

by Eileen O'Leary

August, 2010

Lesotho NGOs...the battle against HIV/AIDS

On any one day in the Kingdom of Lesotho there are a battalion of NGOs fighting against the disease that is impacting a quarter of the population. In the village of Ha Khoabane, near Thaba Bosiu, the **Red Cross** has been running a community programme for the past six years. In this village, as in so many in Lesotho, the challenge is to support and protect the children whose parents have passed away as a result of AIDS. Puleng is 8 years old and attending school; her mother was HIV positive and died in childbirth. Since that time Puleng has been cared for by her Grandmother who is 79 years of age; 'I find it very hard to cope, I am old and I have to carry the child to the clinic when she gets sick in the mornings. I am on my own. I want to see her go to school, eat well, see a doctor and get proper clothes to dress her in. I don't feel good in my head. We need proper warmth in the winter; I can't get firewood for cooking and warming the home.'

There are now 280,000 orphaned children in Lesotho the Red Cross is assisting grandparents by ensuring that the children in their care are tested for the virus at the **Baylor Clinic**. Limpho's mother died when she was 4 years old; in 2006 she was taken by a Red Cross facilitator to be tested at Baylor; they provided counseling, testing and administered antiretroviral medication, a free service to all children in Lesotho. Initially one of the challenges for Limpho's grandmother was to support Limpho when she questioned the fact that her friends did not have to take tablets so why was her life different to theirs. Limpho is now enjoying her life; an eager student she wants to become a professional to take care of herself and also her grandmother. Limpho's grandmother was worried about taking care of a sick child but now she has hope, Limpho is up and running, this child helps herself.



Lipulo Pekane & grandchild

The Red Cross has provided essential food, clothes, seeds, school fees, and most importantly, friendship and support in the form of their outreach care worker.

Doctor Mohapi, Director of the **Baylor Clinic** says that the challenge her staff face is to treat more than 175 children a day; doctors and nurses do not leave the clinic until everyone who has arrived that day has been seen and staff are trained to spot children who need immediate attention. The clinic opened its doors in 2005 in Maseru and is a centre of excellence and now has satellite clinics in every district of Lesotho and outreach programmes that tackle nutrition, education and demonstration keyhole gardens.

Mphole is 14 years old and lives in Maputsoe; he has not been to school for a year as he has been too sick. On July the 28th he was taken to the Baylor Clinic in Leribe where he met Dr Vincent who initiated Mphole's treatment on ARVs. After just three weeks of medication Mphole has gained 2 kilograms in weight and is looking forward to getting back to his favourite subject, maths, with some home support. Baylor is a life line for children and families in Lesotho; children who appear to have no hope respond dramatically in a short period of time if they have access to medication, food and transportation to get to a clinic.

Action Lesotho is an Irish NGO working in the town of Maputsoe that focuses on facilitating programmes with local community groups to ensure that children and sick adults have access to food. After four years of working in the local villages with Basotho volunteers and a core Basotho staff team Action Lesotho are starting to see success stories emerge. Each weekend two community groups, Lepoqong in Ha Maputsoe and Loantsang in Ha Maqele provide hot meals for 160 children and every month a supply of food is distributed house to house to people who are too sick to access the Action Lesotho Community Development Centers. Progress is being made by the beneficiaries of the programmes; adults who were chronically sick are now able to work in local factories and support their children; children whose parents passed away are now cared for and are attending school like their friends and are receiving regular medication and clinical checkups. There are still many challenges for children at risk but Basotho in Maputsoe feel that they are making an impact. Working hand in hand with other NGOs as partners they are focused on becoming self reliant through food sustainability, HIV Peer Education and access to technology.



Lepekola & Reitumetse

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

Eileen O'Leary
087.921.3084
info@eileenoleary.com