

M.O.S.A.

Mohale Orphan Support Association

Newsletter: Summer 2009

Dear Friends of M.O.S.A. Foundation,

I hope you have all enjoyed the summer! I am now a "retired" Peace Corps volunteer back home in Georgia, Vermont, however I will continue to run the Flying Eagles sponsorship program from home for the next few years, so I wanted to give you all an update...

The Lesotho school year begins in January and runs through December, so the kids have just finished their winter break (our seasons are opposite) and headed back for second semester on August 3rd. My two partners in the project, 'Me Ntsediseng Sedia, principal of Mohale High School, and 'Me Tankie Sekese, teacher/administrator, will be carrying on all procedures and routines we have established with the kids, with my guidance and support from the States. The kids also have their own responsibilities and duties to help one another and make sure the needs of the group are being met.

I'm proud to say that all of our sponsored students passed their first semester, with the exception of one who has dropped out of school due to illness. With support and encouragement from all of you, we hope to see these great results continue over the next four years for youths who just last year had no hope of attending school at all...

Rea Leboha!!! We Thank You!!

Belinda Laidley-Collias

What is M.O.S.A.?

The word *mosa* means kindness in Sesotho, and is also an acronym for Mohale Orphan Support Association, which is a small sponsorship program I began while I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Lesotho from 2007-09. During my service with Peace Corps, I was assigned to a rural village called Ha Mohale, located in the mountains of central Lesotho, where I worked at an HIV/AIDS clinic and taught a life-skills class to Basotho teenagers at the local high school. It wasn't long before I realized how severely the HIV/AIDS epidemic had impacted families in Lesotho, and with infection rates as high as 50%, all of Mohale High School's students were somehow affected by HIV/AIDS, whether their parents or relatives were HIV positive, or had passed away leaving them orphaned, or the students themselves were infected. Through my experience helping the community to initiate various HIV-prevention projects, and working with at-risk youth, I began to understand that education was the greatest tool for preventing the spread of this disease and overcoming the cycle of poverty that ultimately drives the epidemic.

Education in Lesotho is not considered a right by any standard. While the fees for primary school (the equivalent of elementary and middle-school combined) were eliminated in the past decade, students are still required to pay for high school tuition, books, uniform, and many other costs, which explains why less than a quarter of the population is able to earn a diploma. Furthermore, thousands of Lesotho's children have been orphaned due to HIV/AIDS, and are now heads-of-household caring for younger siblings. With the help of my mother, Dr. Bettina Laidley, and my Basotho colleagues at Mohale High School, I decided to create the M.O.S.A. scholarship fund, by which we could offer certain youth high school sponsorship.

There are an endless number of children in Lesotho who lack the financial means to attend high school, however our limited resources allow us to only select the most dedicated students and demands that we maintain high expectations of them throughout their schooling. We have so far selected 15 children recommended by principals and teachers of rural primary schools in villages within the Mohale region, some as far as 6 hours walk from Mohale High School where even a 4x4 vehicle can not reach. These students were the highest achievers in their classes, with strong work-ethic and big dreams, and had overcome great adversities in their young lives, so we have named them the "Flying Eagles Scholars" with the hope that after this opportunity to be educated, they will spread their wings, find success and return to give the same hand up to others who were in their position.

We have overcome many obstacles in the process of getting the Flying Eagles project off the ground during the first year, but the program has been very successful and the kids have taken huge responsibility to ensure that they perform well in school. High School in Lesotho is a 5-year program, therefore we have committed ourselves to these kids until they have all completed their secondary education. Working with them has been a challenge and a joy, certainly without a dull moment as they all have such unique personalities and points of view to bring to the group. Check them out on the next page!

Meet the Flying Eagles!



Ntaoleng Makatsela, age 19

Ntaoleng is a Form D student (11th Grade) and moved to Mohale from the city after her mother passed away and she could no longer afford school fees. She now cares for her elderly father and helps him maintain his small farm and livestock along with her younger brother. She is the president of the Flying Eagles Club, loves music and dancing, and wants to become a teacher or a lawyer after completing high school.



Serialong Mojakhomo, age 20

Serialong is a Form D student (11th Grade) and has provided for himself and his younger sister by farming and odd jobs he can find in his village ever since his parents passed away in 2000. Despite this responsibility, he hasn't missed a year of high school so far and has been one of the most dedicated students, as well as volunteering with AIDS orphans in his spare time. His goal is to become an English teacher.



Telang Likotsi, age 17

Telang is a Form D student (11th Grade) and is a double orphan. She and her younger sister live with their elderly grandparents in a village far from Mohale, which requires her to board at a local hostel while she attends school. She is a very quiet, studious girl who respects others, she usually achieves highest position in her class, and wants to be a nurse.



