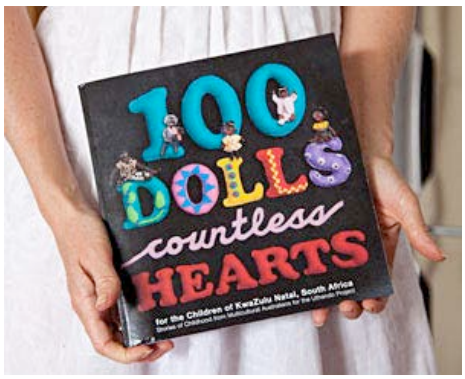
# UTHANDO PROJECT: A BRIEF HISTORY, 2011-2013

## 2011




**Book:** A major focus this year was the exhibition and book "100 Dolls, Countless Hearts", as a way to explain the many levels of the Uthando Project and to celebrate dolls, dollmakers and communities here and in KwaZulu Natal.
Over the first half of the year, 20 mini team leaders each 'managed' five other dollmakers, many of whom were born overseas, in making dolls which reflected their own cultural background and represented our major doll patterns, eg our Uthando Classic Sewn doll on our poster and website. These dolls were featured in a huge travelling exhibition in Western Australia and later in South Africa and in our book, designed by Natalija Brunovs, the film maker for our "Goodness and Happiness" DVD.

Interviews with the dollmakers about their childhood experiences were included, to reinforce our understanding of our common humanity, while our partner NGO's in KwaZulu-Natal contributed pictures and descriptions of their work with children and communities. This humanitarian book also was balanced by practical doll patterns.

The book was stunning and was sold in a number of bookshops or craft shops, at festivals, and through our website.

**Events:** In March, three thousand visitors attended the **Minang Mainitch Indigenous Weaving Festival** in Albany, in regional Western Australia, where the Yorga Moorditj weavers passed on ideas with international weavers for folk to weave clothing for Uthando dolls. This work, which had limited time, required further restoration by local dollmakers and had the positive effect of a new independent Uthando Albany group forming under the leadership of Julie Fletcher. This Albany group in 2012 became a Uthando lighthouse which opened the space for other groups to form across Australia. This represents an important step for any organization, namely decentralization and grassroots empowerment. It is part of the maturing process.

In October, the "100 Dolls, Countless Hearts" exhibition was featured at the **Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting**, (CHOGM) held outside the Art Gallery In central Perth, where we had hundreds of children joining us for a 'dress a doll' activity. The exhibition then travelled to the **Western Australian Museum, Albany** where many local dollmakers volunteered and settled into a good relationship with Uthando.

We also participated again at one of our favourite events, the **Kalamunda Zigzag festival** (where children dressed up 100 'naked' dolls to go to Africa), **Augusta River Festival**, and

**Gooseberry Hill Garden Party** with the extra enjoyment of the African songs by the Akapella Munda.

**Dolls:** We continued to supply dolls to dlalanathi; TREE; Lifeline and Rape Crisis Centres; Sizabantwana Primary Schools; Cerebral Palsy Association; The Africa Centre, Mtubatuba, for the Amagugu Project headed by Tamsen Rochat, senior psychologist, working with on her project where HIV+ mothers disclose their status to one of their children, using our dolls as part of the process. Dolls were also sent to the children in the cancer and blood borne diseases wards at the Albert Luthuli Hospital in Durban.

The concept of **Freight Partners,** who would pay for postage of one bag of dolls, twice a year, linking to one of our partner NGOs was also successfully promoted. Freight Partners appreciated being linked with a particular NGO in KwaZulu Natal with whom they felt affiliated.

**Courses:** We ran courses at **Midland Womens' Health Care Place** for staff and young mothers, **City of Stirling** on a special project called "Untold Stories" with Aboriginal Australian women and similarly in **Brockman Community House** in Beechboro. With the generous support of the City of Melville, the City of Stirling, the City of Swan and Roebourne Prison, Uthando deepened its involvement with Aboriginal women and girls and with migrant and refugee women from all around the world.

