



Action Lesotho

32, The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry. Charity No: 17838

Newsletter No 3: Winter 2010

Dear Supporter,

We bring you the third Action Lesotho quarterly newsletter with our new logo (for the story behind the logo go to p4). In this issue, there are articles on founder member of Action Lesotho, Eileen O'Leary, who recently stepped down as Executive Field Officer; our plans to expand the Action Lesotho mill project; the recent experiences of some Irish volunteers in Lesotho; the story of the Jakobo family; and lots of other bits and pieces which we hope will interest you. A big thank you to all of you who have supported us in during 2010: we wish you a very Happy Christmas and New Year from Action Lesotho.

Founder-member Eileen O'Leary steps down from Executive Field Officer post

Eileen O'Leary recently stepped down as Action Lesotho's Executive Field Officer (EFO). Eileen was a founder member of Action Lesotho and has been instrumental in many of the successes of the organisation to date. Eileen became involved in the plight of Lesotho as a result of her career as a professional photojournalist specialising in documenting social issues. She went on assignment to Lesotho in 2006 (funded by the Simon Cumbers Media Fund) following Caherciveen's twinning with Lesotho in the Special Olympics held in Ireland in 2003. What she saw there gave her the inspiration to become involved in Action Lesotho (originally Twinning the Kingdoms).

During her early time in Lesotho, Eileen put together a photographic exhibition called 'Breaking the Barriers – Living with Disability in Lesotho'. The exhibition was first launched in Lesotho on International Disabilities Day, December 1st 2007, by Queen Seeiso. Eileen toured the exhibition around Lesotho and Ireland in 2009/2010, combining it with a lecture tour of universities and colleges. Her aim was *'to highlight the issues for people with disabilities in Lesotho and to encourage students and staff to make links in Lesotho and volunteer their time on Action Lesotho's community based projects'*. Eileen was extremely successful in her aim, inspiring students and their lecturers wherever she went. Many of the students (and others) who have volunteered for Action Lesotho at home and abroad have done so because of their contact with Eileen. She is a woman who knows how to make people believe they CAN make a difference and to act on that knowledge.

In her role as EFO, Eileen has been visiting Lesotho up to six times a year, spending several weeks there at a time overseeing existing projects, initiating new ones and reporting back to the Board of Directors in Ireland. All of this was done almost entirely in a voluntary basis. Wherever she went in Lesotho, Eileen had an astonishing capacity to draw people in to view, work on and engage in our projects from the King and Queen to the poorest of the poor & the sick & dying.

(Continued on p6)

Action Lesotho buying new land for the mill project with help from IMPACT

One of the very successful Action Lesotho projects is a maize mill which has been running profitably since it was built in 2006/2007. It was developed by Father Tim Wrenn and Ntate Mankoe, with help from Breadline Africa and Bantry Charity Shop's 'Golden Girls'. Running in tandem with the mill has been a farm project which involves growing maize and sorghum on land leased from farmers who are too sick or old to tend their land. The aim of the mill and farm project was to feed some of the poorest in the community by providing them with the grain from the fields and using the profits from the mill for the benefit of the community.

For some time now, Action Lesotho has been planning to move the mill to a new site so that the facilities could be expanded and developed. Earlier this year a large piece of land, sloping down to a river, came to the attention of Action Lesotho. Eileen O'Leary and Ntate Mankoe immediately realised this was an opportunity not to be missed. Apart from being perfect for the mill relocation and expansion project, there was enough space for a farm shop, an enterprise centre for the Ha Nyenye Craft Group (Waterville Friends of Lesotho have raised funds to build the centre) and an office for Action Lesotho staff.

Action Lesotho has been desperately trying to raise the necessary funds to purchase the land. After a major grant application was unsuccessful in October, Action Lesotho felt the opportunity to buy and develop the land might have been lost. However, IMPACT, an Irish Trade Union, came to the rescue this month with the promise of a generous grant from their Developing World Fund. So our heartfelt thanks go to Kevin O'Malley and all involved in IMPACT who have made the acquisition of the land possible.

In the meantime, the Government in Lesotho has also helped moved the project forward by upgrading the road to the piece of land: instead of a rutted mud track, there is now a stone road.



