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THE UTHANDO PROJECT *Newsletter*

December 2008

Happy Christmas and happy holidays to all Dollmakers and Friends of Uthando Project,

Our dollmaking year is coming to a close with a feeling of fulfilment and contribution to children, carers and a wide spectrum of dollmakers. We especially want to thank all the school students who have in the words of one of them "I took ages to make this doll. I hope you like it". Thank you to Lynne Tognolini who has given wise and enthusiastic guidance to countless schools and acknowledged their contribution through school certificates. Thank you to the hundreds of dollmakers over the country, and across the oceans, who have made each doll an individual creation. It is true that no two dolls are identical. Our hands may remember our own childhoods or we can imagine the tiny fingers which will tickle or stroke the wool, or the lace, or the funny button. Thank you to the Uthando groups which are forming independently of the team in Gooseberry Hill. Groups may be found in Western Australia and Victoria, Australia, the UK and USA. You give purpose and community to many women (and the rare man). Thank you, in fact, to all the men who put up with small brown people inhabiting the sofa, along with bits and pieces, the phantasmagoria, of the doll making world on the dining table. Thank you to Lis Hansen who manages the greeting card sales, and to Bill Mackintosh, our new Treasurer. Bill has worked daily on our legal and financial responsibilities so that now we are an incorporated body. We finish the year having joyfully completed our pledge of \$25,000 to the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Services for Children in KZN. Thank you to each person who has bought cards or given donations or has managed our Uthando Project table at various events in 2008. Thank you to Joy Whitfield, who lets nothing stop her from expressing her heartfelt thanks via email and post to all who contribute in one way or another and in managing our data base. Thank you to all the media journalists and presenters who have interviewed, written articles enabling Uthando Project to be more widely known. No energy is wasted. Results may come from unexpected quarters. Thank you to film maker Natalija Brunovs who came to KZN with the Australian team. Her DVD will be forthcoming on the lives of the children of KwaZulu-Natal and our dolls. We will let you know when it is ready for distribution. Thank you to our Director, Dr Julie Stone who is always a resource for our expression of our principles... to contribute to the child, the carer and the community. We could add that she is the mirror who reflects the joy of the dollmakers out to the wider world and specifically to the people of KwaZulu-Natal. And a big thank you to the wonderfully consistent and effective Gooseberry Hill team, the Friday mob, who come each week to pack and mend and embroider and knit and cook and plan and do what ever the project asks of them.

We received a very happy photo of all the staff at the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Services for Children in Pietermaritzburg. It included a new "doll", a baby born to Angie while the Australian group were there. I am sorry that the format of the photo doesn't suit

this email programme. Please check out the new section on our website, www.uthandoproject.org ARTICLES, for good documents from RobS and TREE. These ARTICLES give more detail of their work than we can include in newsletters.

There are a handful of requests arising out of our work in 2008.

STAMPS. We now post out more than 200 newsletters to dollmakers, usually 4 or 5 times a year. For those receiving newsletters by post, may we request an optional donation of a batch of 55 cent stamps from you? Please post them to **Joy Whitfield, 7 Ford Rd, Lesmurdie 6076** . On the other hand, if you have access to an email address, please email it to Joy, on jwhitfi@inet.net.au as each email costs only 1 cent. You can work out the savings here and it fits with our “grass roots” approach of self reliance.

SCHOOLS’ DOLLMAKING. It is always delightful and moving to see the ways children make dolls for other children. However it takes literally weeks of repair work from the teams in Perth strengthening the sewing on of the hair or the floppy necks, remaking clothes that are stitched on to the doll’s body or re-sewing seams or removing button eyes, commercial eyes or glued on bits. We feel a bit desperate sometimes that there are still 5 bags of “school dolls” to be fixed up. How can this extra work be avoided? How can quality control be better? We realise that in schools there is a crowded curriculum with short lesson times and that it really is amazing that there are such fabulous results. We would never want to inhibit the choosing of the Uthando Project as an exciting and worthwhile project for the students. The compassion shown by the students outweighs any criticism. There is probably no blue print for school dollmaking. Extra skills guidance could be sought from parents or others in the school community. The Dollmakers’ Workbook on our website is full of ways to make a long lasting doll. This is simply a request for stronger dolls and their clothing. The dolls will then endure many hours, years, of play. No one wants the child to be disappointed if the hair pulls off or they can’t play “dress ups”.

NEW DESIGN FOR 2009: Soon we will put on our website a simple, all purpose, doll pattern with the arms incorporated into the body. It uses up a bit more fabric, but the gain is in a stronger doll.

We suggest using brown polar fleece for the body as giving more flexible limbs. Reinforcement of the neck doesn’t seem essential with polar fleece, depending probably on the weight of hair style.

By all means continue to use felt knowing that it is cost effective, doesn’t require “turning”, but it does become scruffy with play.

COST OF OVERSEAS POSTAGE FOR DOLLS: One dollmaker passed on a very good idea of selling a couple of her Uthando dolls to be able to buy more wool for knitting many more dolls. This idea of raising funds by selling your African style dolls to local people could be used to cover the cost of postage which may be a deterrent for some dollmakers. Playing with an Uthando doll has the potential of contributing to international peace.

KNITTER’S WORKBOOK FOR 2009: Please send any Uthando appropriate knitting patterns which you have designed or evolved yourself for human or animal dolls to Joy. Contact details above.