**Dollmaking:** A wide range of schools and Seniors' and Community Groups made dolls, not just in the metro area, but in country towns such as Waroona. Schools supply 20% of the dolls shipped to Durban. Many schools take Uthando to their heart and include making a doll as part of their syllabus. Lynne Tognolini (schools coordinator) visits many Western Australian schools and communicates with schools elsewhere, giving experienced instructions and encouragement so that the dolls meet with Uthando standards. (She was the Guest Speaker at the later 2013 Round Square international conference for inspired youth at Bunbury and still receives good feedback of follow-up actions across the South Asian – Australasian region.)

We became more specific in our requests, based on feedback from NGOs – for example asking dollmakers not to use glue anywhere on the doll, no clothing sewn to the doll's body and to avoid blue or 'stary' eyes. We appreciated more that the KZN children enjoyed the extra clothes in the dolls' shoulder bags and the doll wrap. Gradually the partnerships between the South African NGOs and Uthando were becoming closer and more responsive. We wanted to send the 'right' sort of doll.

**Kits and other items:** Our dollmaking kits continued to increase in popularity, with a welcome donation from the Fremantle Branch of Soroptimists International to cover brown fabric. They were sold to raise funds at our events. We promoted the idea of dollmakers making two dolls: 'One to Hold and One to Give', as the dolls made through these kits may not necessarily be given back to go on to KZN.

Another popular item was the South African knitted animals designed and made by Kay Daw. It is always rewarding for dollmakers who design new patterns to see how other dollmakers interpret them.

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**2012**

*One panel*.

Our '**100 Dolls Countless Hearts'** exhibition went to **Midland Junction Arts Centre** in February, then at the **Western Australian Museum, Albany** and at the **Mirrabooka Shopping Centre** in March. This exhibition consisted of two 3 metre panels, nearly 2 metres high, with 70 dolls stitched to the colourful landscape background and with 30 spectacular dolls on individual stands separate from the hanging. The top of the hanging had enlargements of portraits from the book, and there were 6 large vertical panels with KwaZulu Natal images with accompanying words. It was designed from the start to be flexible and transportable, rather necessary for the flight to Cape Town.

In April the exhibition travelled to **Cape Town, South Africa** for the 13th World Congress of the World Association for Infant Mental Health, accompanied by Dr Julie Stone and Georgia Efford. Julie, Nandisa Tushini and Rachel Rozentals-Thresher (CEO of dlalanathi) jointly presented one of the first workshops at the conference (700 international delegates).

Their presentation "Across Countries, Cultures and Language" met with great acclaim as being one of the best of the whole conference!

Meanwhile Georgia had conversations with all those who visited our colourful display, pictured here. Julie and Georgia also met with the former CEO of TREE, Pam Picken, and later with Bertha Magoge, the new Director, as well as making contact with many other agencies and supporters. This meeting with Bertha enabled two Uthando women in 2013 to facilitate a dollmaking training with TREE staff, with Bertha becoming the star dollmaker!

Through Robyn Hemmens of dlalanathi and connected with a related craft organisation, Zimele at Winterton, Georgia had the privilege of training two expert craftswomen in doll making, the idea being that they would teach the other women in their cooperative. The outcome of this is unknown, but in 2013, because of this experience, the group of nine Australian Uthando women visiting KZN were prepared with materials and intent to facilitate a group of 20 and another of 70 rural women in simple dollmaking. Then out of that, came eight women to participate in the three day workshop with dlalanthi and Uthando in Pietermaritzburg. You can see how, within an environment of trust between Uthando and the NGOs, each stage builds up on the previous work, deepening and clarifying how we can best serve.

**Events:** Before the exhibition left for Australia, a **Garden Party** at Georgia's home in Gooseberry Hill had raised much-needed funds. Later in the year, **Ken and Di Cunningham's Uthando Garden Party** was a highlight. Despite a thunderous day, we had more visitors than expected. This was a major fundraising and awareness-raising event.

We continued to participate in other community events such as the **Local Government Community Development Conference at Fremantle**; the **Zigzag Festival in Kalamunda and** the **Christmas Fair, Baptist Church, Maida Vale** and the **Craft and Wood Show, Claremont Showgrounds** where the sale of kits was fantastic. In spite of torrential rain on one occasion, and baking heat on another, all these were very successful. Our **Kadajiny Koort** workshops culminated in another partnership with Aboriginal dollmakers from Narrogin to present a combined doll and stories exhibition in the Perth Town Hall over four days of **Reconciliation Week**, funded by the really supportive Department of Indigenous Affairs.