Eileen @ Pippa Kearon



Miller & assistant @ Claire Heardman



Eileen and school group @ Pippa Kearon

Don't Knock: Computer Class

Maria Deady

Maria and Ha Kekokote class @ Tony O'Connor



In September I headed out to Lesotho with another volunteer, Tony O'Connor, to spend six weeks teaching computers classes. Before I went I was a bit apprehensive because I don't have formal training in teaching computing. Thankfully all of my worries were very quickly put to rest the day after we arrived. At the Loant'sang Community Centre, Ha Mafele, I met a group of women

known as the Ha Kekokote ladies. None had never used a computer before and so were quite nervous themselves in the initial class. However over the course of the 6 weeks these ladies made impressive progress as their confidence in using the machines grew. In just six classes, the ladies went from being absolute beginners to being able to write letters, format documents, copy, cut and paste, along with saving and printing their work. These women were incredible learners and when we asked if they would like some extra time to work on the computers in the centre over the weekend they jumped at the chance to get in some extra practice.

What truly endeared these women to me personally was how extremely keen they were on learning as much as they possibly could. Almost immediately they let us know that they wanted to study computers so they could go on to teach others. With this goal in mind, they worked diligently and took constant notes. For me the most important thing that the ladies did was help each other. If one of the ladies had a problem, one of the other ladies would always come and try to help out. I know it sounds like a small thing but their ability to explain and solve any problems their fellow classmates had, really showed us how quick some of them were at learning.

The Ha Kekokote ladies are extremely special to me; they are all incredibly brave women who have previously been ostracized in the villages where they live. Even the name they call themselves reflects this; Ha Kekokote is Sesotho for 'don't knock', as in don't knock on the door. They use this name because all of these ladies are HIV/AIDS positive and, because of this, some of them are not welcome in the villages where they live.

In Lesotho around 40% of people are HIV/AIDS positive. Unfortunately, even with this high percentage of people who are affected, HIV/AIDS is still a taboo subject. This makes the fact that these women have grouped themselves together to help make a better life for each other a particularly commendable thing. Gradually, through the formation of the Ha Kekokote group, these women are gaining more recognition in the villages they belong to. If they reach a stage where they are able to

teach computer to some of the children in the villages they will help break the prejudices people have against people who are HIV/AIDS positive.

That said, to me the greatest outcome of the computer class is that it has given these ladies an interest in something new. They have a whole new positive outlook on what they can do and how they can become more involved in their communities.

It is often said that students reflect their teachers and people have congratulated me on the influence I've had on these ladies. I would like to say that this is true in this case, but that would not be a fair reflection of these ladies. Yes, by beginning teaching them computers, I may have helped set them on the right track but I'm sure that even without that, these ladies are destined to succeed. It is them who have had a greater influence on me through their dedication, their interest and their bravery.

Maria Deady and Tony O'Connor are from Co Kerry and both graduated earlier this year from University College Cork. Unable to find work in Ireland, they decided to volunteer for Action Lesotho. Maria and Tony worked incredibly hard, teaching computers to five different groups in Lesotho as well as local Action Lesotho staff.

Fundraising news

❖ Dochas in Killarney has very kindly donated money to carry out the badly-needed fencing around the community fruit orchard in Qoqolosing: the thriving little trees were being threatened by grazing cattle but now will be protected.



Orchard site @ Pippa Kearon

❖ Since PayPal became available on the Action Lesotho website, it has become a popular way of donating. Star donor is Joe Hook (pictured right), a US businessman, who came across Action Lesotho by accident when he was visiting Lesotho: he was so moved by seeing the AL projects in Lesotho that he urged friends and family to make contributions via PayPal. Thank you Joel!



❖ Tony O'Connor and Maria Deady (see above left) showed great imagination and innovation when organising fundraising events before they travelled to Lesotho. Their events included a charity shop fashion show (see poster designed by Tony, left), a gig, pub quiz and an Alice-in-Wonderland party.

❖ Why not organise a collection at work? SouthWestern Ltd. Social Club and staff in Clonakilty, Co. Cork did just that and made a generous donation to Action Lesotho.

