



Street Kids International Toronto based Program Officer responsible for Africa – Meredith Lee – reports on a recent trip to South Africa...

Johannesburg, South Africa, April 14, 2004

On my drive in from the Johannesburg airport the taxi driver and I discuss today's big event: the third free South African elections. He thinks it's time for a change and is looking to the Democratic Alliance party to offer some new leadership to the ANC option. While it is almost certain that the ANC will sweep the polls and that Thabo Mbeki will maintain the Presidential seat, the general feeling is that this next term will be a deciding one for the ANC.

This year marks ten years of democracy and yet it is clear that to make such a dramatic societal and systematic change as is happening here, is a lengthy process. Over 12 million people are HIV+ in this country, one where the incumbent President still holds the dissenting position that there is no known correlation between HIV and AIDS. The Anti-Retro Viral (ARV) roll out began on April 1 though and it has yet to be seen if the health care system is extensive enough to properly distribute these free medications. It is a huge undertaking as every person who is HIV+ has a right to receive the treatment. Stigma against those with HIV or even related to people who are living positively is very present here and so it is doubtful that all those who need the medication will actually come forward to receive it.

This backdrop is central to the work that Street Kids International is doing in this country. One of our most prominent partners, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) tries to confront such stigma, not only for those living with HIV but also for the many people who have sought refuge in South Africa. I spend a day working with three youth workers of CSV and we identify ways of building upon our work in the area of Street Health and also discuss the integration of the Street Business programming in their work with refugee women's groups. There is an interest in integrating the elements of SKI's materials into the Safe Schools program, a partnership with the federal Ministry of Education which focuses on bullying, violence and risky behaviour in schools.



Lusaka, Zambia, April 22, 2004

A week later and I am in Zambia. It is Dr. Kenneth Kaunda's 80th birthday this week and celebrations will include parades and musical performances. Dr. Kaunda held the position of first Prime Minister of Zambia from 1964-1991 and was central to supporting the freedom efforts of many neighbouring countries including South Africa's ANC when many of its members were exiled during the struggle.

This is a complex time to be on this continent; a time when two important celebrations are being feted and the tragic event of the Rwandan genocide remembered earlier this month. This week is an opportunity to do a mind meld of sorts with Edith Ng'oma our Zambian colleague who moved to the US last summer but who will increasingly take a lead role in our work in Zambia. Edith and I co-facilitate the follow up day to the Street Business Toolkit which was launched here 8 months ago. Eight youth workers and three youth join us for a day of reflecting how this tool has been integrated in their programs and lives, as well as look forward to future opportunities.

About 60% of the youth workers have worked hard at using the toolkit in their organization's programming; adopting it to further existing work, supporting vocational training, or beginning the training for interested youth. Over 300 youth have been trained as a result of this initial workshop, some who already have their own businesses and others who intend to start a business cooperative. The youth workers are also keen to integrate this into "mothers or caregivers" programming.

One of the youth who joins us is Josef Ngumbi or Uncle Joze as he likes to be called. He began his business of selling second hand clothes after he participated in the Street Business Toolkit training last year. After receiving some financial support from the Youth Skills Enterprise Initiative through the Red Cross, he saved enough money to pay tuition and put himself through mechanics school. Uncle Joze intends to raise the \$100US equivalent for the final exam fee to be written in June and has offered to be a role model for the Street Business Toolkit for other youth in Zambia.

Working with all of these dedicated people in countries which have withstood and continue to withstand such change inspires me. There is a keen sense to constantly push each other to do better, to be more connected, to work more collaboratively, to support youth through referrals and building linkages among organizations of the youth serving sector.

It truly feels that we are part of a process of working at the various levels of supporting youth, youth workers, critical change agents and existing organizations.