



Ottawa woman helps children in AIDS-ravaged Lesotho

Donated books help schools, colleges

By Brian Sarjeant

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An Ottawa Anglican is spearheading a program to give hope and concrete encouragement to the vulnerable children of Lesotho, especially its orphans. Lesotho is a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa.

It is one of the countries whose population has been decimated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa. Stephen Lewis, United Nations Special Envoy to Africa for AIDS, has named Lesotho as one of the nine countries for whom the life expectancy of citizens has dropped in the past decade from 60 years to 40 years.



Peg Herbert with one of her new-found friends in Lesotho

“Project Help Lestho” was developed by Peg Hebert, a parishioner at St. George’s, Ottawa, in conjunction with Mosotho Sister Alice Mputsoe. Peg made an exploratory trip last summer when Sister Alice responded, “Come and see” in answer to Peg asking what she could do to help.

The two had met three years ago when Sister Alice, a member of the Sisters of Charity and principal of a high school in Seboche, Lesotho, joined a class that Peg was teaching in educational psychology at the University of Ottawa. The two became good friends.

Following her trip, Peg’s determination to do something has grown into a number of projects, such as creating a fundraising calendar with her own photographs from Lesotho, twinning Ottawa schools with schools in Lesotho, developing internships, creating opportunity for training, support of students, and support for a sewing project which will make a number of young women independent business people within a few years.



Photo by Peg Herbert

The older brother carries his sibling during the 1.5-hour walk to school through the mountains. Child-headed households are increasing as the number of orphans rises to 30 per cent of all children.

Early in January it was hoped to send off a container-load — the target was 650 boxes — of textbooks and teaching and research materials destined for a nursing library in the mountains, the libraries at the college of education, technical schools, public and high schools.

While the language of the Basotho is Sesotho, English is the language of education, so the more education someone has, the more likely they are to speak English. However, they rarely have the chance to write or speak to English-speaking people.

Students of Rockcliffe Park Public School are said to be very excited about being twinned with the Guardian Angel Primary School in Pitseng, Lesotho. It provides a unique and wonderful opportunity to make a direct connection with children in a vastly different country.

The Rockcliffe students solicited donations from parents and the public at their annual Book Fair, asking donors to support their twin school and to “Buy a Book for a Child in Lesotho.” These children raised \$1,300 in three days. Now they aim to fund an awards program and purchase sports equipment for the school.

The Rockcliffe school as well as St. George’s and St. Bartholomew’s, Ottawa, are among the sponsors of “Project Help Lesotho.”

The project also:

- Supports 40 orphans including the 16 at St. Mary's;
- Has twinned six schools to date with more to come;
- Has learned that 40 people are considering going to Lesotho as volunteers;
- Is helping six young women have the opportunity to become financially self-sufficient in a microeconomic project;

- Has arranged for hundreds of Basotho children to receive letters from Canadian pen pals;
- Shipped its calendar to people in many countries and all over Canada.

Financial support has also been anonymously donated for Peg to travel to Africa this month and return with Sister Alice for a speaking tour in late March. Peg will also be meeting up with a number of volunteers that will be in Lesotho at that time.