Local group: Bantry Friends of Lesotho

Clare Heardman (photos), Colleen O'Kane, Caitriona Barry & Guy Dalton

Bantry Friends of Lesotho is a local branch of Action Lesotho which is linked with the Loant'sang Committee in the village of Ha Magele. In 2009, the Bantry group funded the building of a community development centre in the village - a video of the centre being built in 2009 is on <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onBT0Ij3qU>. A feeding programme for up to 100 orphans has been operating from the centre every weekend since October 2009. Earlier this year, the Bantry Group funded the purchase of an adjacent piece of land for the purpose of building a playground. In October 2010 some of the group returned for three weeks to carry out some more projects, also funded by the Bantry group: Guy Dalton ran a woodwork class; and Colleen O'Kane, Clare Heardman & Caitriona Barry helped set up a community cinema and a community information service.

1. Knock knock: woodwork class

Guy Dalton, a cabinet-maker based in Bantry, Co. Cork volunteered to teach an intensive 14-day woodwork course in the Ha Magele Community Centre. His class consisted of three young men and a woman from the village who had never had the opportunity to do any training after leaving school. Apart from passing on his skills to the group, another aim of Guy's was to work towards finishing the interior of the community development centre which he had helped build last year. In less than three weeks Guy and his pupils had made a fine sturdy workbench, floor to ceiling shelves for a store-room, a large kitchen cabinet and a shelf/cabinet unit for the community cinema TV and DVD.



The students were full of enthusiasm and loved the class – Guy even found it hard to get them to stop for lunch or finish up at the end of each day! On the last day of the course all the participants were chuffed to bits to be presented with certificates stamped and signed by the village chief. All four of the students showed great initiative and intend to work together to start a business, which is fantastic news in a country where unemployment is a massive 45%.

A big thank you is due to Murphy & O'Connor's in Bantry who contributed greatly to the viability of this project by donating three comprehensive sets of tools and a bench grinder. The tools have been donated to the community centre in Ha Magele and it is hoped that Guy's students will make good use of them in their new business venture.



2. Community cinema

Bantry Friends of Lesotho funded the purchase of a TV/DVD system for the Ha Magele community centre. During their visit in October they worked with the centre's committee to develop an action plan for running the community cinema. Apart from the entertainment and educational value of showing films, the village committee hope to turn the cinema into a profitable enterprise that will help pay for the management of the centre and provide a stipend for the committee themselves. At the moment the centre and all its activities (most importantly a weekend feeding programme for 100 orphans) are entirely funded by donations from Bantry and are run solely by a group of volunteers in Lesotho. It is hoped that the cinema will generate enough income to help make the centre a little more self-sufficient.



The first show at the cinema (during a massive thunder and lightning storm) was of the short videos that Clare shot in the village during last year's trip. The orphans and vulnerable children who are fed at the weekends at the centre screamed with delight at seeing themselves on the big screen, but the committee had to watch the films a few times before they got used to seeing themselves singing and dancing!

3. Citizens' Information Service

Colleen O'Kane and Caitriona Barry (pictured below), who both graduated this month with a Diploma in Development Studies from UCC, carried out some research into the social welfare benefits in Lesotho for their final year project. While in Lesotho they met with Social Welfare and Education Ministry officials in order to develop links between these Government Departments and the community development committees that run the Ha Magele and Lepoqong centres. Caitriona produced information sheets on each of the government benefits to provide a reference resource for each of the support groups. The aim is to enable the committees to help the neediest in their communities with the process of obtaining any services & grants available. For example, few people knew that there is a bursary available to attend secondary school (primary schooling is free but children have to pay to attend secondary school which, of course, orphans can't often afford to do). Another interesting scheme is a Social Welfare administered grant under which groups of up to five people can receive up to R10,000 (€1000) to start a small enterprise.



If you would like to link your community with a community project in Lesotho contact info@actionlesotho.ie

Jakobo family story

Theresa Moriarty

Every picture tells a story, so the saying goes; this photograph (right) is no exception. It tells the story of the 4 Jakobo children, how they survived alone for some 2 years and how they came to be so happy and healthy. From left to right there's 'M'e Lucy Mankoe, Sethembzo (aged 10), Nosepho (7), big brother Mothandene (13), Nellizlwoe (5) and Ntate Mankoe [Action Lesotho's Project Manager in Lesotho] with his little granddaughter.

