

Action Lesotho

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

Newsletter No 1: May 2010

Dear Supporter,

Welcome to the first of a monthly series of e-newsletters to keep you up-to-date with the activities of Action Lesotho. We hope you enjoy the contents and welcome any feedback you might have. In this month's edition we bring you a letter from our Chairman, Paul Hanrahan, who recently visited Action Lesotho projects in Lesotho. We also feature reports from volunteers in the field and from the Lepoqong Caregivers. For those of you new to Action Lesotho, we have included an introduction to our organisation.

As many of you might know we changed our name to Action Lesotho in January 2010 - we were formerly known as Twinning the Kingdoms (of Kerry and Lesotho). In recent years, this organisation has expanded beyond the boundaries of Kerry, with volunteers and groups now hailing from Cork, Limerick, Dublin, Meath and beyond. In order to reflect the changing nature of the organisation, the more all-embracing name of Action Lesotho was chosen. For more information check out our website www.actionlesotho.ie

Letter from the Chairman – A Call for Support

Chairman of Action Lesotho, Paul Hanrahan, recently spent time in Lesotho visiting all the projects and meeting with the management committee in Lesotho, headed up by Ntate Mankoe. The main projects operating at the moment are in the areas of primary health care, micro-enterprise (including agricultural enterprises) and education. His experience in Lesotho brought home to him how urgent the need is for action:



Paul Hanrahan & Ntate Mankoe

'There is nothing romantic about poverty. It is grim and unrelenting. In Lesotho, some of the poorest people in the world, often children in families without parents or a source of income, struggle daily just to survive. While we strive in Action Lesotho to bring livelihood and management skills to the local community, we regularly have to deal with emergency situations, such as desperately sick people who literally have no food, or vulnerable children who have nowhere safe to go.

In the long-term, the people of Lesotho will be agents of change in their own communities. In the short term, their suffering is real and ongoing. As we are completely dependent on the financial and volunteer support here in Ireland to fund our efforts, we are making an appeal to all our supporters to help raise money to continue the work, to consider committing to a monthly standing order of €25 a month and to asking their friends, families and neighbours, to get involved. This would allow us to plan our work for the years ahead, and to use desperately needed resources to alleviate critical problems in the community as it struggles to get on its feet.'

Paul Hanrahan,
Chairman of Action Lesotho

EVENT



Africa Day 30th May – Limerick

Action Lesotho is participating in the Africa Day event at City Hall in Limerick city. The day will feature African music, dance, drama and much, much more. Action Lesotho will be in the Education Zone where Brian & Eileen Coates - who spent two weeks volunteering in Lesotho earlier this year - will be organising fun activities for all the family. The event is free to attend. For more details see: <http://www.africaday.ie/limerick/overview.aspx>

Update: Ha Nyenye Craft Group

Ha Nyenye Craft Group @ Pippa Kearon



Ha Nyenye Craft Group is one of several projects supported by Action Lesotho. Based in Maputsoe in western Lesotho, it is a women's co-operative that specialises in making felted handicrafts and quilts.

Irish-based artist **Pippa Kearon** is spending 6 months in Lesotho, working with a range of groups, including the Na Nyenye women. Her aim is to ensure that the women of the Ha Nyenye Craft Group develop key skills in running their small craft enterprise - from the moment the wool comes from the Basotho sheep to when their products are sold at market. Pippa is also working with the women on plans to build their own craft centre and to secure some solid business outlets for their products. As part of the plan to find new business outlets, Pippa encouraged the group to take part in the country's main crafts bazaar in the capital city, Maseru, in March 2010.

'The interest in the ladies' work was really good. They mainly sold felt nativity sets and sheep although the herdboys sold well too. They secured some orders and talked to a large craft outlet in Maseru about stocking their

products', said Pippa.

'It was really fun being there and our table ended up as the liveliest one with Action Lesotho Project Manager Ntate Mankoe and I entertaining the crowds with a Basotho/Irish dance display (which caused much laughter and fun around the place) The Ha Nyenye ladies took off and were dancing with their daughters. It was so much fun and it drew some good custom our way'.

The women of the Na Nyenye craft group obviously made a good impression in Maseru: the Basotho Hat, the largest craft shop in Maseru, has recently placed a large order for nativity sets and other figures made from felt.

'The group is going from strength to strength and, apart from accessing new markets, have undertaken some courses in leadership, English language, book keeping, basic administration, digital photography, sales and marketing and also in wool preparation and dyeing', said Pippa.



The Lesotho Enterprise Allowance Programme (LEAP) will be coming to talk with Ha Nyenye Women's Craft Group at the end of May to educate them and other groups on opportunities that would be available to small co-operatives and private companies for money towards sales and marketing materials'.

