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THE UTHANDO PROJECT *Newsletter*

Newsletter August 2009

Dear Dollmakers and Friends,

Please note our happy new logo designed by Natalija Brunovs, our DVD film maker.

This is quite a long newsletter with so much to share about. It covers the peak point in our planning for 2009, although who knows what is still in store for us.



"Difficult Truths" Workshops

This newsletter will give you an idea of the exciting developments from our two "Difficult Truths" workshops in Fremantle and Midland, WA, held in July with our wonderful guest leaders from KwaZulu-Natal. Rachel Rozentals-Thresher, CEO, Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children, and Sibongile Mhize, psychologist staff member, stayed in Perth for two weeks to contribute their rich experiences of training the trainers in communities and other organisations. The main volunteer "staff" from Uthando have provided comment for this newsletter, which I'll include as a special supplement.

In the absolute nick of time, an email has come from Rachel in Pietermaritzburg, with her comments on the workshops.

Rachel RozentalsThresher writes:

UTHANDO - Love connects and changes us. What an incredible privilege to spend a few days of play and reflection through play with the wonderful groups of women in Australia. Such a joy to meet doll makers, therapists, educators, community social workers, mothers, sisters, grandmothers and friends. Here in KZN which is the epicentre of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in South Africa with a prevalence rate in our area of the province of a staggering 42% in a context of poverty - women, families and children face overwhelming challenges just to survive. Here when we play, we sing and laugh and cry and listen, and in the process find connections with ourselves and each other that help us remember what living feels like so we can



renew energies to fight for the rights of our children and families affected by the pandemic. In Australia likewise together we played, shared the creative joy of doll-making and story-telling, listened to each other, sang, laughed and cried. I experienced such connection, understanding and respect which made me feel at home and deeply connected to a sisterhood of love and generosity. Being together, listening to each other, sharing our learning, our experience and ourselves is what creates the magic that connects us in our own communities and over the seas. Your hospitality, generous support and genuine concern for the challenges faced by women and children in here KZN is humbling and inspiring. I learnt so much from each of you that strengthens my work and the work of RobS. As we continue to play we reconnect adults and children through dolls and play, so building up each other and our communities. Thankyou, thankyou, thankyou as you make dolls for your children, your families, your community and for us in KZN know that as the song goes " Love changes everything" - it really does.

Please go to see the photos in GALLERY and also to read our latest writings in ARTICLES.

This photo show the banners welcoming 300 people to our Open Day at Midland Junction Arts Centre, July11th.

Sewing and Knitting Patterns in Two New Posters

By having the financial and in kind support from the City of Swan, we published two posters to spread the Uthando Project concepts and to result in thousands more dolls being made. These are not ordinary posters, although they are designed to look great up on a wall, could be at home, in a school or library or take to show other groups and dollmakers. They are full of patterns.

POSTER ONE ; General Uthando Project poster

- The project's background and purposes are described.
- Patterns are provided for **knitting** dolls, hand puppets, balls and **sewing** dolls.
- Many photos of completed dolls for inspiration of face, hair and clothing details.
- Posters are large, A1 in size, double sided, in full colour. See photo which shows both front and back of the same poster.



POSTER TWO; South African Animals Knitted Patterns poster

- Knitting patterns for South African animals and glove puppets.
- Project's background and purpose.

The Animal Poster honours the work of Kay Daw who has designed and perfected animal dolls where a specific animal head (eg rhino) is knitted either with a basic doll's body or made into a glove puppet. If you are an experienced knitter this

poster is for you. Kay provides many hints and guidelines for authentic details. We feel that boys will love these animal heroes.

Both posters include glove puppets which Rachel said were enormously useful for RobS in interacting with children. So please make lots of these, different characters, different emotions.



The photo shows Kay Daw's animal knitting poster in the background behind Sibongile Mhkize and Rachel Rozentals-Thresher with her daughter Rebecca.

