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THE UTHANDO PROJECT *Newsletter*

November 2008 newsletter with photos

Dear Friends and Dollmakers,

We are drawing this dollmaking year to a close, although there will be one more Christmas Newsletter after the dolls have been sent.

Each one of us will be richer with doll experiences irrespective of perhaps being a primary school student or a skilled senior craftswoman or one of the nine Australian women who travelled to KwaZulu-Natal in October for Dollmaking and Play Awareness Workshops. Read on further in to this newsletter for some of these stories.

As a grass roots movement of thousands of people coming together in active dollmaking for the emotional benefits of the children in KZN, let us all thank each other for all the creativity and resourcefulness it has taken each person to get their finished dolls in to the children's ready hands. Thank you everyone. The dolls are doing their work after being greeted happily.

Thank you too for all who have contributed money or bought our greeting cards so that

our ongoing support of the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Services for Children in KZN enables them to extend their powerful work. Please continue to order the cards. They are our bread and butter. Likewise thank you for the fundraising which covers freight costs.

Our new treasurer is

Bill Mackintosh, 410 Mavis Cleaver Crt, Wootliff Way, Bentley, WA 6102.

Please record his name and address for any cheques or direct credits you may wish to send.

Please make cheques out to Uthando Project Inc as we are now an incorporated body.

DATE FOR NEXT SHIPMENT

We hope to finish packing 2008 dolls by Friday 5th December. If possible, please get them to

2 Healey Place, Gooseberry Hill, WA 6076 by that date. We are again indebted to the Darling Range Rotary Club for allowing our dolls to be combined with their container of school furniture being sent to schools in KZN. It is a huge contribution and a saving to Uthando Project.

CHRISTMAS LUNCHEON WITH PAM PICKEN, DIRECTOR, TREE, KZN

Uthando Project is immensely grateful that over the last eighteen months TREE, (Training Resources in Early Education) has distributed our dolls using its network over the whole of KZN to crèches, pre-primary centres and to other organisations working with young

November 2008 newsletter with photos



children. We are delighted that on Wednesday 17th December, Pam Picken, director of TREE, has offered to give us a presentation on the work they do. We wish that everyone could come. It is ideal timing for a party! So please bring a plate to share for lunch and arrive at 11am at Georgia's house, 2 Healey Place, Gooseberry Hill. We expect to be finished by 2.30. RSVP 08 9293 2363. (For our final weekend in KZN at the famous Umfolozi wildlife reserve, Pam was our happy driver, a guide who was on the lookout for anything that walked or flew and recognised the pale rock on the side of the dry river bed as a real lioness.)

Just for the record, over 18,000 dolls have been sent from Australia in four years' of our existence, plus an estimated 2000 from other countries.

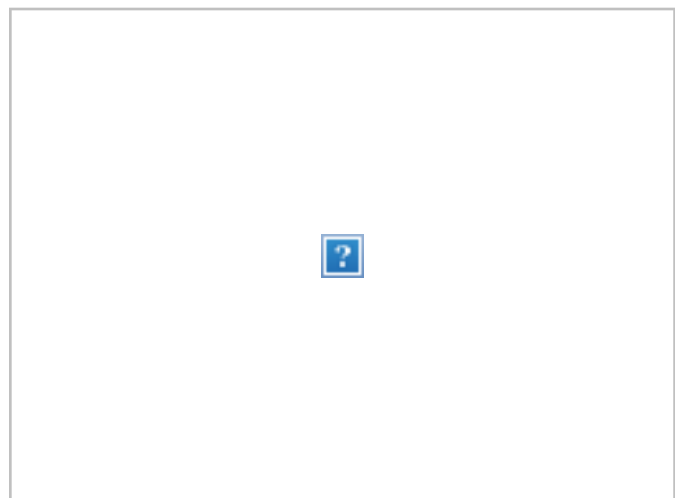
DOLLMAKING AND PLAY AWARENESS WORKSHOPS IN KZN

We thought we'd join together to share some of our thoughts and memories of the dollmaking trip. Over 130 Zulu women (2 men) were overjoyed with their finished dolls. This is an understatement. Creativity unleashed is more like it. When your daily life is encumbered with the responsibilities added to by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, to have two or three days to yourself to have fun and discover old games and new skills, it is a precious experience. We were all honoured and deeply moved to be catalysts in this. After our first workshop (Oct 16 and 17) focalized by RobS staff in Pietermaritzburg, our group divided, so that we had three workshops running: here are some thoughts from these:

IRENE GILL on the Centocow workshop

Our Centocow workshop was absolutely delightful on many grounds;

- The readiness of the women to be fully engaged in learning to make a doll and be involved in the RobS training.
- The spontaneous and beautiful singing which rose and echoed around the hall.
- And the wonderful moments when chairs were pushed aside, rhythmic clapping commenced and women rose to their feet and danced those wonderful Zulu dances, many reminding them of happier days of their youth.