As Pippa nears the end of her current stint in Lesotho, she says that in many respects *'I feel confident that I am leaving them independent'*.

Report: Lepoqong Caregivers (Phela U Phelise)

Lepoqong Caregivers is a group operating from a community centre in Maputsoe. There they care for orphans via a weekend feeding programme, as well as caring for the long-term sick and disabled in their homes and supporting people to become self sufficient through growing vegetables in their gardens.

Action Lesotho has been supporting this group since 2006. Overleaf is an account given in a recent report by the Lepoqong Caregivers Committee:



Nutrition training @ Pippa Kearon

'Action Lesotho has helped us a lot because they extended our building and also connected such with electricity and water. They also bought us kitchen and office furniture. Furthermore, they bought us 7 computers for the orphans and chairs, tables, sewing machines, security fence and gate to keep the place safe.'

'In December 2009, Action Lesotho made us really proud and happy because the King Letsie III, head of state was here. It is not easy to see the King but Action Lesotho made it possible for us and the kids to see him.'

'With regard to the sick people . . . we think

Action Lesotho has helped us a lot because [in the past] most of them died as a result of hunger. Since Action Lesotho gave assistance, there has been major difference as some who were sick are getting better and have even gone back to work.'

'Future plans: We want to see the orphans being able to provide for themselves and getting jobs to survive because we are not expecting them to always be expecting help and not striving to reach self-sufficiency. We want to see the sick out of bed and working and being able to provide for their families. We want to see HIV/AIDS infection rate decreasing.'

News from our student volunteers in Lesotho



Ciara Walsh, a Childhood Studies student from the Cork College of Commerce, is coming to the end of an 8-month placement in Lesotho. For the first 3 months Ciara worked in St. Luke's pre-school in Ha Maputsoe, before moving to the capital city Maseru.

'In Maseru I was working in two different schools: Leseli and St Angela's. Both schools specialise in special needs education. In Leseli I worked with children with autism and in St Angela's I worked mostly with children who had physical disabilities. After gaining experience in Maseru, I moved back to Ha Maputsoe to help start up a support programme for local children with special needs'.

As a first step M'e Heshie, a physiotherapist from Maseru, assisted Action Lesotho with baseline assessments on each child through a surgical specialist. Then Ciara and three Basotho graduates from Roma University, under the direction of M'e Heshie, began working with the children.

'We started off with five children with disabilities. And we only worked with them once every second week. Now we have six people from the Lepoqong Community

Development Centre working with the children on a weekly basis. Both the six members and I are starting to do home visits during the week also so now the children get some exercises at least once and maybe twice a week. It is growing bigger and better every week'.

One of Ciara's particular success stories is 5 year old Lineo [pictured right] a child with a disability. Until Ciara intervened this little girl was isolated, housebound and suffering from malnutrition. She is now attending pre-school and is thriving.



Lineo (aged 5) @ Ciara Walsh

For Action Lesotho, it is a privilege for us that we are in a position to try to secure a stable future for the children like this. Without the facility Ciara has helped set up, the nearest special needs services for children in Ha Maputsoe would be in Maseru, at least two hours drive away. Finally, Ciara's project is a real success story in the sense that it has reached a stage where she has empowered the community to sustain the project after she leaves in June.



Sarah-Jane Crilly is a Development Studies student from UCC who started a 6 month placement in Lesotho in early April.

'Working with Action Lesotho is an amazing experience. As soon as I arrived I was immediately immersed in the local culture and,

after only four weeks here, Ireland seems a distant memory. I work a Sunday-Thursday week. On Sundays I attend the community development centres [that Action Lesotho helped build] where feeding programmes operate for orphaned children ranging from 2-18 years old. Along with other volunteers I provide entertainment for the children who

attend the centre. We've taught them new songs and new games.

During the week I teach IT skills to two groups. I am running classes for members of a disability group and I run another class for members of the Lepoqong Caregivers committee who were keen to improve their computer literacy skills.'

In order to assess the needs of the community so that any help Action Lesotho provides can be targeted, research is required. Sarah-Jane has a role in training a local team of interviewers: 'I train 3 designated members of

our interview group in research methods, constructing questionnaires, interview techniques and carrying out observations. It is hoped that they will become an independent interview team for Action Lesotho'.

Sarah's working week ends on Thursdays, when she attend St. Luke's pre-school to assist the teachers with their lessons, caring for and feeding the children and helping care for a special needs child who has recently enrolled in the pre-school. Of her experience so far, Sarah says that 'Working with Action Lesotho is a very enjoyable, once in a life time opportunity'.