Poster Orders

Please order your copies of the posters from our Honorary Treasurer, Bill Mackintosh, 410 Mavis Cleaver Crt, Wootliff Way, Bentley, WA 6102. They cost \$5 each plus postage and packing \$2 to send one or two posters. \$4 for more. Cheques made out to Uthando Project Inc. For direct or internet banking, BSB 016341, Acct. No. 480303827, Uthando Project Inc. Please send your postal details to Bill. Write or email; billmack@comswest.net.au

General News

Everyone notices that our dolls get stronger and better. Thank you everyone. The new sewing pattern works very well, where the arms are part of the body and not needed to be sewn on later. Dolls arrive from all over Australia and we know that many are sent from the US, Scotland and the UK. We have 700 packed now ready towards our **Final Packing Day, October 7th** so that the dolls arrive before Christmas holidays. Please deliver yours before then.

Family Groups

The idea of family groups in their own bags for TREE is very successful. In a typical family group there are granny, grand-dad, mum, dad, older brother and sister, younger brother and sister, with a baby or two, an animal, two soft knitted balls, two hand puppets and a play cloth. If you contribute all or some of these, we can make up the missing pieces if needed. The carry bag is ideally in strong, light fabric, approx 50cms x 60cms, either way, finished with handles.

Future Events in WA

One of the wonderful results of our two workshops is that there are many events featuring Uthando dolls through partnerships with other organisations. Here are some. If you would like to participate, let us know.



Sat, Sept 12th: Lady Gowrie Centre dollmaking day. Contact Georgia 9293 2363. (away until Aug 28th)

Sept 20th; Children's Fiesta, Samson. Contact Lynne Jones 9384 8492

October 23 – 25th: City of Melville, Textile Arts Exhibition. Contact Georgia.

November 1st: City of Melville: Little Hands Day. Contact Iris Whitlock 9316 8393

November 15th: Mount Hawthorn Primary School. Contact Clare Harris 9242 3837
We steadily get requests to help various schools in dollmaking. This is core work for us. Very rewarding. Please let any schools you are in touch with to look at our website and ask for a visiting speaker or material help. When you read the Report on the Workshops which scrolls on from this newsletter, you will see that the Doll Kits are a very cheap and effective resource for schools and other groups.

Special Partnership Project

Soroptimists International, Fremantle Branch is working together with Meerilinga Parentlink using dollmaking and baby massage with mothers experiencing postnatal depression.

Dollmaker's Contacts

Georgina Noble is Joy Whitfield's partner in writing to dollmakers and maintaining our data base. Joy's health is not brilliant at the moment so please ring Georgina on 9291 9053. No email at the moment. We especially request anyone who prefers NOT to receive any newsletters **by mail** or by email to let Georgina or Joy (jwhitfi@inet.net.au) know. Access to emails is easier and cheaper. Thank you to all who have sent stamps. Georgia Efford will be overseas until August 29th. If your question is urgent please email Anne Bell, anne.bell@westnet.com.au

Summer Camp in Las Vegas

Julie Wignall, documentary film maker Las Vegas, has sent a truly wonderful report of 7 – 15 yr olds making happy Uthando dolls as part of their Summer Camp. It was so exciting to read her email that it is included in full in ARTICLES. It shows how individuals all over the world can use the Uthando material and apply it to their own situations. The dolls may be sent on to KZN or used locally where the need is great.

Final Payment to KZN Pledge 2009

Income from our workshops, sales of Uthando posters, DVDs, dollmaking kits, cards and generous donations have enabled us to finalise our annual pledge payment of \$27,000 to the work of the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children in Pietermaritzburg, KZN.

Many families, communities and children will benefit in this district from our contribution. RobS's specific expertise is internationally recognised and their staff now contribute through conference input and training to other countries. Continued healthy income from sales of our Uthando products will go towards next year's pledge.