Two years ago, the Jakobo family, consisting of the children and their mother, left their rural home and moved to a rental block in Maputosoe. The mother was unable to find work and after a while, she gave some money to a neighbour, asked her to keep an eye on the children and went to South Africa. This meant that Mothandene, then only 11 years old, became the head of the family with full responsibility for his small sisters. He made sure they all attended school and kept their uniforms as clean as they were able. The teachers, who soon noticed their hunger and poor condition, gave them left-over food when there was any, and Mothandene took his sisters to the Action Lesotho feeding programme at the Lepaqong Community Centre every weekend for a hot meal.

Things came to a head when the children nearly burned to death in their one-room home. They had been cooking over a small fire on the concrete floor, when some of their meagre bedding was set alight. They were saved by neighbours but it was clear that the children could no longer live alone without an adult to help them. Members of the Lepaqong Committee, Action Lesotho and Ntate Mankoe searched high and low for a family who could take the Jakobo children into their home, but no one could afford to feed four extra mouths. They were given shelter for a while in a convent; although the nuns were kind, the children could not stay there forever.

One evening, Ntate Mankoe went home to 'M'e Lucy in despair and told her he could find no one to take the children. 'M'e Lucy did not agree with her husband that the problem was so great, in fact she saw no problem at all. The solution was obvious to her; they would take the children themselves, and so they did. The Jakobo family moved into their home in August 2010, malnourished, their clothes in tatters, and very much in need of someone to look after them. The photograph was taken 2 months later and you can see for yourself just how much love and care they are getting at last.

Theresa Moriarty is an ex-Action Lesotho Board Member, who has visited Lesotho several times, most recently in October 2010. She has been instrumental in a number of projects in Lesotho, including helping fund a water pump in the remote village of Qoqolosing.

To view a short film about the Lepaqong Community Development Centre go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=InFhwWGqPDE>



Mothandene @ Clare Heardman



Mankoe family the Jakobo's @ Theresa Moriarty

Dear Santa

We are sure you are getting lots of letters from children all over the world who are hoping for something wonderful from you for Christmas this year. At Action Lesotho's centres our children are asking for food. We are very lucky that for us to fulfil our commitment to the children in Lesotho a little goes a very long way.

We are hoping that you can help us to reach out to all our friends, colleagues and volunteers in Ireland to ask them to gift €10 to Action Lesotho this Christmas to enable us to feed the 200 orphaned and vulnerable children who attend our two community development centres in the border town of Maputsoe in Lesotho.

It costs us just 50c per day to feed a child. If everyone on our mailing list could gift us €10 we would be able to guarantee the continuation of our feeding programme for 2011.

There are three ways to donate to Action Lesotho this Christmas:

- ❖ *Online securely through PayPal using your Debit or Credit Card. Visit www.actionlesotho.ie What You Can Do*
- ❖ *Post a cheque, bank draft or postal order made payable to Action Lesotho to: Colleen O'Kane, Treasurer Action Lesotho, 11 Glengarriff Road, Bantry, Co.Cork.*
- ❖ *Lodge a donation directly into Action Lesotho current account at any Bank of Ireland branch.*

Account Name: Action Lesotho

Sort Code: 90-58-38 Account Number: 27016723

Iban: IE23BOFI905827016723 Swift/Bic: BOFIE2D

Bank Address: Bank of Ireland, Castle Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry

Nollaig Shona Dhibh

Action Lesotho's new logo



As you will have seen, Action Lesotho has a new logo. For those of you curious about its origin, the logo is an interpretation of a Litema design by Kerry-based graphic designer and craft-worker Tessa Dennison. Litema (pronounced di-TE-ma) is a type of traditional mural art which is unique to Basotho houses.

The word Litema derives from the words 'ho-le-ma' = to cultivate and 'tema' = a ploughed field. The images used in Litema are often thought to represent harvest field furrows. So, as Action Lesotho sets out to plough a new furrow (both literally and metaphorically), we feel this is a fitting image.

A visiting doctor's perspective

Dr Diane Foord

Diane and Lineo @ Eileen O'Leary



Having enjoyed a photography holiday in Lesotho in 2009, I decided to return with my medical bag for a working holiday this year.

