

A letter from Pietermaritzburg, Kwa Zulu Natal,  
South Africa  
Friday, 23rd March 2007

Dear Doll Makers Everywhere

It is day 2 of our 2nd doll making workshop. I am sitting amidst the intense engagement and quiet talking of a group of Zulu women and Njabulo, the young man who is our interpreter and co-facilitator. They are all busy finishing their small doll, which they began yesterday. Irene and Georgia walk among them, admiring their work, answering their questions and assisting them in their task. There is an air of awed delight as their dolls take form, with faces and hair styles that rival those of the women working. Beads, earrings and other decoration are worked onto the garments with great panache. Some had never before held a needle and thread or a pair of scissors. They began with great trepidation. It was wonderful to see their anxiety fade away as the day unfolded and their creations took shape.

During this morning's reflection and sharing - after glorious singing and a prayer, a Zulu start to all gatherings - one woman, Irene M, is amazed she has already made a doll. She is looking forward to teaching others and is proud she will leave the workshop a teacher.

Our second workshop, with 14 participants, is in the urban setting of Pietermaritzburg, a university town and large city. Our first was in Nkandla, a deep rural area north of Eshowie, 4 hours drive from PMB. 19 women joined us in Nkandla. They will break into two smaller groups for days 3 and 4. We shared with great joy over the two days, and felt sad to leave them with Liesl, Rachel and Phethi who will lead the 3rd and 4th days of the training. Our colleagues from the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children, RSBSC or "Robs" for short, will build on the sense of possibility and achievement that was created along with the dolls in the first days of the training. Days 3 and 4 will add knowledge, experience and practical ideas to enable the women deepen their understanding of the importance and possibilities of play in a child's life, and this will enrich their work as volunteer family facilitators. Throughout this municipality of Nkandla the dolls will become an inspiration for expressive play and for strengthening the caregiver's communication and relationship with the child.

Tululiwe, one of the women at the Nkandla workshop, spends her days in a crèche with 48 pre-school children. There is only one doll at the crèche. She said the children always fight over it. She is thrilled to think that she and those she will teach will be able to create more dolls for the children to play with.

Councillor Zwelabo Zulu, the principal of the local high school and the Major of Nkandla, visited us on Wednesday, Human Rights Day and a public holiday in South Africa. He came to thank us for bringing skills and knowledge to his community where there is 93% unemployment and widespread poverty. We told him the women were enthusiastic, responsive and able students hungry for knowledge and opportunity. He made the commitment that they will continue to receive material support for their sewing. His community has already made a wholehearted commitment to Early Childhood Development. He fully understood and sincerely appreciated the ways in which the workshop will enrich the lives of the children and families in his

municipality.

Each workshop participant has been given a doll making kit. It is wonderfully equipped with all the essential tools for sewing and knitting. The kits are generously supplied, so those trained can share their tools with others. At the end of the day 2, each participant is given a further resource pack with a generous supply of donated material and fabric to make many more dolls.

The Uthando women in Perth sent gifts for the workshop women: a tote bag to hold their tools, each very different, some hand painted, and all stunning and very beautiful. Others made needle cases, which have also been used to be the teacher's sewing stitch sampler. Joy Whitfield's niece sent cakes of soap she had made and perfumed with essential oils. The women are deeply appreciative. We can already see them wearing their distinctive bags with a sense of pride. The kits were funded by Irish Aid, as part of a CINDI project, which RSBSC is leading and with whom Uthando is working in partnership.

The chance to share news from our training workshop in KZN, is the most exciting writing assignment I have ever had. Your spirit and good wishes are strongly felt in the room by the three of us. Thank you for your support of Uthando's work. The dolls you created for the children of KZN are the most eloquent teachers about play. Each workshop began with a "lucky dip" to greet one of the dolls who travelled with us. Every participant was instantly enchanted by their magic and they brought the first peals of laughter into both groups.

Your generous spirits and loving hearts resonate with our sense of being your ambassadors here in KZN. Thank you Dear Friends and Supporters everywhere.

With love  
Julie, Georgia & Irene.

Additional Information from Joy Whitfield  
Doll Makers please note the next shipment of dolls to KwaZulu Natal will be packed on 13th April. Please deliver any completed dolls etc to 2 Healey Place, Gooseberry Hill, Calico and Ivy Shop, Mosman Park or email Joy Whitfield or Georgia Efford georgial@iinet.net.au

PLEASE NOTE CHANGE OF EMAIL ADDRESS  
From 1st April - new email address for Joy Whitfield - Communicator will be joywhitfield@bigpond.com  
Many thanks  
Joy Whitfield - Communicator - Uthando Doll Project

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