RobS and Uthando Workshops

“Difficult Truths, being with children in times of stress, grief and loss”

Fremantle July 1 – 3, and Midland, 8 – 10
OPEN DAYS, July 4 and 11, 2009

To give you a real taste of these two effective, warm and productive workshops, many of the main volunteers were asked to contribute some of their thoughts on the process and results. Our Uthando Project Director, Dr Julie Stone fortunately was in Perth for the Midland workshop. It felt like the team had come together to see her in action with Rachel and Sibongile. Julie's writing of the workshop deserves full space, so it follows in the next section.

Julie opens with; “For children to reach their full potential, respectful and loving relationships

are an essential part of day to day life. Uthando exists to help facilitate such relationships for children living in all parts of the world. I believe Uthando enjoys the vitality and success it does because our intention is for respectful and loving relationships to provide the warp and weft of everything we do. At all levels of our grass roots organisation, relationships are what matter most.

Working in partnership with Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children, (RobS) has given our Australian-based project an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our vision, sense of value and contribution. This partnership has allowed Uthando participants to identify with and to support Rob's mission: “To bring hope and healing to bereaved children, their care-givers, families and other caring community members through therapeutic play interventions in communities affected by death and loss.”

Sibongile writes” working side-by-side with Julie, yourself (Georgia) and all the Uthando ladies will always be a highlight in my young career as a therapist. Your energy and enthusiasm is contagious. The exchanges we had linger on in my heart and mind.”

Lynne Jones of both Uthando and Soroptimists says, “Soroptimists International, Fremantle have shown great interest in the Uthando Project and are keen to see the concept introduced locally. To this end the club offered to assist with the organisation of the Fremantle workshop, facilitated by Rachel and Sibongile. With a small grant from the City of Fremantle , to cover the costs of the venue, the Soroptimists agreed to provide the food and the helpers to cater for the needs of the participants over the three days.



The workshops were extremely well-received by the sixteen participants, who represented a diverse range of professions. They brought experience from fields such as social/community services, Psychology, Occupational therapy and teaching. Rachel and Sibongile are certainly skilled presenters and kept the group's interest from the very start. Their energy was contagious and the three days flew by as we talked about games we had played as children, took part in new games and learned to tell stories using the dolls. An activity to demonstrate how it feels to 'not be listened to', left the group with much food for thought. The room may have been cold but there was definite warmth in the friendly, caring atmosphere created by Rachel and Sibongile.

Georgia, Lynne and Judy demonstrated their skills when assisting everyone with the dollmaking. The new dollmakers were more than impressed by their own achievements of character rich dolls.

Soroptimist, Sally Ryan attended each day in the role of "catering manager" and the kitchen ran like clockwork, thanks to Sally's expertise. Volunteer helpers, recruited from Soroptimists and Uthando dollmakers, arrived laden with slices for morning tea and soups, along with a variety of cheeses and breads, for lunch each day. Workshop participants and volunteers all enjoyed a wonderful opportunity for social interaction over tables of very tasty food.

Feedback from the group was very positive and SI Fremantle has met with some participants to talk about a way forward. Meerilinga- Parentlink, is working on a plan to use dollmaking with a group of mothers who are suffering from Post Natal Depression and Soroptimists will be considering the funding of the pilot programme. A couple of new dollmaking groups have already formed and SI Fremantle is hoping to work with another community organisation to develop a programme for Aboriginal or migrant women."

Lynne has edited the reflective evaluations from the Fremantle participants. See our website, go to ARTICLES.

Photo above shows the Fremantle workshop participants engaging with their dolls.

Photo below: Dr Lynne Priddis enjoying conversation with Sibongile Mhkize



Lynne Tognolini writes," Having been part of Uthando workshops in KwaZulu-Natal , Fremantle and Midland, I noted a great many similarities. Organizations or institutions represented all had the common purpose of children's welfare, which included early and primary education, physical and mental health and aspects of migrant, indigenous and foster care. The biggest difference with KZN lies with the intolerable burden of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

One great bonus was the opportunity to meet others, learn of their work, and form valuable networks where the learning and processes could be shared.

