

100 Projects for Peace Final Report - Summer 2007

Title: Building a Brighter Future for Kids at the Amazing Grace Children's Center

School: St. Lawrence University

Student(s) Information:

Alexander Tedeschi(Sasha) '07 from U.S.A. – did not attend UWC

Shazia Shahnaz '09 from Bangladesh – attended Waterford Kamhlaba UWCSA (02-04)

1. **Project Summary:** Describe location, timeframe, participants, other funding involved, scope of work, and goals intended.

Location: Malelane, South Africa

Participants: Sasha Tedeschi and Shazia Shahnaz, and the children and staff of the Amazing Grace Children's Center

Our project began on July 2nd when we arrived in Johannesburg, South Africa. Amazing Grace Children's Shelter, a home for orphans and abandoned/abused children, has two locations, one that is in Johannesburg and another that is in Malelane, a rural town situated on the southern border of Kruger National Park in Mpumalanga Province, about 200 miles west of Johannesburg. After spending a day at the orphanage in Johannesburg and getting to know some of the staff and children there, on July 4th, we headed out on our journey from Johannesburg to Malelane where our project would take place. At the Malelane shelter we met with Grace Mashaba, the founder, who gave us instructions to spend as much time as we wanted with the kids and, after getting a feel for the place and getting to know the children on a personal basis, decide what kinds of resources would best benefit the shelter. Our goals were to provide guidance for the children as well as the tools they needed to succeed in life. For the next three weeks we came to the shelter everyday at 9 am to spend the day there helping the kids with their homework, playing card or board games with them, joining them in a friendly game of soccer, or just simply talking with them and becoming good friends. After about a week or so, we decided that we wanted to renovate a dilapidated building within the shelter, the inside of which we eventually repainted, refurnished, and turned into a new activity center. This new center included educational DVDs as well as an assortment of Disney movies, coloring books, workbooks, a new table where the kids could sit down and do their homework and draw, as well as new furniture that replaced the old, dirty and broken couches. We also supplied the kids with several new bicycles, soccer balls and basketballs, seeing as they had none of their own. In addition, we bought the children new clothes as some of the old clothes that they wore were torn and full of holes. In return, the kids taught us to speak siSwati and educated us about their own unique blend of cultures, through song and dance and attempting to communicate with us in their native language. Overall, the project turned out to be a great success and was mutually beneficial, endowing Amazing Grace's children with

new games, books, and tools which would help them lead a healthy childhood, and giving us a chance to experience a different culture.

2. **Project Results:** Self-evaluate the project; your assessment should enumerate what goals were and were not accomplished.

The project accomplished its goals in the sense that we were able to stimulate the intellect and creativity of some of the younger children who did not yet attend school. By the end of our stay, most of the young children were fully engaged in reading the new books we provided, coloring in the coloring books with crayons, and building new creations with Playdoh and Legos. The older children also became engaged with Scrabble and Chess, as well as Monopoly, Twister, and Uno. In addition, there was a good intercultural exchange as the children learned from us about American and Bangladeshi culture. The project also accomplished its goal of promoting physical growth for the kids, as they immediately put their new sports equipment into use. Another goal the project accomplished was making the center a better place to live, as the kids will benefit from the use of the new and improved activity center for years to come and will hopefully continue to lead healthier lifestyles. One of the goals that we did not accomplish was providing education about HIV/AIDS. It proved extremely difficult to organize the children for this purpose; many of them were not fluent in English and most of them were too young. Thus, giving them a structured lesson about AIDS was not feasible. In addition, the majority of them already knew a lot about HIV/AIDS, thanks to Grace Mashaba. Rather, we had more one-on-one or small group interactions where the children could maintain a better focus. The children were very eager to help us paint and remodel the new activity center and loan their efforts, which reinforced teamwork and allowed them to accomplish a short-term goal together.

3. **Implications:** What are the project's implications for peace? What are the future prospects for the project? What have you learned?

The project's implications for peace are great because the care and love that we showed the children will hopefully be passed forward and reflected in the way the children treat each other in the future and when they become adults. We promoted peace through providing better living conditions, teaching all the children about the kindness and compassion of the people of earth, so they can do the same for other. With new tools and an improved center, the children there will have healthier, more educational ways of spending their free time as opposed to getting into the wrong activities. Our project sent a broader message of peace and helped to create a positive cycle of peace for all, beginning with the inspiration and opportunities offered to a small group of children.