PAM PICKEN, DIRECTOR, TREE (KZN)

Thirty dollmakers gathered at Georgia's house on Wed 17th December to be enthralled by Pam's presentation about the work of TREE and the life of people in KZN deeply affected by poverty, lack of employment opportunities and the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

We want to share some notes from Pam's talk as Training and Resources in Early Education (TREE) is our partner in KZN. It is through TREE's wide network of early childhood education trainees, family and community support training that our dolls are distributed. There are TREE training centres throughout KZN from the most remote areas to the dense populations around Durban (5 million!). Families are devastated by poverty, cultural restrictions, disease and distance from medical support. Men are often absent in communities due to work being available



only in mining or other industries. Often mothers are the breadwinner leaving their children to be reared by aged grannies (gogos) or aunties. There is a culture of violence, and even mistrust of neighbours sometimes making communal play groups dangerous. One of TREE's responses to this situation is training Family Play Facilitators who take a pack of toys to individual families and engage the children and their carer in play. Underlying the whole work is the principle of PLAY BEING ESSENTIAL for the healthy development of children and that ongoing interaction with a caring adult is likewise essential. Many of the carers have endured difficult childhoods themselves. Unexpressed grief and loss is everywhere, in all generations, brought up to be "strong". Violence and lack of respect for life is rife when these emotions have no outlet.

One of Pam's clear points is that the description "orphan" is misleading. Our dolls, and TREE's work, go to ALL CHILDREN. Orphanages are the absolutely last resort for the loving upbringing of children. Orphanages may be a scam for disreputable people taking government grants, and the word orphan is used to extract donor funding internationally. Orphans become a "commodity" to be marketed. Some children described as orphans still may have one parent. Many children not described as orphans may not have access to a parent. Many children care for sick and dying parents. Many households have a child as the "head".



Zulu households are widely scattered, although there may be a "community centre". This is why the regular home visits of the Family Play facilitators are such a good response to the present situation.

The photo shows a group of TREE trainees and staff being introduced to the Uthando dolls to use in their work.

Photo by Mehreen Docrat, TREE.

TREE'S PURPOSE:

TREE'S PURPOSE: The word "psycho social" needs to be demystified. TREE's trainers and facilitators are not clinical psychologists. They are trained in the simple things of listening to the child, of asking sensitive questions and responding sensitively, of building resilience in the child and the carer, of talking with the child about death and loss, not leaving the child in limbo over the unexplained absence of mother. Especially TREE works closely WITHIN the community, to build up local support for children. The overall statistic of only 15 % of young children coming in touch with any trained/structured early education shows that an enormous number of children arrive at primary school never having seen a book or a pencil before. TREE is finding that the "buddy" system where older primary school children play with the younger ones is working really well for both ages. They gain in leadership and enjoyment of games such that they don't want to stop buddying when they turn 12 years, when the community fears the incidence of child rape.

RESPONSES TO UTHANDO DOLLS:

Pam spoke of the loving impact which Uthando dolls have on the families and the children. Vicky Sikhakhane, TREE staff, says "They look at them in awe. They look at every detail. Cuddle, have for their own, dress, undress, talk to, hug, cry with. Emotional bonding." Vicky appreciates the training in fine motor skills with child friendly fastenings which buttons, wrapping, Velcro give the child.

The packing of the dolls into suitable age groups makes distribution clear.

Family groups of dolls help real life discussions.

More sophisticated dolls go to older children in the families.

The receiver of the dolls signs for them as a record of where the dolls are distributed.

Special dolls are welcome for the children with disabilities, who are often ignored in communities.



Photo of carer and child with new doll is by Mehreen Docrat, TREE.

Also the photo of a child pondering the message on a doll in their creche.

VISITS BY UTHANDO DOLLMAKERS

Something we are not always aware of is the impact that our personal visits to KZN bring to the women, families and communities there. Building bridges of love, compassion and reality. Pam spoke of our dollmaking workshops with the gogos. Often they are depleted emotionally and haven't the energy to cope with young children. The few days of dollmaking are one of the highlights of their lives. To be seen as worthy of our attention and love can be lifechanging.



HIV/AIDS PANDEMIC

: When Pam was asked whether there was any hope for the future, she replied that the example of the way in which Botswana (admittedly a smaller population) has tackled HIV/AIDS with government policies, especially anti-corruption and education, which have brought down the incidence of HIV/AIDS dramatically. For her, it is how to impact the South African's government attitude to even recognise the needs of the very young. Less than 5% of HIV+ children receive medical help. The stigma of being identified as HIV+ is so horrendous to community and the individual and so limiting to effective treatment (if any), that even the lives of children are unnecessarily at risk because the mothers would face the stigma of disclosure.

RELATIONS WITH DONORS (INTERNATIONAL FUNDING BODIES):

Pam spoke of the often unrealistic demands that the international donors make of their recipients. How does one get forms filled in across raging rivers where communities have no electricity or postal services? Also of the generosity of South African companies, who often exceed the 1% of profits given through benevolent grants.

We are indebted to Pam for her talk. It takes a deeply committed, sensitive woman to do what she does.

With gratitude for all the beautiful, lovefilled dolls of 2008.

We resume Fri 16th Jan, Please keep on delivering the dolls to 2 Healey Place,
Gooseberry Hill WA 6076

Georgia, Joy and the team.

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