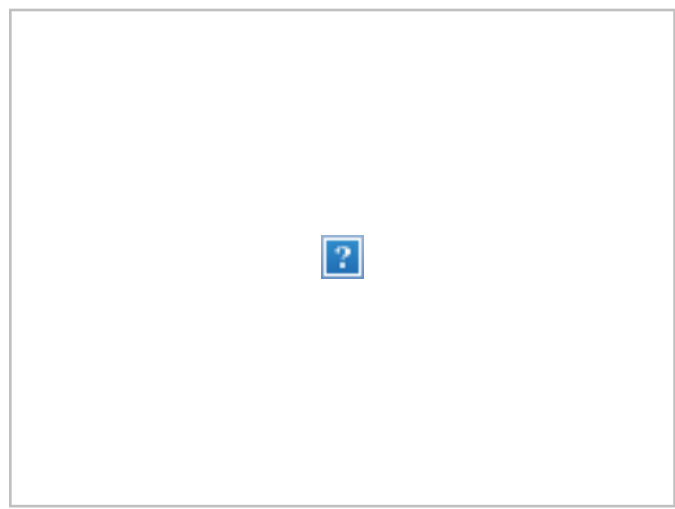
Centocow is an old Polish Catholic Mission station established by priests from Krakow in the mid 1800's, and it's quite a surprise when one drives past villages of rondavels in the deep rural area of KZN near the Eastern Cape border, to round a corner and come face to face with an amazing scene of a beautiful cathedral, associated buildings and a large rural hospital.

Twenty six women had come in from an area of 30 km radius, to stay together for a week of learning, sharing and rest from the ongoing strain and sadness of current-day life in South Africa. Their evening accommodation was lit by candlelight but that didn't stop an amazing amount of homework being done. And by the end of the week many new friendships had been formed along with lasting memories.

ANNE BELL on the Copesville women's workshop:

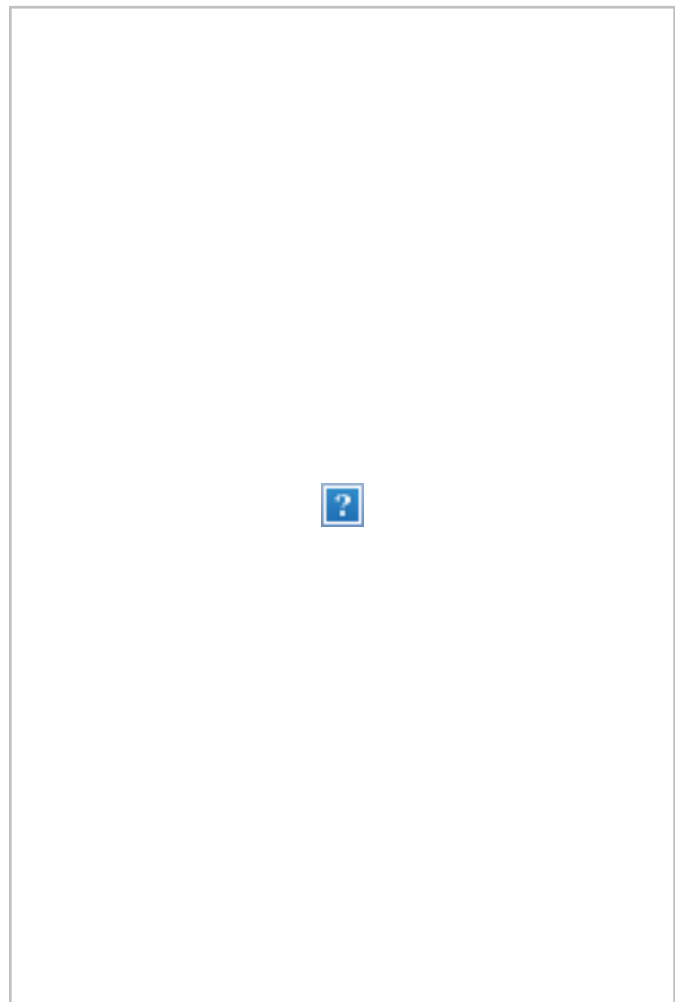
As I look through my pictures of the women from the Copesville group making dolls I am struck by the strength of these women – mostly Grandmas. The strength to tend to families, the strength to advise, the strength to keep their loved ones as safe as their environment will let them and the strength in the belief that the children are the future and every breath we they breathe must be to help make them stronger to be able to face whatever the future brings – and lastly the sheer joy and music they gave to Lynne and to me when making dolls.

