provided sandwiches for a funeral and hosted a food booth at a horse auction. But mostly they "do lunch"—a natural given Chef McNabb's artistry, Danby's elegant silver tea service presentation and Gray's organizational skills. McNabb was already a "fabulous cook and a fabulous baker," said Gray. Occasionally their friend, Lois McRae, helps out.

Their first luncheon on Nov. 15, 2006 was a huge success. The Amazin' Mamas have held 37 altogether, now averaging three to four a month.

Guests pay \$12 each to come for lunch at McNabb's gorgeous, century-old farmhouse, complete with Belgian horses, near Rockwood, Ontario. They may bring their own wine if they wish. After signing the guestbook, visitors sit down to a five-course meal prepared entirely by McNabb, right down to homemade hummus, and served by Danby. As the guests nibble on hors d'oeuvres, Gray talks for 15 minutes about HL, directs them to the envelopes beneath their plates and invites them to make donations to the organization.

"It's something different, something special," said Gray, "and we make it fun." However, it is a lot of work for the group, who prepare for about a week before each luncheon, and Gray stated that she wished she knew how to get more money from people. "Sometimes we get a great donation; sometimes we get \$100. We got one donation of \$1,000 from a lady who couldn't even come," she said. "But sometimes I look in the envelope and there's \$5. People say we should raise the price of the luncheon. They don't understand that the fundraising part is in the envelope." Donations average \$20 per person.

The Amazin' Grannies do not advertise, although they do have their own business cards to give out. After every luncheon, customers tell their friends, which usually leads to one or two more bookings. The Red Hat Society comes often.

Go Go Grannies

Toronto, Ontario

The leader of the Go Go Grannies was out of the country during publication of this issue. The group will be profiled in the next newsletter.

Kingston Grandmother Connection

Kingston, Ontario

Please turn back to page 2 to read a feature-length story about this huge, eclectic group.

Grandmothers Helping Grandmothers Fredericton, New Brunswick



Some of the members of
Fredericton's Grandmothers
Helping Grandmothers.

Meet the only "granny group" in all of New Brunswick! Founded in October 2006 by Marie Cashion, Fredericton's Grandmothers Helping Grandmothers began with five people and "exploded to 54," she said, of whom 30 are active members. It has raised about \$10,000–\$12,000.

Cashion met Stephen Lewis and, later, Peg Herbert through her son Joe, who works at the William J. Clinton Foundation in New York and does some work with Lewis. Cashion told Lewis that she would start a grannies group in New Brunswick. Half of Grandmothers Helping Grandmothers' proceeds go to the Stephen Lewis Foundation and half go to Help Lesotho.

The group, which just initiated a \$10 membership fee "for commitment and incidentals," said Cashion, has earned money in several ways since its first fundraiser in 2006, which was a wreath sale and donations from the Cashion family's Christmas party. "When I sent invitations [to the party]," said Cashion, "I asked people to consider donating to grandmothers instead of bringing wine or a house gift."

In July 2007, Grandmothers Helping Grandmothers held a benefit dinner and raffle at Amici, an Italian restaurant that had just opened in Fredericton. Although group members learned the hard way that \$35 per person for the meal, wine, and dessert was not enough, "the restaurant loved the idea and was very supportive," said Cashion. "They charged only for the food, which was half of our underpriced ticket cost." A yard sale that September brought in over \$3,000, and December wreath sales supplemented funds.

Plans are big for this year. They include another benefit dinner at Amici, probably in either June or October, a yard sale in September, wreaths at Christmas and one innovative way to make money: making 300 "Thinking of You" baskets for St. Thomas University (STU). Parents will give the baskets to students prior to exams in November. Using 100% donated goods and selling the baskets at \$35 apiece, profits will be handsome, even with the small percentage that probably will be given to STU. The women will make homemade goodies as well. If the baskets are successful, the group will expand the scheme next year.

Grandmothers Helping Grandmothers has also just begun to collect eyeglasses through

optometrists.

Meanwhile, Cashion said she is "working on other people to start their own groups," including one man she met while working in Lesotho in October 2007 who wants to start a grandfathers group.



Learning to cook on solar cookers

Progress Report on Our Work in Lesotho: The New Grandmother Support Program

From the emergence of HIV/AIDS in the early eighties until now, a crippling but neglected trend has grown in Lesotho. More and more women in their fifties, sixties and seventies—long past their child-rearing years and in a phase when they should be living in ease—suddenly find orphaned, sometimes ill, children with nowhere else to go on their doorstep.