Funding for photographic exhibition

Action Lesotho has recently been awarded a generous grant through Irish Aid's Development Education fund for a new exhibition by Eileen O'Leary, a renowned photo-journalist and founder member of Action Lesotho. Featuring people affected by HIV-AIDS in Lesotho, it will be touring Irish Universities in 2010-2011 (dates/venues to be confirmed). In the meantime, over 50,000 people have viewed Eileen's current exhibition 'Breaking the Barriers'. If you didn't manage to catch it, you can see some of the photos at http://www.eileenoleary.com/docs/Breaking_The_Barriers_Article.pdf 'Breaking the Barriers' will also be featured on the RTE programme 'Outside the Box' in November.



Feed five children

€25 a month is all it takes to feed five orphaned and vulnerable children in one of Action Lesotho's feeding programmes. One of our main sources of regular income is the standing orders that many of you have so generously signed up to. This reliable income is essential to maintain the projects, in particular the feeding programmes for 150 orphaned and vulnerable children that take place at the two community centres Action Lesotho built. We have recently taken on responsibility for feeding an additional 30 needy children so we urgently need additional funding. Just €25 a month will feed five of these children per year.



Dancing at feeding centre @ Pippa Keaton

Ways of donating to help support the work of Action Lesotho

- Standing Order: A standing order form is attached with this mailing (or can be obtained by e-mailing info@actionlesotho.ie)
- One-off donation: Lodge your donation directly into the Action Lesotho current account through any Bank of Ireland branch or make your donation using your online banking facility. All the information you will need is outlined in the bank details below:



Sello Motlere@Eileen O'Leary

Account Name: Action Lesotho
Sort Code: 90-58-38
Account Number: 27016723
Iban: IE23BOFI905827016723
Swift/Bic: BOFIE2D
Bank Address: Castle Street, Tralee, Co. Kerry

An introduction to Action Lesotho

Action Lesotho is active in the Maputsoe area of Lesotho, where our main aim is to help build capacity within the community to deal with the devastating social impact of AIDS/HIV and the chronic lack of food security in this small, landlocked country. It is, according to recent World Health Organization figures, in the top three most affected countries in the world when it comes to AIDS/HIV and, due to poor natural resources, climate change and huge increases in basic food prices, the community is ravaged by death, illness and the inability of basic social structures to accommodate increasing and overwhelming numbers of orphans and vulnerable children.

Fortunately, the government in Lesotho is in the top ten African countries when it comes to good governance, but the country will still need international financial aid for a long time to come in order to maintain any kind of basic living standard for its people.

Our goal is to assist the people in Maputsoe to become agents of change for the betterment of their own society. We facilitate developments within the community to improve health, alleviate poverty and develop livelihood skills. We build community development centres in the heart of villages and run training programmes for the committees who manage them.

We help develop expertise in the area of care-giving for those suffering from HIV/AIDS. We run projects, overseen by a local director employed by Action Lesotho, covering a wide range of activities such as feeding programmes for orphans at weekends and during school holidays, food supplement provision for the chronically ill, and financial and training support for the initiation of mini- and micro-businesses such as chicken rearing, keyhole gardening and pig breeding as well as local crafts. In all of these projects, the involvement and input of local people is crucial if the benefits are to be sustained and integrated in the long term.

We believe that Lesotho will continue to need all the financial aid it can get, but also needs organisational skills at local level in order for that aid to be put to proper use in village and small town communities. It is our aim to assist in the development of these skills in partnership with the Basotho themselves.

We are driven by our understanding that we in this country have benefited in the past from the assistance of others who were not content to have their brothers and sisters flounder when an outstretched hand could keep them from going under. We hope now to offer that outstretched hand to others in need.

Paul Hanrahan, Chairman of Action Lesotho

Students from Lesotho visit school in Dingle



Morate English Medium High School students Tefo Libate, Kekeletso Tlaba and Matseliso Ramaqele,

together with Linking Co-ordinator Ntate James Obua, recently spent ten days in Dingle's Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne (PCD) as part of the 'Worldwise' supported Schools Linking Programme. During the visit the Basotho and Irish students engaged in a diary of events that included documenting the lives of grandmothers on the Dingle Peninsula, reciting from their poetry collection 'Voice of the Children' at Féile na Bealtaine and taking part in the live Radio Kerry programme 'In Conversation with Weeshie Fogarty'.

Although this was a first trip to Ireland for the Morate students, many of those taking part commented that they felt the visit was as if spending time with old friends; this linking project is now in its fourth year and students

have been developing friendships and sharing work based on culture over that time. Without doubt, school linking helps to explore global issues, break down barriers and broaden awareness of development issues within a global environment. According to Mary McCarthy of Worldwise *'The world is becoming smaller and increasingly interdependent and student visits like these make these connections much clearer'*