Each doll had a name and a baby and each had a home to go to. The women left with heads high, hearts full and memories that will take a long, long, long time to erase – if ever.



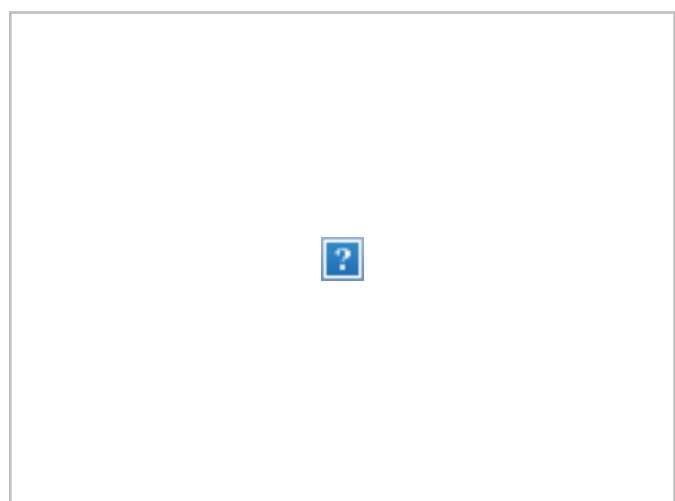
CLARE HARRIS on the TREE workshop in Durban

Georgia and I worked with wonderful RobS facilitator Sbongile (Mary) and in one of the fun exercises she did, we all mimed what we'd done so far that morning. And what an insight that gave into the participants' lives – we saw who'd had to wake early to look after others, and realised that not one of them had had any breakfast beyond a hot drink (Sbongile quickly asked for the morning tea to be a little more substantial than a biscuit). One very successful aspect of the workshops was the decision not to use our standard pattern, but to show everyone how to tear out a pattern in folded newspaper themselves. This led to dolls of amazing shapes and proportions – elegant long-legged dolls, dolls with wide hips, dolls with huge bodies and tiny arms. Everyone was so happy with the doll they had designed and created – it had something of them in it.



LYNNE TOGNOLINI on a visit to two of the Sizabantwana schools:

(This is a group of 15 schools where two staff members from each one have met twice a month over 11 years under the guidance of KZN uni psychology lecturer, Carol Mitchell.. They share with and support each other and through discussion and referrals to help the children who are in need of special attention) As a recently retired teacher, I found a real connection with two primary schools when I accompanied Dr Julie Stone and film-maker Nataljia Brunovs on their visit to Ndabenhla and Fezokuhle schools.



The first school of over 800 students included a pre-primary class where the principal introduced me to 54 students and their teacher in one small room. They were busily engaged in painting, block construction, imaginative play in the doll corner and rote learning. Students' activity books were stacked in piles along one wall in readiness for what we would call 'parents 'week', a time when teacher and parent discuss a child's progress and development. However I was informed that most of the children in this class were bereft of parents and were living with grandmothers or foster carers.

Soon it was time for outside play, the boys bursting through the door to the grassed area where they engaged in boisterous activity, while the girls gathered to jump rope and play together in a circle. These are the lucky ones whose carers can afford to pay the necessary small fee required to attend school. Out in the surrounding landscape which seemed to stretch endlessly in all directions were the small and crowded homes of the many thousands denied this opportunity.

The second school was Fezokuhle where 1400 primary students were enrolled.