Nkololeko Semethe, age 17

Nkololeko is a Form C student (10th Grade) and one of the best English speakers in his grade. He enjoys creative writing and playing soccer. His mother passed away ten years ago, and his father, a derelict, left him and his younger siblings in the care of their older brother, who is a carpenter but doesn't earn enough to send them to school. His goal after high school is to become a teacher.



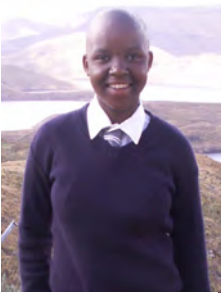
Pusetso Motete, age 21

Pusetso is a Form D student (11th Grade) and president of Mohale Youth Group, a club of volunteer HIV/AIDS peer-educators. He comes from a family of six and is the only one currently attending school, as his siblings all help their father herding livestock and farming. Pusetso is very motivated and wants to become a doctor.



Mpolokeng Rappheng, age 15

Mpolokeng is a Form A student (8th Grade) and lives with her elderly grandmother and younger brother, now that both of her parents have passed away due to illness. She is very outgoing and resilient, loves music, and wants to be a nurse someday.



Lisebo Motiki, age 13

Lisebo is a Form A student (8th Grade) and comes from a village that takes 8 hours to walk to from Mohale High School, (a vehicle cannot drive there because there are rocky mountain paths), therefore she boards in a local hostel during the school year. One of the youngest students in the school, she is a high achiever and her goal is to become a doctor.



Mamakha Nkhahle, age 15

Mamakha is a Form A student (8th Grade) and is a double orphan living in a rural village extremely far from Mohale High School. She has lived with her great-aunt, who is elderly, and cousins for the past few years and was unable to attend school due to lack of finances. Now that she is finally studying, her goal is to become a nurse.



Maleenya Makhaleme, age 14

Maleenya is a Form A student (8th Grade) and lives with her mother and older brother, who has been worked as a herd-boy to support the family since their father passed away in 2005. She works hard in school, likes playing net-ball, and wants to be a nurse someday.



Mpho Moahloli, age 15

Mpho is a Form A student (8th Grade) and lives comes from a rural village where she lives with her mother, father and six siblings. Her parents struggled to support such a large family by means of livestock and farming, and were unable to send any of the kids to high school. Mpho's goal after high school is to become a nurse.



Lyndiwe Bolwane, age 16

Lyndiwe is a Form A student (8th Grade) and is a double orphan who has been raised by her two older brothers since she was five years old. The two boys, who work as shepherds, struggle just to feed and clothe their sister, let alone pay her school fees. Lyndiwe is very social, a friend to everyone, and sings in the school choir. She would like to become a nurse someday.



Relebohile Mashale, age 14

Relebohile is a Form A student (8th Grade) and comes from a family of six. Because her village is so far from school, she boards at the local hostel. She is one of the brightest students in her class, enjoys sports, and wants to become a nurse after high school.



Ntsoaki Makoae, age 16

Ntsoaki is a Form A student (8th Grade) and is a double orphan. She has been living with her older brother and his wife ever since her parents passed away in 2001, therefore they did not have the funds for her to continue her education after elementary school, even though she had the highest grades in her whole school. Her goal is to become either a teacher or a nurse.



Matseliso Lelimo, age 15

Matseliso is a Form A student (8th Grade) and the oldest of six children who all live with their mother, therefore she has taken on much of the responsibility for the younger ones after her father passed away a few years ago. She would like to become a teacher so she can teach at the small school in her home village and help other children growing up the way she has.

Saying Goodbye...



My final photo with the Flying Eagles before I left Lesotho...here they are wearing their new jackets, hats, and mittens purchased for them by donations from their U.S. sponsors! Thanks for making sure they stay warm for their long walk to school each day!

But still in good hands...



'Me Tankie Sekese (left), teacher/advisor, and 'Me Ntseliseng Sedia (center), school principal, will be responsible for continuing the Flying Eagles project for the next five years (pictured here with my mother, Dr. Bettina Laidley)

A HUGE Thanks!!!

For a community effort here in Vermont to help the Flying Eagles...

Annemieke Spoelstra, a concert pianist and teacher in Burlington, performed a benefit concert for the MOSA Scholarship Fund on June 17th, 2009 at the Charlotte Congregational Church.

Generous contributions from parishioners and friends who attended the event added up to over \$500.00, which will be enough to cover school fees, books, and other necessary items for all of the students for the rest of this school year! Thank you all for your kindness and generosity which has allowed the dream of an education to come true for these kids.



Annemieke (center) with Tankie and my mom, Dr. Bettina Laidley

(L-R) At the concert, My sister Phoebe, Tankie, Annemieke, and I.

