

Hlau Hlau School Update

Many thanks to the APTA National Board, the local chapters, the corporate members and all of the individual members that continue to support Hlau Hlau School located in a rural township near White River, South Africa. I would like to update everyone on what has been going on at the school since Nancy Decker-Davidson, Suzanne Bigelow, Jeanne Wellington, Virginia Dionisio, Patrick Siebel and I visited the school last May.

I am proud to announce that the Allan Tyrcha Hlau Hlau Trust has been officially set-up in South Africa. The money gathered in the Trust is to be used solely for the benefit of the children and aged in the rural area of Hlau Hlau & Zwelilita. The trust is administered by Ethne Cameron, Thandi XXX, head mistress, and the executive Board of Hlau Hlau Primary School.

The good news is that this school is a true success story. The school has gone from a dysfunctional school with an uninspired staff, in a run down building with broken windows and an old photo copy machine used to copy lessons from the one lesson book shared by the teachers, to a fully functional school with several classroom buildings, a library full of books, and a very dedicated and energized staff. Hlau Hlau Primary School has a vegetable garden where they grow their own vegetables to help support their hot meal program. The school feeds all of their students one hot meal a day (for some children the only meal they eat). The school also has a wonderful choir and a football team (soccer). Many things have been donated to the school including the books for the library and the soccer equipment but it has been the sheer will and hard work of the staff that has turned Hlau Hlau Primary School into a community school the whole community can be proud of. I am proud to say that the donations made to the Allan Tyrcha Memorial fund by the APTA members and friends and family played a small but significant role in this success story. As many of you already know the original funds collected were spent to buy clothes for the orphans at the school. The day each child was presented with their individual package of new clothing (underwear, socks, shoes, shirts, & track suits) the surrounding community turned out to celebrate with the school. They were overwhelmed by the fact the strangers cared enough to clothe their orphans. They have learned what it means to care. Additional funds were also used to provide "care packages of food" for the orphans during school holidays. Now Thandi has learned how to negotiate with the Department of Education to obtain some of the things they need for the school. So much has been accomplished in a relatively short amount of time with everyone coming together to achieve this worthwhile goal.

With the school functioning well, the administrators and executive board of the trust have turned their attention to another growing problem in their community, the number of orphans (due to HIV and Aides) attending Hlau Hlau Primary School is escalating at an alarming rate. There are currently 376 orphaned students of which 123 of them are living in deplorable conditions. The government has a foster care program in place, where they pay families a small sum to take in these orphans, but in an area where poverty runs rampant the inevitable happens whereby families agree to take in orphans, accept the government money and use it for their own families leaving the orphans to again fend for themselves. Unfortunately the government does not sufficiently monitor this program so many of these orphans have no safe place to live and no food to eat.

The board would like to tackle this problem head on, they would like to build a children's village, a safe and loving place for these children to live and be cared for while they are attending school.

The Chief of the surrounding area has allocated a piece of land for this project and the money they are raising now will go towards building the housing for the children. They would like to build several housing units with 10-12 children per house. They would then employ house mothers to look after the children and make sure their basic needs; food, clothing, and shelter are met as well as provide a loving and nurturing environment for these children to grow up in.

The building fund, thanks to a very generous donation from one of Ethne's friends, who donated a Christmas gift of \$20,000.00 is off to a great start. We would like to continue to grow this fund so that the board can break ground on this urgently needed children's village as soon as possible. The truth is you do not have to be a "Bill Gates" to make an impact on peoples lives, small donations add up to big dollars and can really make a difference. Creative Safaris is a small company with a small budget however; we are pledging \$5.00 for every client we send to Africa this year and I challenge my fellow tour operators and travel agents to do the same. Together I think we can make the dream of a children's village for the children in the Hlau Hlau district a reality.

Thank you again to all the APTA Chapters and members that have given so generously to the Allan Tyrcha Memorial Fund to support the Hlau Hlau Primary School. I know that he would be honored to know that money for such an important and worthy cause was being raised in his name. The children of the world hold the future of this planet in their hands.

Carole Tyrcha
Creative Safaris

Students from Lion Park Elementary School make Friends with Hlau Hlau Primary School

Students from Lion Park Elementary school in Mt. Prospect IL (a suburb of Chicago) started corresponding with Hlau Hlau Primary school of Zwelitia, South Africa (a township near White River) this year. The students from Lion Park wrote letters and made a video about their school and their lives here and sent them to the students at Hlau Hlau who in turn wrote letters and drew pictures to send back to their new friends at Lion Park Elementary School. The children at Lion Park were so excited about their new friends in South Africa, and some of the lovely drawings they received, that they decided to raise some money to buy their new student friends at Hlau Hlau art supplies for the school. The Student Council and Mrs. Cheryl Tyrcha's Special Education Students decided to sell smencils (scented pencils) to the student body. The sale took place over 2 days during the students lunch period. The pencils came in different scents like root beer, chocolate, cherry, grape and tropical blast and sold for a dollar each. The sale was a great success as the students loved the smencils and they sold out quickly. One half of the cost of the pencils was sponsored by the student council, so more of the profits will go towards the art supplies. The students of Lion Park Elementary School raised approximately \$1000.00 which should buy a nice amount of paints and other art supplies for their new friends. The students are busy writing letters again, and they are looking forward to receiving new relpy letters and pictures painted by the students of Hlau Hlau with their new art supplies in the future.