

Thirst for Life (TFL) Scout Project Report on the HIV/Aids Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Support Initiative (HOVUCSI)

(By Bhekie Metfula, Project Co-ordinator)

The 'Thirst for Life' Scout project started an initiative also known as HOVUCSI to support HIV/Aids orphaned and vulnerable children in November 2005. The objective was to extend Scouting to young people in difficult circumstances. It was planned that TFL would seek assistance from her regional and international network of Scout friends.

TFL would then establish a troop and implement the local Scout youth programme. The children would be empowered with agricultural and business skills.



The campsite at the TFL Centenary Scout Centre

A research by TFL was conducted and found that, there were 154 of these children in the project area community, known as Buhlebuyeza. 16 boys aged between 7 and 18 were identified and an experimental camp was held at the TFL Centenary Scout Centre on the weekend of May 12-14, 2006. All these children slept in tents for the first time and it proved to be a lifetime experience. It was discovered that two additional boys attended the camp out of curiosity.

Three patrols were formed. The patrol leaders and their assistants then chose the troop leader. The patrol system was introduced early enough to help with discipline. It proved to be worthwhile and worked to our advantage throughout the duration of the camp.

The Scout Centre is still being developed. However, there are few things already available for use. They include a borehole and two 5000-litre tanks for clean water supply. There is no electricity at the moment but it will be connected shortly. TFL have three camping grounds that may take 500 campers. The available tents can accommodate up to 34 people. There are ventilated improved pit latrines, burner stoves, wood chairs and tables. A small storeroom big enough to keep safely all the project equipment is available. The initial development (about US\$20, 000) was made possible, courtesy of Avon County Scouts in the United Kingdom.

CASEGHA-USA Scouts were the first to respond to the HOVUCSI call, by donating a sum of US\$400.00.

TFL then organised an awareness campaign about the initiative targeting residents particularly the youth. A one-day soccer tournament was organised and four local teams took part. Soccer is one of the leading sports in the country. The tournament managed to bring together many of the local residents especially the youth. All the 154 children were also present at the event.



Hon MP Masuku seated fourth from left

The event was graced by Honourable Mfanakaziwa 'Lobhoncela' Masuku.

Masuku is a local member of parliament. The children had the opportunity to escort each player to the pitch in all the games. They also provided all entertainment activities for the day.

The soccer players were invited to the Centre for a separate briefing about the initiative prior to the games. The TFL team also managed to sensitise about 300 residents who attended the event about HOVUCSI.

The event had an impact and hopefully the overall goal would be achieved.

TFL aims to empower the children with relevant and meaningful life skills. These will include agricultural and business skills. There is an arable land in the Centre. Planted crops are sweet potatoes and beans. A vegetable garden would be cultivated when funds become available.



OVC escorting soccer players to the pitch

E1, 000 (US\$167) out of the CASEGHA-USA Scouts fund was spent on the tournament. The soccer teams contributed a total of E200 (US\$33). The MP then contributed E700 (US\$117) towards the initiative. This donation together with the balance of US\$200 from CASEGHA-USA will be used towards constructing a school for the OVC.

TFL already have young volunteers who may implement the Scout youth programme to the children. Challenges ahead of this initiative include buying their Scout uniform and the youth programme handbooks as well as record books. Other things required for the

initiative would include the costs for hiring a tractor and buying seeds for farming. The children would need to camp at least once a month. Camping expenses would remain a challenge as well. TFL would welcome further support from interested partners. These may include used clothes, toys and reading books.



Team players with OVC before the last matches

The initial project would be piloted for a period of 6 months. It would then be reviewed, documented and may continue on funds availability.

TFL aims at replicating the initiative to 4 other communities, 1 per region in future. This would be possible because the Swaziland Boy Scouts Association has three other places where a similar project may be implemented.

The 'Thirst for Life' Scout Project was declared a 'gift for peace' by the Swaziland Boy Scouts Association in August 2004. HOVUCSI is one of many initiatives planned by the project team.

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