NOTE: Annemieke's new CD, *Toccare*, will be available in stores in October 2009! Her music is absolutely extraordinary!

LET'S GO TO THE MOVIES!!



Introducing our "Movie Nights" Fundraiser...

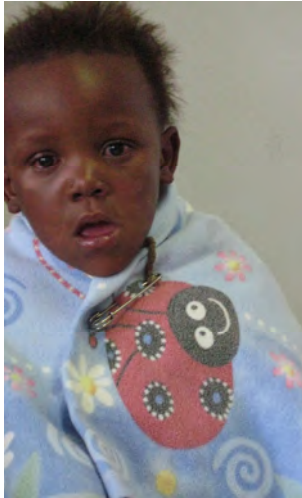
Winters in Vermont can be very long and lonely, so as a way to stay in touch and raise some support for the Flying Eagles, we've decided to have movie nights once a month at our home in Georgia, Vermont!

The first showing will be the HBO film, *Yesterday*, which is a touching story about a mother and child living in an area of South Africa which is very close to Lesotho and shows many similarities in culture and way of life. It is a very accurate portrayal of the situations many face in that part of the world, and it's one of our favorites!

Admission will be by donation, so please feel free to bring guests...we'll serve refreshments and discuss the film afterwards, so it'll be a great chance to re-connect, socialize, and meet new friends with the common interests of humanitarianism and peace.

More details to come soon!

Successful Recoveries from Malnutrition!



Before...



And After!

Malnutrition is still a huge problem in Lesotho due to the fact that many families live rurally without food security. The HIV/AIDS epidemic contributes greatly to the incidence of malnutrition, especially because many infants are left in the care of their grandparents who are unable to breastfeed, cannot afford formula, therefore they feed the babies sugar and water. Children living with HIV are also at greater risk for malnutrition—although they now have access to antiretroviral medications and can live a relatively normal life, these meds are often harsh on the stomach and require the child to consume an increased quantity and variety of foods, which the families simply can't afford.

Luckily I've seen that many of these cases of malnutrition and wasting syndrome can be reversed quickly after a short period of intensive nutritional therapy, and they are soon growing and thriving again. The little girl pictured above was too sick to go to school, but after receiving therapeutic food and supplements, she quickly recovered into a happy, healthy and energetic child.

Mohale's HIV/AIDS clinic currently has about twenty HIV-positive children whom they have identified and have begun treatment or will be starting soon. There are hundreds of others who have yet to be found...all infants born to HIV-positive mothers are now being tested shortly after birth, but some parents of older children will only realize there is a problem once the disease has progressed to a dangerous level.

I often worked with the HIV kids and got to know all of them and their families very closely. Due to lack of resources, supplies, and personnel, when the clinic visited their villages once a month, they were always mixed into the long line of people attending the clinic for various other ailments, and never received any special time or treatment of their own.

We all remember how much better we felt when we got a toy, a lollipop, or a colorful band-aid after getting a shot as a child. American kids take those little perks for granted each time they visit the doctor. My HIV kids in Lesotho, however, had to endure their long, painful blood-draws every three months in a crowded, noisy room, and were told afterwards to quickly stop crying and get over it!! I always tried to bring them surprises like stickers, toys, and when I could, vitamins and supplements to help them better metabolize their food and medication.

I would like to send a box for these young patients at Mohale Clinic so the HIV/AIDS nurse can continue that practice of making those dreaded visits to the clinic just a little more bearable for them. **Items I would like to include are: GummyVites (chewable vitamins for kids), Emla Cream (topical anesthetic which numbs the arm before a blood draw), children's band-aids with colors or Disney characters, stickers and small toys. If you can help with any of these or know someone who can, please let me know...Thanks!**



(Above) I often visited the patients' homes to make sure they received their medications and were taking them properly.

How You Can Help!

M.O.S.A. is an all-volunteer, grass-roots organization which has committed itself to the education of the Flying Eagles students for the next five years of their high school attendance, therefore the project and its expenses will be ongoing. We are effective only because of the support of volunteers and donors like you.

- Spread the word! Pass this newsletter on to your friends and family or use your e-mail network to let others know about the project.
- Recruit corporate sponsorship in order to continue the ongoing support of our Flying Eagles and expand aid to families in need.
- Donate your services! If you have a talent such as art or music, perform a benefit concert or auction off one of your pieces and donate the proceeds.
- Make a donation to M.O.S.A. to support our students.

PLEASE HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Donations can be sent to Belinda Laidley-Collias at:

176 Village Drive Ext.

Fairfax, VT 05454

Or contact her at: (802) 893-2996 or (802) 324-9995

Remember, \$1 translates to 10 Maloti which goes along way here in Lesotho. Every little bit helps!

As the Basotho people say...

KHOTSO, PULA, NALA!

(peace, rain, and prosperity!)