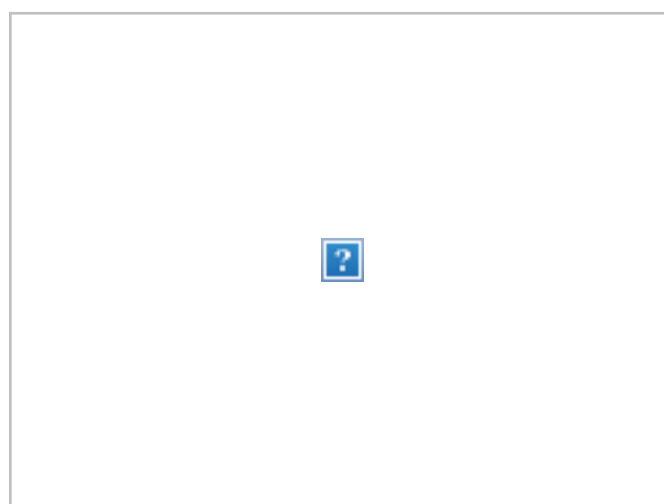
Unbelievable! The principal, introduced as 'Knowledge', proudly informed of his school's many achievements. Here all students receive a hot meal every day, the only meal for many. The visit culminated in an inspirational performance by the talented choir of senior boys and girls. I left with the lasting impression that such confidence and pride in achievement at primary school level must lead on to further education and greater hope for the future of these more fortunate students.

GEORGIA EFFORD on the knitting morning at the Dlokwakhe Primary School

It looked like a morning of productive chaos with 15 upper primary students, staff representatives from three schools, the inspiring school principal, Nozipho, plus the elderly woman who helped in the Permaculture school food garden and six Uthando women. In a very short time we each had a table full to pass on the skills of designing your own kitted doll, how to stuff, sew up and do the face and hair, how to knit finger puppets, hand puppets and knit a soft

ball for play while Irene lifted the knitting game from plain squares to the intricacies of purl, rib, increasing and decreasing. Not only had the concrete hall floor been assiduously shined by the students, but we were honoured by a real reception. Two rows of school girls in orange traditional pleated skirts with vertical lines of beads and with wristlets and anklets stood proudly making a guard of honour for us. One lead singer began the dance and the troupe performed with intricate footwork, bending and singing. Two girl drummers accompanied them for the second dance. The early morning light, the open view from the school, the rapt attention from all the students made this a very moving experience. You know we came to KZN in all humility to support the work of the communities there.

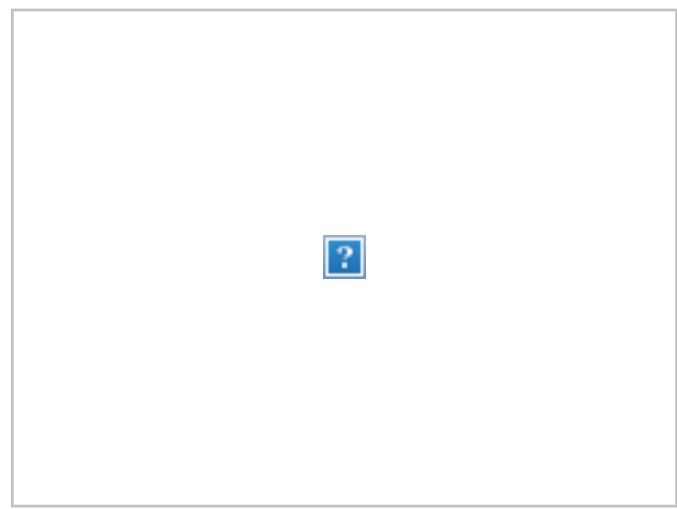
Sometimes it is hard to recognize that we are feted and appreciated at such an occasion. We can't wait to get reports on the dolls which the children will invent. To make full use of our time, each of the students will teach their own class and the teachers from the other schools will share the materials and take the dollmaking ideas back to their own schools.



ISABELLA COWIN on a visit to two TREE crèches at Cato Manor, Durban

Our visit to Cato Manor was enlightening as well as a little emotional. The first school we visited there were these beautiful children so excited to see us, greeted us with beaming smiles, and performed a lively concert showing their wonderful skills with their voice and dance. In the playground they were jumping up and down with delight and breaking into song and dance around us.

In the second school the children were younger and a lot more reserved. It consisted of a crèche for babies and children up to the age of six. The teachers at both schools were very dedicated women doing their best with the resources available to them. Probably for many hard reasons, one of the teachers was too ill to stand up, but she gracefully held the children's attention with a story, told from the floor. My one wish is that by the time these children reach adulthood the future will be a lot brighter.