Another was the joy that the three day workshop provided in setting aside the pressures of daily work, to fully engage and focus on learning new skills in an interactive setting. Much fun was had in role-playing and examining "play" in a number of settings and situations. Dollmaking provided a connection to childhood memories and experiences.

Some participants are already setting up workshops. Sharing their knowledge, involving colleagues and friends in activities which will benefit children in their own communities or those in KwaZulu-Natal (or both), are some of the many anticipated outcomes of the workshops, and a pleasing acknowledgment of the purpose of the Uthando Project in promoting the well- being of all involved."

Judy Mackintosh says," The generosity of people. Whether it is the donation of lovingly made dolls by seniors, schoolchildren or groups in city or rural areas of both WA and KwaZulu-Natal . Or on many occasions the different contributions freely given, such as time, money,

meals, wools and fabric and the sharing of skills with others. All so valuable in this grass roots project.

People in the project say that it means they can help others as well as expanding their own creativity. Helping others, who compared with us, have "so little", especially children. Without a doubt, our ambassador dolls do all the talking. Our informative website really inspires people to become involved in the Uthando Project. Having sellable products that we can take to groups also generates immediate interest and involvement."

Anne Bell sorted out a chaos of dollmaking ingredients into hundreds of doll kits and also arranged the companionable Knitathons at both Open Days. " In this ready-to-go world the "Doll Kits" are a winner. Already there are makers out there using them. Sales of the kits @ \$4 contribute to our RobS pledge. Thanks and more thanks to all who continue to donate material, braid, elastic, scissors, cottons, beads needles, pins and the many bits that combine to make these kits. Keep up the good work, the collecting, the knitting and the sewing. Let us know if you can use a pile of kits for any workshops or groups."

Here is Anne's poem on the Knitathon.

Kindred spirits

Nice and noisy

Involved

Together to sing

Age and skills no barrier

Together to knit

Hearts full of love

DOLLS FOR KWAZULU NATAL

New connections

Clare Harris took on the role of being Shop Keeper at both Open Days. "The sales table was an exciting place to be. As well as our greeting cards and workbooks, we had the 'Goodness & Happiness' DVD for sale, and our two wonderful new posters (funded by the City of Swan) on display. Words like 'vibrant, inspiring, practical' hardly do those posters justice. (If you haven't seen them, get in touch - one shows sewn and knitted dolls, with patterns, tips, and photos, while the other celebrates Kay Daw's amazing knitted animals. People bought posters to take to craft groups, to send to friends, to put on display in classrooms, or just to admire. The doll kits (\$4 for a pattern, brown fabric, needle, thread, pins, scissors, fabrics, trim and filling) were another source of excitement. Children (and adults!) all took a loooooong time to choose just the right kit for their doll, and some immediately began making up their kits at the sewing table.



As a fundraising venture, we were delighted to raise around \$1000 at each venue, a great contribution to completing this year's pledge of \$27,000 to support the work of RobS. But the focus of sales isn't just the money - it's much more about the dollmaking. Every product is designed to lead to more dolls - or to raise awareness about the reality of life for children in HIV-AIDS affected communities, and the value of play in those 'difficult conversations' with children living through grief and loss."

Georgia Efford looks back on the most intensive Uthando preparation for 2009. "To have over 30 volunteers make our last day, the Open Day at Midland , full of fun for all, from babies to knitting octogenarians, shows how Uthando Project steals into hearts. Over 300

people dressed dolls, saw our DVD and a Zulu film made through TREE, knitted baby dolls, gasped and giggled at our doll exhibition, had a photo taken by Nat to express Love and Play and were enticed to the Sales table. A family day. A day filled with kindness. It was the icing on the cake of our Difficult Truths workshops. To bring Uthando Project home to enter children's lives in Australia, where life can also be tough, felt the timely thing to do. Each workshop participant gave of themselves. I was surprised to see that it had taken over 900 emails to create the full vision of having Rachel and Sibongile here. All was a delight, and a huge willingness to expand in to local and other international projects. Our dollmaking and packing steadies down and onwards. Our Uthando team shows that much can be accomplished by being together. Thank you beyond words."



