

**Swaziland:**

Swaziland is a small, landlocked kingdom surrounded on three sides by South Africa and by Mozambique to the East. It is the world’s last absolute Monarchy, ruled by King Mswati III. About 63% of the population lives below the poverty line (2011 UNDP figures) and Swaziland has the world’s highest HIV/AIDS prevalence and death rate with a life expectancy at birth of about 49 years. The scourge of HIV/AIDS in particular, has been harsh on the youth and children in the country, resulting in an increase in child-headed households, orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) and impoverished communities. In these communities, children often have little or no access to basic resources such as clean drinking water and food. Without having their basic needs met, there is very little that can be done to halt the poverty cycle in these communities and ensure more prosperous and hopeful futures for the children who grow up in these environments.

**Mgidza-Vuvulane Community:**

Mgidza community is one of the informal communities of Vuvulane Irrigated Farms (VIF) in the Lowveld region of Swaziland. This informal community is highly populated by unemployed residents who were initially farm laborers but who now live under the plight of HIV/AIDS. These conditions have significantly contributed to the increase of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC) who end up living on their own or with grandparents who have limited resources and can barely meet their basic needs. The daily struggle to make ends meet results in the children roaming the community scavenging for food. Furthermore, the lack of transport and isolation of the community means that many of the children cannot afford or cannot attend any of the nearest educational institutions. Living under such bleak conditions, where many lead purposeless lives, many of the children are often victims of violence and have uncertain futures.

**Background on Care Points:**

Children’s Cup is an American donor-based humanitarian organization that was founded in 1992. To date, it provides meals, basic medical care and educational assistance in about two dozen sites or Care Points all over Southern Africa. The daily running of the Care Points is overseen by a designated community resident or facilitator who reports back on progress and ensures the upkeep of the Care Point. It currently provides such assistance to eight areas in the most impoverished parts of Swaziland. Part of the organization’s success at transforming children’s lives comes from the fact that they ensure that the construction and functioning of the Care Points is established as a joint effort with the community, as opposed to “showing up as outsiders throwing money at a need”. Community members and volunteers are invited to lend a helping hand at every level of the establishment of Care Points – be it in the pre-construction phase, in the construction itself, as well as teaching and cooking at the Care Point. This way, community members play a crucial role in the establishment and success of the Care Points, which creates a sense of unity under the common goal of ensuring brighter futures for the children in the community.

**The Project:**

The Mgidza Care Point is one of the newest Care Points that have been established. It is currently not fully functional due to a lack of funds to build a structure. However, having recognized the scourge of hunger and a lack of education in the community, Children’s Cup has started feeding the children, despite the lack of shelter. Due to the lack of shelter for the time being, activities like cooking for the children are all done outside which means that the Care Point activities are often interrupted by bad weather conditions, such as rainy days, and the playing premises are still unsecure due to the lack of fencing – all of which negatively impacts the progress and development of the children who access and depend on the services provided by the Care Point.

With the Davis Project for Peace grant, I, together with volunteers from Christian Family Church International and other resident volunteers in Mgidza, want to provide the children of Mgidza with the shelter and protected premises they need in order to fully benefit from what is currently an unfinished Care Point project. The project will be labor intensive, requiring community members to assist with clearing the allocated land, putting up a fence around the area and digging up the foundation for the structure. With the grant we will be able to purchase building material. A local and trusted

construction team will be employed to proceed with building the main structure, as has been done with previous Care Point projects. Fortunately, because of the great community network that Children's Cup has already established through its feeding program in Mgidza, the recruitment and logistics of the preliminary stages will not be cumbersome for me as a project leader. The grant will also enable us to purchase simple furnishings for the Care Point, namely desks and chairs for the students, as well as stationery. We will also be welcoming community and church volunteers to help with decorating the classroom and creating a child-friendly, playful environment where the children can flourish educationally and creatively.

### **Project: Plan of Action**

The structure itself will be very simple in design, consisting mainly of two rooms – a classroom, and a kitchen area where cooking utensils will be kept.

*First Month Objectives (May 10 - May 31):* Recruiting volunteers, hiring the construction team, purchasing building material and making sure construction gets underway. This will involve contacting Children Cup's usual contacts and reaching out to their network of community volunteers, which will reduce any initial delays in the project.

*Second Month Objectives (June 1- June 30)*

- Working out the daily running of the Care Point: this includes establishing a formal roster of local cooking women who currently take turns cooking for the children.
- The appointment of a Care Point facilitator - who will oversee Care Point activities, schooling and will be the main point of communication with Children's Cup. The facilitator's job will be to monitor registration of the children who come to the Care Point.
- Purchasing desks, chairs, tables and other basic furnishings, as well as stationery.
- Purchasing a water tank so that running water can be more easily accessed on site.

*Third Month Objectives (July 1<sup>st</sup>-mid August)*

- Finishing up construction and the purchasing of final supplies.
- Making adjustment to logistics if need be from preliminary operation in the newly built structure.
- In early August, official Opening and celebration in the community.

### **Expected Outcomes**

The success of this project will ensure that orphaned and vulnerable children in Mgidza get at least two meals a day, as well as basic education in a secure location. The Care Point will serve as both a feeding site and a haven for these children, where most of them can feel cared for. The outcomes of a fully operational Care Point in Mgidza will ensure that more students can eventually enroll into formal schooling without being further delayed in their education. The Care Point activities will also attract the support of other community members as we have seen in previous efforts. Men and women in these communities often find fulfilling, honest work in maintaining the Care Point through gardening, cooking and cleaning for example.

### **Mission of the Davis Projects for Peace: creating a sustainable peace**

The economic plight within which children in Mgidza find themselves in, makes their community nothing less than a conflict zone. I believe that conflict exists in situations where people live under conditions that do not allow them to lead decent lives; where their futures are uncertain and they lack security -the very conditions that residents of Mgidza are plagued by. The Care Point project will not only help to fulfil a basic need in children's lives, but will also be a force that unites the community through a collective effort to construct a safe haven for children in the community. The successful construction of a Care Point will serve as a much needed building block for a sustainable peace in the community by breathing hope and purpose into the lives of the community's children, and inspiring other residents to actively participate in this goal. Ultimately by actively dealing with some of the root causes of conflict in Mgidza, the purpose of the project is to create more peaceful and sustainable conditions by investing in children's future and their potential to transform a despairing community into one where they will one day thrive.