



©2009 Eileen O'Leary

*Students outside their classroom*

# what partnership can achieve

by eileen o'leary

'through partnership...things are changing...and 2009 is bringing new possibilities for the children of Lesotho'



The month of July in Lesotho is cold. In the town of Maputsoe children make their way to school in temperatures of minus ten. Groups of children gather in the corner of the school yard and light a small fire to get some warmth before they make their way into their 'tent' classroom which has no heating or light. On a cold morning in July 2007 the children and teachers of St. Monica's Primary School found to their dismay that the storm during the night had brought a tree crashing down on top of the already frail army tent and seventy children were left without a classroom.

St. Monica's School houses 1,500 students and in 2007 the pupils and staff were without toilets or electricity. In the winter it was difficult for children to study in the cramped, cold and dark conditions. Many of the children in the school are without parents as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; the disease has cut through the lives of children decimating families and whole communities.

Before children arrive at St Monica's for the start of the school day they will have helped their grandmother with the morning jobs; fetching water, and kindling. For all children in Maputsoe access to school and getting an education is the step to alleviating poverty; for some children school attendance is not possible as they may be obliged to look after a small sibling, a sick grandmother, or if they are now the head of a family they are obliged to find work to support the other children through school. One thing is certain, the pupils of St Monica's want to be at school, are eager to learn and delight in being part of the school community.



*St. Monica's Tent Classroom*

Through the partnership and long term goals of the school and Twinning the Kingdoms, a small NGO in Tralee, County Kerry things are changing for the pupils of St. Monica's and 2009 is bringing new possibilities for staff and children alike. The story of the children and their tent classroom at St. Monica's was told to the family of the late Doctor Mangan in Killarney, County Kerry, a group of farmers on the Sheep's Head Peninsula in south west Cork and Irish Aid; all three groups decided to support the school financially and the goal was to create a suite of three classrooms to replace the tent so that in the winter of 2009 children would have classrooms with electricity and for the first time computers to use.

Theresa Lekhanya, Principal of St. Monica's recalls, 'Throughout the project we had a tremendous amount of help from the community; the parents showed their commitment by coming to work voluntarily on the site. Some of the parents are working in factories and were unable to come so they provided a small contribution so that we could employ labourers. 500-600 people made a financial contribution. In July it took 6-10 people a week to complete the foundations.' The project was managed by Twinning the Kingdoms Project Co-ordinator, Ntate Mankoe. Teachers, and parents alike carried rocks and unloaded blocks so that when the Irish volunteer builder/farmer team arrived in August 2008 the site was ready.



*Brian O'Donovan Volunteer from Tralee*

The classrooms were erected by men and women during the school term so there was tremendous excitement for the children while they watched the walls rise and a roof put on and indeed some surprises; according to the Principal of the school, 'Culturally it was quite a challenging experience for us to see women involved in the building process; it taught us a lot; that women should not shy away from this work, it was interesting to see and motivating. We felt that the process should take place while the children were in school because we have seen Bo Me' building the school.'

For the volunteers it was an incredible experience to be part of the community and to see the difference that their work will make to the lives of the children they met each day. For the teachers, 'We don't have enough words to express how this development will change the lives of the students. The installation of the electricity means that children will be able to learn; before they could not see and were unable to work. We feel that we will now be able to provide quality education and that the results will be better this year as a result of the building.'



*The new suite of classrooms*

Representatives of Doctor Mangan's family, Irish Aid and Twinning the Kingdoms will take great pleasure on April the 8<sup>th</sup> this year when The Minister of Education Hon. Dr. Mamphono Khaketla and Irish Ambassador Paddy Fay will officially launch the classrooms. The children, teachers, parents and grandmothers will all be there to celebrate a step forward and the start of long term friendships between the Kingdoms. The builders will be back in September to view their classrooms full of children, renew friendships and turn their skills to the construction of a Community Development Centre in the village of Ha Maqele. Linking in friendship is making things happen in Maputsoe.



*Ntate Peter Rantoo & Ntate Mankoe*

# what partnership can achieve

February, 2008