There was plenty of work to do, and no bag could be well enough stocked. On the day I arrived I visited a recently bereaved mother, whose daughter had died tragically. She was left caring for several very small grandchildren. The eldest

girl who looked about eight years old, but was probably twelve, was smiling proudly, stirring a small pot of soup over a smoky paraffin stove on the floor. She was in charge of the meal for the day. Meanwhile a toddler walked unsteadily around and looked every minute as if she would fall into the stove. Their grandmother was in despair as she could not afford to bury her daughter. The only shelter this family had was a rickety corrugated iron shack, the door opening revealing a picturesque deep river ravine just outside. Action Lesotho intervened, and the next time I visited, the woman was sitting outside back at her "work" cutting up old clothes into small triangles to stuff pillows to sell.

My next visit was to see a teenage girl who had been missing from home for several months after being poisoned by eating rotten apples from the rubbish dump. Her brother had been more severely poisoned and had died. The girl was sick, with a chronic cough and multiple other symptoms and was sitting on the mud floor of a small, smoky shack with an ash stove in the middle of the floor. Her grandmother, sisters and other relations also lived in the shack. Their bedding rolls were stacked against one wall. The family had taken the girl to a doctor but needed money to go for an X-ray and to pay for transport to get it. Her able bodied sister was prioritised for paid work at a local factory after negotiation by Action Lesotho.

The disability clinic held at the Lepoqong centre was an interesting and heartening experience. Four children attended on the day I attended, with varying degrees of physical disability due to cerebral palsy or congenital malformations. All were receiving an exercise plan instituted by a volunteer Basotho physiotherapist who travelled by public transport from Maseru every two weeks to oversee treatment. The children were being helped by local volunteers or relatives and all had been making progress in the ten months during which they had been attending the centre. Exercises were done with minimal equipment but great encouragement. The eldest boy in the disability clinic had difficulty forming



Diane and Mhole @ Eileen O'Leary

his words clearly but with time he demonstrated a great vocabulary both in Sesotho and English. He cannot walk and has coordination problems but he has now started computer classes with Action Lesotho volunteers, is learning fast and wants to go on the Internet! A younger, very quiet boy with congenital cataracts and a clawed right hand was receiving intensive exercises designed to increase his right hand movements. By a cruel twist of fate, when I next met him, he was sitting outside his house with his right arm in a sling. He had fallen and broken his arm the day before and had been taken to hospital by bus but the X-ray machine was not working because of a public holiday.

I also had the job of visiting everyone on the Malimpo feeding programme [this Action Lesotho project provides a monthly delivery of basic provisions to critically ill people living at home]. The Action Lesotho nurse 'M'e Futho worked with me and we saw 27 clients in their own homes. All are poor, usually HIV positive, and most are receiving anti-retroviral (ARV) drug treatment. Many have tuberculosis. Some are babies, some school children and some are caring for orphans. I met one man who had regained his health sufficiently, through treatment and food supplies, to start work and look after himself. Everyone welcomed us into their homes, insisted that we used any available chairs and searched out their "Bukana" a small medical record book which is kept by each individual and carried to every clinic they attend. Babies' records include a weight for age chart, which often show a marked fall off after weaning.

Poverty, poor housing, domestic violence and hunger compounded everyone's problems. Still, people talked freely and intelligently about their most intimate problems, and in general, they had very positive attitudes. Action Lesotho's nurse, 'M'e Futho has obviously been invaluable to them all with her cheerful support and counselling. Many problems seemed insurmountable but with the medical bag and a little money we were able to help with some problems.

All in all, it was a very rewarding experience and I would recommend it to anyone else who is considering volunteering in this way. Everyone can do something.



Moli and Grace @ Eileen O'Leary

Dr Diane Foord is a GP based in Sneem, Co. Kerry, who spent time volunteering in Lesotho with Action Lesotho in Sept/Oct 2010.

Action Lesotho has a new Facebook page. Join us there to keep up to date with all the happenings at Action Lesotho.