**Groups: Uthando dollmakers** met independently both locally and elsewhere, with two groups, Dover and Cygnet, in Tasmania, and The Meeting Place in Fremantle. Dolls were supplied from other groups, such as the Rostrata Community Craft Group, Forrestfield Community Craft Group and Kalamunda Uniting Church Women's group. Albany groups ran their own workshops, and, like Bunbury, did their own fundraising.

**Workshops:** A large number of schools participated, and we ran workshops with local councils: **City of Cockburn and City of Melville in Willagee**. **Sandra Maher** led two Indigenous and non-Indigenous dollmaking workshop series and was a wonderful example of an independent roving Uthando ambassador addressing issues within her region. **City of**

**Stirling (with ASeTTS)** and **City of Perth** also supported workshops for Ethiopian (Oromo) migrant women and for the general public.

**2013**

Our first major area of focus this year was the **Australian Uthando Dollmakers' trip to KwaZulu Natal** in May, (our last visit was in 2008.)

Nine self funded volunteers (from Perth, regional WA, and Victoria) visited KwaZulu Natal and met over 250 people, many Zulu, of widely differing backgrounds, and all wanting a more solid future for their children. We also had **the first ever joint meeting of our five partner non-government organisations** (NGOs), held at Lifeline in Pietermaritzburg. This was a crucial meeting with every one learning how others made use of the dolls. It helped Uthando clarify what type of dolls best suited each NGO and to see the depth and power of their work.

*Photo above; Chris from Albany WA at one of four workshop tables. Photo below, Creche children enjoying the lengths of red fabric brought from Victoria by Julie Timewell. Photo at bottom of page shows Primary School children so proud of making their small dolls.*

Our dollmaking workshops, held jointly with dlalanathi, took place in Pietermaritzberg and elsewhere. We had taken with us 600 kits and 200 spectacular bags, enabling us to provide one for every participant over three weeks.

With dlalanathi, we ran workshops designed to bring to the surface each person's own childhood and lifetime experiences through their own story, traditional stories, games and dollmaking. We made smaller handsized dolls, to gain the principles of making a larger doll, with 20 participants at Centacow, at, and with 70 at self-help group Zimele. At Swayimane we saw our travelling exhibition of "100 Dolls, Countless Hearts" again.

Volunteers were able to visit the Durban TREE centre, to see well set up environment for extensive training in early childhood education.

Two Uthando volunteers facilitated a two-session dollmaking class with many of the staff, and later, visited a crèche to see the distribution of the dolls. The children were in raptures, investigating their own doll, the extra clothes and anything in the shoulder bags.

Several of the Australian team also visited two of the Sizabantwana primary schools for first hand experience of daily life and to teach (even the very young ones) how to make a small doll.

**Activities in Australia:** The **major 2013 fundraiser** was an **Uthando Exhibition at the Zigzag Gallery,** in October**.** This featured artists' dolls, typical Uthando dolls and group-made dolls, for sale, as well as donated, very popular, textile works. We rarely had offered dolls for sale, so this was a special opportunity. (Dolls intended for KZN are never sold, and all dolls made by school students are sent to KZN.) Many visitors and metropolitan groups, who have contributed dolls over the years, attended the mini workshops, or simply viewed the exhibition, which was hugely successful (with great support from the Shire of Kalamunda). We raised $15,000 over the 10 days.

**Local Government partnership activities** included **Belmont Dollmaking workshops**, funded by the City of Belmont and **City of Wanneroo Dollmaking and Communication workshop for Community Development**.

**The satellite groups** continued to grow and strengthen, with Albany and Bunbury groups both raising the funds for their dolls' freight and for general income. Groups continued to meet in Leederville and Mosman Park and at Gooseberry Hill, The Meeting Place, and Sorrento, as well as the Tightknit World group in Victoria.

**Planning** began for our 10th anniversary event: "Celebrate a Decade of Dollmaking" with a Uthando Retreat at Serpentine Retreat Centre, Western Australia, to be held in May 16 – 18, 2014 with Bertha Magoge, Director, TREE, Durban, and Rachel Rozentals-Thresher, CEO of dlalanathi, Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu Natal as our guests. A number of other events for the public, for those involved in early childhood care and in community service are being planned for their visit as well.