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PROJECT NEWS

November 2005

Dear Supporters of the P.I.N. Project,

I left the 'Make Poverty History' Demonstration in Edinburgh on July 4th and arrived in Zululand on the 6th July. I was enthused by the fervour of the thousands of people who do care. This energised me. Now after 3 months I have returned; three months of roller-coaster emotions and incidents which challenged my tenacity and my energy.

Initially, there were administrative issues to deal with, such as finding and appointing a new Community Worker. The current Worker had been appointed on a six month contract with the proviso that she got a driving licence and proved herself a competent administrator. Unfortunately, she failed to do both these and we could not renew her contract. We have now appointed Thabile Zulu, a very experienced person who has previously worked for Children's Rights and Zululand Hospice.

We have also appointed a new Youth Leader, Nkosi, to replace Simangele who is our first P.I.N. 'child' to graduate to employment. Simangele acknowledges the help the P.I.N. Project had given her in sending her to College, and building her confidence. We are proud of her determination and wish her success.

Nkosi heads a household and was the first P.I.N. child on our 'books'. When we met him he was caring for his younger brother with no relatives to help and dependent upon the neighbours for food etc. Sadly, his younger brother has now been diagnosed as HIV+. At 13 years it is remarkable that he has survived so long. IN 2004 the South African Government announced it would be funding the distribution of antiretroviral drugs. Since then it has been training health staff and organising a system for allocation. This is no easy task in a country with 5 million infected people and with the health personnel being depleted by infection and, I am sorry to say, the 'poaching' of trained health workers by other countries. Nkosi's little

brother is now on anti-retroviral drugs, a cocktail of 4 drugs to be taken at the same time each day... for life. As I left one of our very young HIV + children, with TB, will start anti-retrovirals shortly, providing he is strong enough. T.A.C. [Treatment Action Campaign] must be praised for its grass-roots efforts and persistent pressure on the S.A. Government to provide these drugs for its people. Horrible though they are they are the only life-line.

Another dramatic event was the birth of a first P.I.N. baby. Born to one of older 'girls' the event was one of mixed emotions. A birth should be a time to celebrate but it also implies 'unsafe sex' and the consequences could be HIV. This young woman, not only heads a household with younger brothers but has compromised her own life and added to her responsibilities. Fortunately, the baby was administered Niverapine at the birth and could be saved from transmission of the virus. Pat Chase, our Promoter in SW England, visited during this time and was a pillar of support and rationality, for both me and this young mother.

Whilst mentioning Pat I would like to give my most sincere thanks to the people of Painswick and surrounds, who sent so many beautiful clothes, toys, pencils and pens. We had some very rewarding distribution days and I know Pat has taken photos to show her friends and neighbours.

This leads me on to tell you about the progress we made with the other children and the assistance we are giving towards their development and education. Older children continue to meet for the P.I.N. Youth Club every Friday after school. So popular is it that we have 'non-orphan' children asking, 'What do we have to do to join this club!' To reduce stigma and combat ignorance we have introduced the idea of P.I.N. 'friends' so that they can join. From the Club we have developed two off-shoots: a Gardening Group and a Bead Craft Group. The Project has





bought the tools and seeds and the first crops were picked whilst I was there. The initial idea is to add to the diet of these children but maybe it will develop into a small business with any surplus veg. The Trainer, beads etc were also provided by the Project and the first products, very pretty bracelets, came back with me. These young crafters received their 'pay' [pocket money] with excitement. At my first event back in UK I sold one of these little bracelets and remembered the children's real concentration as they bent over the tiny beads. Their Grannies continue to produce beautiful jewellery as well as pins which, of course, are the source of our fund-raising.

We reinforced understanding with a workshop on Mini-enterprise. Thirty young people came on a Saturday and 'brain-stormed' ideas and gave presentations. I was impressed by their enthusiasm and their potential ability. I was reminded of one of Mandela's phrases, 'there is no achievement without opportunity.' The opportunity came for some of the older children when they held a 'stall' at a local Festival and sold the jewellery made by the grandmothers. Their attendance was funded by a Government programme called, 'Black Empowerment.' The Festival was a predominately 'white event' but it was opened by the Zulu King. I felt they were doing more than selling the jewellery and was very proud of them. They were very pleased with themselves and their success.

The younger children were presented with 2 workbooks, crayons, pencils etc and the grandmothers and older siblings given some guidance on their use. In addition, they were given a story book, tooth brushes and tooth-paste. [Thank you Pat's dentist!] and one out-fit of clothing. The older children were involved in decisions about their school needs. They drew up a list of needs and then prioritised. Before I left they were each given their writing materials, some dictionaries and calculators and a choice of one item of clothing. In November, Thabile will shop with some of the older children for school shirts and text books. By involving the Youth in the buying, we hope to give them an idea of budgeting. Next year, we intend to work more closely with the schools on the issue of books etc. Khula School, our link school, will be our first focus and Sonia will open up a dialogue on this when she visits in February.

As you may remember, we moved into another area with P.I.N. This area, KwaDlangezwa, is part

rural and part urban. Dr Ngeni Ntombela, the Head of Indigenous Knowledge at the University of Zululand, is our Chairperson and also oversees the whole P.I.N. Project in South Africa. She has been the person responsible for getting this branch started. She has worked with the Unduna [Chief] and the Tribal Authority for approval. This is where the UK Supporters take a step back and observe with interest and respect another way of operating. The Dlangezwa P.I.N. Project will be, appropriately, more African in its operation. With the help of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund this embryonic P.I.N. will soon be providing services to the children in need in this area. The UK will provide the market for the Grannies jewellery and pins.

Finally, back to this country. May I remind you that World AIDS Day is 1st December? Please wear your pin and, if possible hold a fund-raiser to suit you energies and your time. In Manchester, on December 3rd, there will be a Service in the Manchester Cathedral organised by Anne Winstanley of the Aston under Lyne Soroptimists, which I have been told will be attended by 8 Mayors!! I hope to be in London outside Southwark Cathedral as well as visiting other venues that week. I will report on events next letter. Sonia is producing the Christmas cards again, this time designed by a 'talented' Supporter. Thank you both. Hope they appeal and you will buy a few.

Teddy bears: Siyabonga and now his little brother, Siphewe, with jerseys and pins made by the Grannies, are on sale. Great presents for your grandchildren.

It remains only for me to wish all of you a peaceful Christmas, to thank you again for your interest and support and to say, 'Ambergathle,' Go well' as they say in Zulu.

Alice