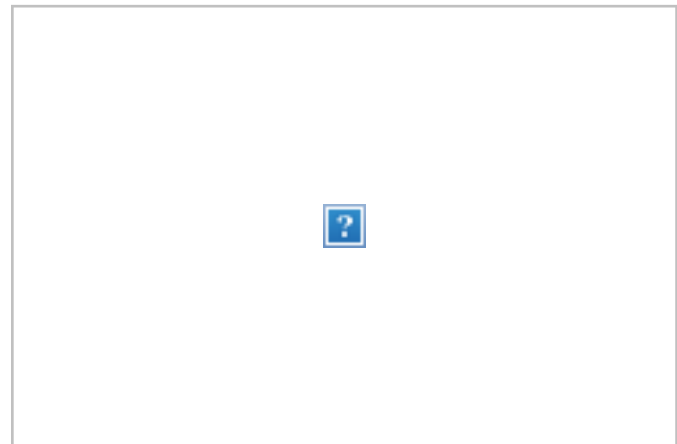


Threads throughout the three weeks were Nat's filming and the connection shared with our co-facilitators, the RobS staff.

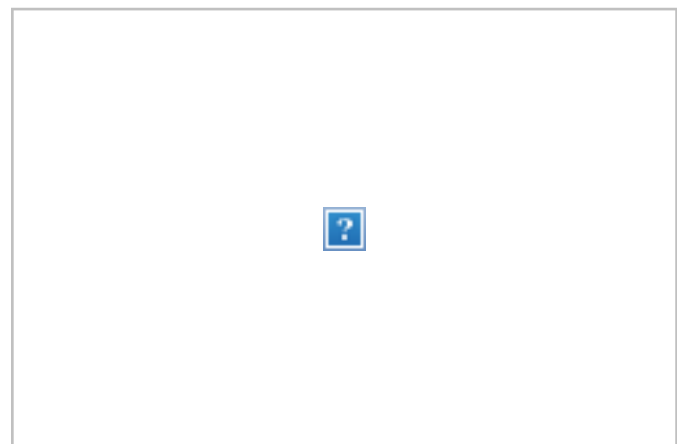
NATALIJA BRUNOV'S on the experience of filming:

This experience of making a documentary in a somewhat whirlwind tour of Kwa Zulu Natal is to remain with me as one of the highlights of my life.

I came to South Africa with an idea of what this film might be about, ie: the significance of play in the face of adversity. However the real story finds you through all the conversations and observations you make upon arrival. We had so few words between us (myself and the Zulu people), but the messages were clear about the tragedies, the hope and the power of their joy and dignity. The film began to take a beautiful shape, driven by song and the hearts of the people we met.



Julie and I knew when we were on the right path because things would synchronistically open up for us, like a flock of birds flying over the house as we filmed, or a woman shining her gum boots for a day of road work and most delightfully, a rainbow appearing above a city street shot, and gone again once the camera was off. It could be pure luck, but sometimes we felt like we were being helped to make the messages even more magical than we could have hoped for.



JULIE STONE ON ROBS: The Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children

Uthando is blessed to have RobS as one of our lead partners in KZN. Over the years, through a reflective and thoughtful distillation of the collective wisdom about children's healthy development, RobS have developed very clear practice guidelines. They work in a variety of ways and settings to achieve their 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.”

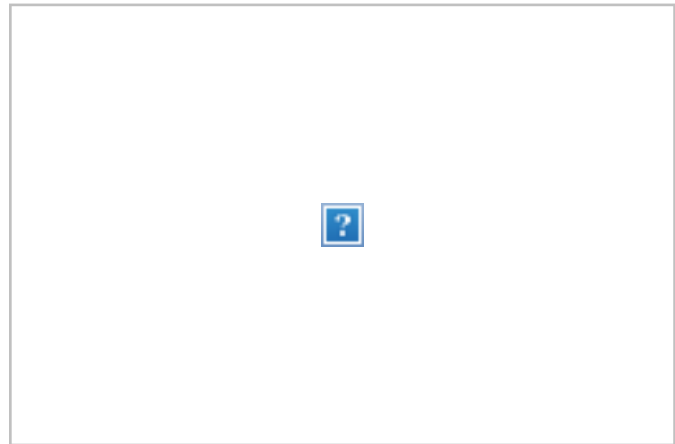
During this visit, members of the RobS team co-facilitated the doll making workshops with the Uthando women. Nat & I were fortunate to be invited to meet a group of gogos (grandmothers) who had been part of a “carers’ support program” and a group of children who had been part of a 10-week group, run at Copesville primary school, for children

whose parents have died. Each time I have the opportunity to observe and share work conducted by any member of the RobS team I am impressed by their loving respectfulness for everyone, the clarity of their communication, their ability to engage others and their spirit of play.