People

Changes on the Board of Directors

Outgoing: Brenda Friel, an artist and teacher, based on the Dingle peninsula, recently stepped down from the Board of Action Lesotho. Brenda was particularly involved in the educational elements of Action Lesotho's work,

both in Ireland and in Lesotho. Brenda set up links between schools in Lesotho and schools in Ireland and helped obtain sponsorship for children who wouldn't otherwise have been able to continue with their schooling.

As a result of her deep interest in Lesotho, her own school, Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne (PCD), has participated in exchange visits with students and teachers from Morate Medium High School, Kolonyama, every year since 2006. Some of these were funded by WorldWise (an Irish Aid initiative) but Brenda has also put huge effort into fund-raising to make sure the exchange visits happen.

Brenda is a strong advocate of the value of cultural exchange and intends to continue her links with Lesotho in her role as School linking Coordinator for PCD. We wish her well in her continuing association with the people of Lesotho and look forward to maintaining links between PCD and Action Lesotho.

Incoming: Joining the board in the last few months, have been veteran Action Lesotho supporter Dermot Walsh (whose article appeared on the back on last month's newsletter) and Dr Jacqui O'Riordan. Dermot is a bank manager and so brings a wealth of financial experience to the Board, whilst Jacqui is a lecturer in University College Cork (UCC). Jacqui lectures on a range of courses in UCC including Development Studies. She has a special interest in human rights, gender and equality issues. She has been visiting and working in Africa for many years, particularly Tanzania and Kenya. Action Lesotho whole-heartedly welcomes Jacqui and Dermot onto the Board of Directors.

Additions to the Action Lesotho team

❖ Earlier this year, Action Lesotho appointed a new nurse in Lesotho who visits clients on the Malimpo feeding programme and who assesses the orphans and vulnerable children on the feeding programmes. Her name is M'e 'Makamohelo Futho and you can read a more about her wonderful work in Dr Foord's article (p5).

❖ A new assistant to Ntate Mankoe (Action Lesotho's Manager in Lesotho) has just been appointed. Her name is Malithare (pictured left) and she had previously volunteered with Action Lesotho when she was studying at Roma University. Malithare is a very welcome addition to the team and everybody looks forwards to working with her in the coming months.



Mall @ Eileen O'Leary

Founder-member Eileen O'Leary steps down (continued from front page)

Eileen also drew support for our work from factory owners and businesses throughout Lesotho and the Free State. For example, when the World Food Programme stopped delivering food to a project to feed malnourished and underweight pre-school children, Eileen negotiated with Lesotho Mills to supply food to these neediest of people free of charge.

Over the last 4 years, Eileen has shown a huge dedication to the people of Lesotho and worked with an energy that had most other people flagging in her wake. She is a woman with deep compassion for the poorest in society and is a hero to many people in Lesotho who without her intervention would now be starving or worse. Ntate Mankoe and the committees in the centres named Eileen M'e Pula (Mother Rain), which is huge honour in Lesotho where rain is prayed for. Indeed, the national motto is 'Khotso, pula, nala' which translates as 'Peace, Rain, Prosperity'. The esteem in which she was held was also illustrated at the opening of St Monica's school: they wrote a song in her honour thanking her for bringing abundant blessings upon them.



Eileen @ Pipa Keaton

Many of you reading this will know Eileen personally, so I'm sure you will join all of us on the Board of Action Lesotho and all the volunteers, past and present, in wishing

Eileen all the very best for the future. All of the team in Lesotho (Nt Mankoe, Molemo, M'e Futho, the community centre committees and representatives all our projects on the ground in Lesotho) also send a huge thank you to Eileen for her tireless work in setting the foundations for Action Lesotho:

Ke a leboha haholo

To see some of the stunning and moving photographs Eileen has taken over the years in Lesotho visit: <http://www.eileenoleary.com/gallery1.html>

Changes in the Government of Lesotho

Congratulations are due to the Hon. Manette Ramaili, Lesotho's former ambassador to Ireland and, indeed, co-founder of Action Lesotho: during a recent cabinet reshuffle in Lesotho, she was appointed Minister for Tourism, Environment and Culture. Manette was sworn in at The Royal Palace on the 14th October. Just a month earlier she had been appointed as a Senator. Manette left Ireland earlier this year but as yet Lesotho has not yet sent a new ambassador to Ireland.



Manette at Mofini NS @ John Manning