

Recycled Materials Making a Difference

In the village of Ha Nyenye in Lesotho thirty women have a small enterprise, Ha Nyenye Crafts; they are sewing quilts from recycled material to earn a living and help people in the community who are sick. It was three years ago when I met 'M'e Matsepo for the first time; a widow with two children to rear she walked to St Luke's Mission with two very large bags of quilts to represent twelve women in her village. The women were collecting scraps of material taken to the local dump by the textile factories in Maputsoe. Each afternoon the group waited by the mountains of ash to pick among the pieces of material and carry them to their homes to cut up and hand sew them into colourful quilts. 'We work hard but we have no market for our products.'

Many of the women are grandmothers caring for orphaned and vulnerable children. It is estimated that one in four people in Lesotho are HIV positive thus leaving elderly people to try to earn a living in order to feed, cloth and send young children to school. The women work outside 'M'e Matsepo's home sitting on the ground chatting or singing while they work motivating each other; she has encouraged them to become involved and use the products they produce to provide for their families.

Action Lesotho, (formerly Twinning the Kingdoms) a Kerry based NGO, has supported the women to develop their work and have ordered quilts on a monthly basis to distribute to families in need in the area. The quilts have made their way to Ireland, France and America, each one crafted with care, hand made in the Lesotho sunshine. 'M'e Matsepo speaks for the group when she says, 'We are

so happy to have this opportunity, now thirty women can hold their heads up, buy a school uniform for their child and put bread on the table.'

Winter nights in Lesotho are very cold; it is a land locked and mountainous country surrounded by South Africa. People who are sick are often unable to easily access local clinics and can no longer work for a living thus leaving them without the means to purchase or grow food. Action Lesotho introduced the Malimpho Programme in December 2008 to ensure that food deliveries are made on a monthly basis to chronically sick adults and child headed families. Each person now has essential food to take with their medication, a quilt and mattress and outside their front door a keyhole garden where vegetables can be grown and easily accessed. Patients are recovering and are leaving the programme to work in the market or the local factories.



Leipolo

In April Malimpho clients will receive a pillow made by the Ha Ke Kokote group based in the village of Ha Maqele. Ha Ke Kokote are a group of ten people who are HIV positive. In order to generate the money they need for transport to get to clinics and hospitals they have started to make pillows filled with sponge off cuts from a shoe factory and are selling them to the local community. Action Lesotho are ensuring that groups are no longer scrambling for materials in the local dump but are collecting cloth and sponge from factories and delivering them to the two groups.

The Sesotho name Ha Ke Kokote symbolises HIV which crashes through the front door without knocking or an invitation. The group are determined that their small enterprise will make a difference to them and the community in which they live, their success encourages other people to recycle and sell.

If you would like more information about
Lesotho and the work being done there, please contact:
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