

## The Coffee Teen: My Chat with Peg Herbert

*Editor's note: This is the first in a new series of articles by Will Brereton, a burgh teenager who is currently residing in Buffalo, New York.*

**By Will Brereton**

When I thought of starting this column, it brought me to a particular interest in talking to a woman who has profoundly affected the lives of hundreds of people living in Lesotho. This woman also lives in New Edinburgh and I knew her well when I lived in the neighborhood.

During a recent snowy I was able to speak with **Dr. Peg Herbert**, the Executive Director of *Help Lesotho*.

Dr. Herbert managed to take an hour out of her very busy day to discuss changes and the long road ahead for not only the organization, but also for the children and grandmothers of Lesotho and the many programs to be instituted over the next couple of years.

Dr. Herbert recently returned from a two-month trip to Lesotho. During that time, she took part in setting up the third annual Leadership Camp.

A wonderful six day program designed for teenage boys and girls, this life-changing program teaches them about becoming strong leaders in the community through many confidence building and youth development exercises and, most importantly, to establish friendships. One of the camp's objectives is for the young people to learn more about sexual health, in terms of gender equity and HIV/AIDS awareness.

"For most of the first participants (ages 12 and 13 primarily), it is the first time

they have ever been out of their own village." articulated Dr. Herbert.

With a mixture of old and new participants, the week brings much hope and understanding for the beleaguered Basotho youth.

Despite this sense of hope given by *Help Lesotho*, Peg says, "There is still much work to be done!"

Lesotho has the third highest prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS in the world. The mortality rate for both women and men in Lesotho ranges from 36 to 38 years of age.

Gender inequity still proves to be a prevalent problem in Lesotho matters. "Women, particularly young girls, are the most vulnerable in terms of sexual rape and teenage pregnancy." A point made clear by Peg.

For the organization, this explains why most of the sponsored children are girls and that there is an added push for more women to become strong leaders in the communities.

Another point addressed by Peg is the effort to build a leadership centre and a hostel in two locations. One is in a small, mountainous village called Pitseng and is funded by the *Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association*, and the other is in Hlotse, where the *Help Lesotho* office is located.

The leadership centres are intended to help support the 400 grandmothers, 7,500 children and the several hundred "out of school" youth which *Help Lesotho* currently supports on a regular basis. One function for the centres will be peer-tutoring to increase literacy skills amongst children.

The hostel is being built for 50 sponsored girls who form a leadership

corps to do village programming during the holidays and to act as role models for the many children who have no parents.

Peg Herbert is more committed than ever before to help to people of Lesotho. From the small works of the charity founded four years ago with only a handful of volunteers, this NGO has grown well beyond its original intentions. In fact, *Help Lesotho* is now moving to a bigger office! Thanks to *Keller Williams Realty* in Ottawa which has kindly donated office space to *Help Lesotho* the move will take place in April.

“It is a huge privilege to do the job that I do every day,” stated Dr. Herbert. “The quality of people attracted to *Help Lesotho* has allowed me to meet many incredible people during my time with the organization and it has been amazing.”

“Canadians have always been helping in Lesotho... One example of Canadian generosity is the fact that some of our twinned schools in Lesotho were built by CIDA.”

The work in Lesotho has yet to be finished. It must be noted that the strong work ethic of Dr. Herbert is one of the reasons why the organization has stayed strong.

The people of Lesotho are fortunate to have this “Mother Teresa” of New Edinburgh. I am proud to know this quiet hero. She inspires me and I hope she will inspire you.

For more information about *Help Lesotho*, check out the website at [www.helplesotho.ca](http://www.helplesotho.ca).

Also, feel free to check out my blog at <http://thecoffeeteen.blogspot.com>.