To mark the end of the work Uthando and RobS had achieved together, RobS invited us to lunch and an afternoon of reflection about the doll making workshops. It was a welcome opportunity for us to share with one another. We also made some tentative plans for our future collaboration.

RobS is a small team who work very hard to achieve a great deal. Their work is intense and very important. All those who so generously contribute to Uthando in so many different ways can feel proud that Uthando made the commitment to pay the salary of one of the RobS team for three years. Our commitment meant the team could expand from 8 to 9, which, in turn, means many more children and families can be supported. Thank you Uthando doll makers and Uthando supporters. And Rachel who leads the small and dynamic RobS team, offers her thanks for your support too.

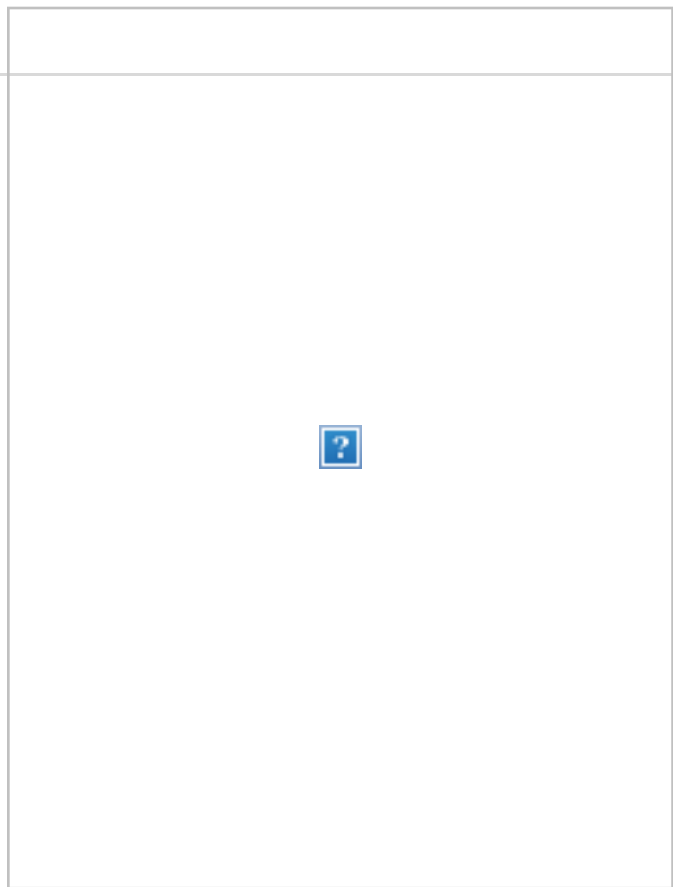


These photos all give a hint of the richness of our time there.

If you like, please go to the following links or attachments for

1. Natalija Brunov’s Youtube DVD (One minute 40 seconds) begins with clearing the graves. <http://www.youtube.com/natbrunovs>
2. The project we visited at Ladysmith is called Mpilonhle Project. It was a follow up on one of our dollmakers taught last year. The flow on was remarkable. Judy Mackintosh will write about this many layered visit on her return from India. We would like to include it in our Christmas Newsletter once the dolls have been sent off. Check out their website www.mpilonhle.givengain.org
3. An article on the Uthando Project/RobS workshops was published in The Witness, Pietermaritzburg. [http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global\[_id\]=15598](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global[_id]=15598)
4. December 1st is World AIDS Day, but the collection date is Friday Nov 28th. For WA go to the website for the AIDS Council, www.waaid.com

We have two documents about Children Living within an HIV/AIDS environment in South Africa presented by Pam Picken. They will soon be posted on our website. www.uthandoproject.org



This November Newsletter will finish with a lovely summing up, descriptive page written in KZN by Julie Stone. Sunday, 26th October 2008

Dear Dollmakers and Friends

The day has been warm and bright. As the evening draws near, so countless women across Kwa Zulu Natal – and throughout southern Africa – carry water from the nearest pump and light the fire to warm the house and to cook food, if they are fortunate to have some. Neither the families who live in Copesville, 10km from the centre of Pietermaritzburg, nor those who live in Centocow, some 200km to the east, have any electricity to dispel the gathering darkness.