We received most generous financial sponsorship from the City of Swan Community Development, WA AIDS Council, Soroptimists International, Fremantle Branch, City of Fremantle, Textile Traders. Thank you to all the organisations who trusted participants to enjoy themselves for three whole days! Results will tell.

Recent Thoughts on Uthando Project: Dr Julie Stone

For children to reach their full potential, respectful and loving relationships are an essential part of day to day life. Uthando exists to help facilitate such relationships for children living in all parts of the world. I believe Uthando enjoys the vitality and success it does because our intention is for respectful and loving relationships to provide the warp and weft of everything we do. At all levels of our grass roots organisation, relationships are what matter most.

Working in partnership with Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children

– Robs – has given our Australian-based project an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our vision, sense of value and contribution. This partnership has allowed Uthando participants to identify with and

to support Rob's mission: "To bring hope and healing to bereaved children, their care-givers, families and other caring community members through therapeutic play interventions in communities affected by death and loss."



The Uthando Project draws together a diverse group of volunteers who by working with Robs get to learn more about, and to make a contribution to, Kwa Zulu Natal's children, families and communities. Rachel Rosenthal-Thresher and her team have been our teachers and our guides. Our relationship with them and the work they do is our "insurance policy" that Uthando's contribution is not only heart warming but that it also helps facilitate children's healthy social and emotional development.

Uthando is delighted that Robs has incorporated doll making as one of the tools they use in their community work. The Australian women, who, at their own

expense, travelled to KZN in 2008 to co-facilitate a series of play for communication and doll making workshops, all say the experience has deepened their understanding and enriched their life. Rachel and Sibongile's recent visit to Western Australia offered an opportunity for many more of the Uthando family to get to know these remarkable women and the work they do. For me their visit was a precious time to delight in sharing with them and to deepen my personal and professional relationships with them.

As Uthando's Director and an infant, child and family psychiatrist, I am inspired by the way the Robs team has distilled all the knowledge and theory about children's developmental needs to their essence, and by the clarity and integrity with which they share their complex understanding with others. Rob's work has an elegant simplicity and their understanding is a rare gift so willingly shared with others.

In the wake of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the challenges facing children and families living in southern Africa are unprecedented in world history. The purity of Rob's intention and the passion of the teams' commitment continue to inspire Uthando's work. Robs day to day work midst the suffering and need of courageous yet over-burdened families and communities, inspires all involved with Uthando to remain connected to our responsibilities as members of the human. Rob's work and the hand of friendship and partnership they extend to us, enables us to keep our eyes open and helps us face the reality of the hardships. They also enable us to make a small contribution toward alleviating suffering and to, hopefully, enriching the future possibilities for our world's children.

Sadly, no society is without children who are hurt and confused by the experiences that they and their families find themselves in. Children's hurt and suffering is painful to think about. All too often it is brushed aside and dismissed in the hope that children "will not remember" or that "they are very resilient." I am very appreciate that the recent Fremantle and Midland workshops, organised by Georgia and her phenomenal team of shining people, created a space where some of the "difficult truths" of children's experience could be thought about and talked about.

The reflective conversations and the relationships forged during the creative workshops have the potential to become a powerful healing force within our society. Perhaps it was no surprise for anyone attending the workshop to share with our sisters from KZN and to recognise that our hopes and fears and dreams for our children are the same. This connection reminds us again that we must work together to care for the world's children. There is much to do here in Australia. Every conversation which widens our heart and brings a deeper appreciation, understanding or renewed commitment to engaging with children to create loving and respectful relationships with them, is one way to together build a world fit for our children and our children's children.

Julie Stone

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