With very little government assistance, thousands of grandmothers in Lesotho feed, clothe, house and pay the school fees for orphans all by themselves—often on only a pension of C\$26 a month, or pennies a day. On top of that, grannies, who are usually unaffected by HIV/AIDS

themselves, shoulder an extra burden: many of the children they care for are HIV positive. However, the youngsters cannot properly absorb the free antiretroviral drugs due to malnutrition. It is heartbreaking.

"When it comes to the grandmothers, the situation is bad and somehow unexpected," said Carolyn Kennedy Vanderheide, HL's director of programs. "It is as if the focus has been on orphans, while the grandmothers' stories have not been heard. HL has been overwhelmed and shocked at how bad the situation is."

Older women caring for orphans is not new in Basotho culture; the formal North American foster system has never been the norm in that country, although a "grandmother" may in fact not be related to her young charge at all. But it means that an elderly woman is obligated to do the job and that she may wind up with typically five or more of the village children living in her small *rondavel*.

HL recognized early on that the grandmothers of Lesotho were in big trouble. It therefore created three grandmother programs: Grandmother Days, the Grandmother Relief Fund and the Granny's Child Fund. All of these initiatives offer some relief to these heroic women.

Mathabiso Lipholo speaks from Hamolibeli Village, Lesotho:

"I am 77 years old, I am a widow and I stay and take care of 5 orphans they are 4 girls and 1 boy, all of them depend on me.... After the death of their parents I thought life has come to an end mostly because I was worried about their future, how they will attend school, how I will get food to feed them. Food is the problem is the most problem in this family, we are many. Sometimes I cry with them when they cry, I sometimes think that would be the easiest way to show them that I also don't know what to do...."

HL also deemed the Basotho grandmothers' situation dire enough to hire someone solely responsible for this issue. Last year the organization launched the Grandmother Support Program, and in December 2007, 'M'e Mapoloko Leteka joined HL as grandmother support officer. Her position is funded by the Stephen Lewis Foundation. 'M'e Mapoloko works extremely hard, engaging the community, building relationships and assessing the needs of the most vulnerable grandmothers.



'M'e Mapoloko Leteka became HL's first grandmother support officer in December 2007

In March 2008, 'M'e Mapoloko filed her first report. Hlotse, Pitseng and Butha Buthe were chosen for initial consideration, she wrote, due to their HIV/AIDS prevalence

Start or Join a Grandmother Group!

You do not need to be a grandmother to help a grandmother!

Engage your family, church, book club and friends. There are lots of ways to help and each grandmother group decides its own way. HL is available to advise and support the groups in any ways we can. It is a won-

derful experience and makes a real difference to the lives of these grandmothers. Without your help, they will have no other option for support.

Mamathe Mahanetsa speaks from Lisemeng Village, Lesotho:

"I am 63 years old left with orphans.... They are all boys, 14 years, two are 13 years, 12 years and the last one is 11 years. The elder one is at high school (Molapo High School). The rest are still at primary school which means there is a long way to go with their education, and that kills me when I look at all the problems around me, their health, education, clothing and food, all that is on my shoulder. I don't qualify to get the government pension which I am thinking would help me with some of the needs, because I am not yet 70 year. My son died this month...."



Basotho women who constantly feel ignored by society experience recognition, support, friendship and motivation on Grandmother Day.

One of the first things the Grandmother Support Program created was Grandmother Day, when women are invited to day-long, central gatherings for social support and education. One hundred of the neediest grandmothers—50 from Hlotse and 50 from Pitseng—were asked to attend the first three grandmother days, on February 27 and March 27 in Hlotse and on March 18 in Pitseng.

Each Grandmother Day began with a prayer and the lighting of a candle to honour the affected and infected and those who had died of HIV/AIDS, 'M'e Mapoloko reported. Then, in an atmosphere of social support, participants

received training on the disease and on home-based care and emotional abuse. They shared their experiences, had a Bible study and were



Participants learn about relevant issues on a Grandmother Day.

served a nutritious lunch. Storytelling, singing and dancing—key elements of Basotho culture—were all part of the agenda.

Although education is a significant part of the events, 'M'e Mapoloko wrote that "much more importantly, [the grandmother days] created a space and environment for the grandmothers who are persistently overlooked." Many said this was the first time they had been invited to join an occasion or travel anywhere in five years.

Participants asked for more grandmother days and

- More discussion about HIV/AIDS, nutrition, psychosocial support, home-based care, counselling, gender issues, positive living and children's rights;
- Training on how to teach their grandchildren about respect, good behaviour, psychosocial support and vegetable production;
- Help for the formation of local grandmother support groups; and
- Education in income-generating activities, such as farming poultry, growing vegetables and making crafts.

The grandmothers still need more food and a way to meet basic needs and repair their homes, reported 'M'e Mapoloko.