It is a beautiful season in Kwa Zulu Natal. The jacarandas are in full bloom and their purple blooms sing throughout the landscape. The weather has been unseasonably cool. Yesterday mist and rain settled across the valleys and by 3pm the fog was thickening. However, the weather has not dampened the spirit of the group of doll makers who have been busy co-facilitating a series of doll-making and play workshops, with friends and colleagues from Robs [Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children].

The days have been full and busy. Soon after arriving in KZN, six of the group, taught 36 women to make a doll over two days, as part of a story-telling workshop. This week the group of nine spread themselves more widely in the province. Georgia and Clare worked together with a group in Durban. Anne and Lynne shared with a group of go-gos from Copesville. These women travelled to Pietermaritzburg in the mini-bus “taxi” each morning to join the workshop. Irene, Judith and Isabella co-facilitated a group of TREE family facilitators, at a workshop in Centocow. Because of the distances to travel and the paucity of transport options, most of these women stayed at the Centocow mission through out the week, and a joyful holiday-like mood prevailed. In each workshop the women were receptive and responsive students and they all created at least one beautiful doll with brightly coloured outfits and set off home with materials to teach others.

Thankyou again to those of you who contributed resources for the workshops. Your generosity has been thankfully received. The women delighted in the variety and richness of the materials offered to them to work with, as their dolls declare. Many of the women expressed their relief at being with such patient and encouraging teachers, and after three days together the relationships formed were precious and fond. It seemed that mutual appreciation, love and sadness was part of each goodbye.

Early in the week Julie travelled to Capetown with Rachel Rozenthal-Thresher, the Director of Robs, to participate in a small UNICEF sponsored workshop on the use of the creative arts in psychosocial support for children. It was a good experience, and Julie was delighted when Rachel passed around a bag of Uthando created dolls at the beginning of her presentation on Robs’ work. The presentation was inspired and inspiring, and Julie felt humbled and honoured by Uthando’s partnership with the thoughtful and effective work that Rachel and her team are doing. As Rachel spoke, many of the 35 participants interacted with the doll sitting on their knee. The central message of the meeting was of the need to widen the reach of programs that offer children an opportunity to develop their reflective capacity and to express their innate creativity.

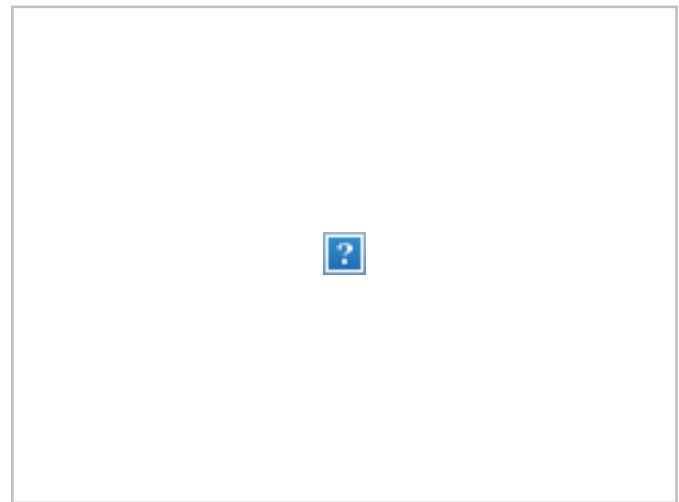
Nat has been busy filming. She has some wonderfully rich and evocative footage, and we have been excited by the snippets she has shared with us. We know you are going to be moved and inspired by the film she is making for us.

This morning Nat & Julie waved to Anne, Clare, Georgia, Irene, Isabella, Judy & Lynne as they set off with our friend Mbongi Mtshali to spend some time in the Northern Drakensburg Mountains. A well earned rest after the busy days of teaching. They will be back in Pietermaritzburg on Monday evening, ready for a further teaching at a CINDI extravaganza of doll making on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Each of us is gathering stories to share with you on our return.

With love from us all Anne, Clare, Georgia, Irene, Isabella, Judith, Julie, Lynne & Nat .
And from Joy, our communicator and the crew in Gooseberry Hill.

We can't resist adding one more photo The quality of the education at Cato Manor will contribute to the future of a better South Africa.



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