

20 Years of Doll Magic

22nd – 24th March 2024

Canning Bridge Community Space, Mt Pleasant WA



Uthando Exhibition Birthday Celebration

Saturday 23rd March 2024 Presentation

Lynne Jones: Chairperson

Welcome everyone to this celebration of 20 years of the Uthando Project. My name is Lynne Jones and I'm one of 7 Board members privileged to be overseeing this very special organisation.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and waterways on which we live, work and play and pay my respects to the elders, past present and emerging. I extend that respect to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

I would like to acknowledge and welcome the very talented Margaret Sutton who has so generously donated her works to the Uthando Project. This is not the first time this huge-hearted woman has shared her stunning art works with us and we are eternally grateful for the funds she has helped raise in this way in the past.

Margaret, on behalf of the Board members, the network of volunteers that makes up Uthando, our partners and the children of KwaZulu Natal, thank you. We are truly grateful for your thoughtful generosity in donating so many pieces, not only the wall hangings but also for going the extra mile and making the beautiful bags and scarves.

We are honoured to have with us today Dr Julie Stone and Georgia Efford, founders of the Uthando Project, women of vision who took on a challenge and created a grass roots organisation that has brought smiles to thousands of children and their carers in the AIDS affected regions of Kwa Zulu Natal.

Welcome also to Irene Swan from Tasmania. Irene was one of the first doll makers working with Georgia and on moving to Tasmania worked tirelessly to introduce Uthando to some of the regional and more remote areas of that state.

I won't go into the history of Uthando because Georgia and Julie can give a better account of that.

As a board it is our job is to ensure the project is managed according to rules and regulations that govern Australian charities. I would like to thank the Board members for their hard work, their skills, time and dedication. In addition, I would like to recognise Peter Langoullant, Julie's husband as he was instrumental in Uthando Project gaining Deductible Gift Recipient status.

We managed to weather the storm of the pandemic and associated high costs of shipping and we are managing to send 2 shipments a year, each with approximately 3000 dolls plus additional toys and sewing kits. We keep the stripey bags businesses going.

Our biggest asset is the wonderful network of volunteers who make dolls or accessories for the dolls. We probably don't know everyone in this network - many anonymous donations of dolls arrive on our doorsteps or in our mailbox in time for each shipment.

Uthando is about social and emotional wellbeing of the children and their carers in South Africa. In today's world there is also a great need for programmes supporting the social and emotional health and wellbeing of many here in Australia, particularly the older members of our communities. I believe that being a part of Uthando Project provides opportunities for combatting social isolation and improving mental health and wellbeing. Being part of a

doll making group means coming together to share skills and ideas, share stories, celebrate good times and offer support to those going through difficult times. It brings purpose, an opportunity to help others and use valuable skills, exercising hands and minds, not to mention the jaw and the laughter muscles.

Uthando means love and caring and we try to show this for all our volunteers. We hold workshops and retreats – times for meeting up with others and making dolls or toys, putting together our fabulous sewing kits or simply coming along to share the company and the cake.

But we don't lose sight of the fact that hundreds of thousands of children in a corner of the world we might never see, need to know they are loved and cared for and that love is transferred through the precious doll they will receive through one of our wonderful partners.

Each of our partners is caught up in the endless processes of grant applications for funding to carry out their valuable work; how marvelous it would be if they didn't have to do that. Uthando provides a resource for which they don't have to jump through hoops and I know that the dolls, given willingly and with no strings attached are highly valued, form the basis of much of their work and bring loving connections with those working so tirelessly to assist some of the most vulnerable children in the world.

In some way, you are all a part of the web that forms the roots of this grass roots organisation. You feed the roots with your generosity and you keep it growing.

Something as simple as a doll or a ball can be life changing for children who have so few personal possessions. Thank you all for your support.

Dr Julie Stone: Founder Uthando Project

What a thrill and an honour it is to be here with you all today to celebrate Uthando's 20th Birthday.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we celebrate today – the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation. I pay my respects to their elders past and present. And I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects and offer my thanks to Noongar elders and to the elders of all nations and all peoples and to thank them for their endeavours to care for our children and our planet.

Among those are the elders of the Uthando Project here in Australia, other parts of the world, and our partner organisations in Kwa-Zulu Natal. Those pioneers who cleared, and created the path, paving the way to bring us to this glorious birthday celebration. A heartfelt thanks to each of them.

My heart is full to overflowing with awe and gratitude and love. So many luminous souls have, and continue to, contributed to Uthando in so many ways.

Julie Wignall, an eco-warrior based in the US, has been a part of Uthando for many years. She wrote to us in 2009 telling us how Uthando inspired her to discover the power and potency of making dolls with a multi-racial group of children, 7 to 15, on a summer camp. She wrote that her planned workshop was scheduled for two days and it turned in to a full week -- offering a spring board into important conversations about skin colour, wealth and poverty, the lottery of where we are born, along with some important learnings for some of the adults about their gender assumptions, which their experience with these campers proved ill-informed. Julie exclaimed with delight, "the workshop became the highlight experience of summer camp".

I introduce Julie and her story because it is illustrative of the wonderful ways that members of the Uthando Family have found to utilise the creative act of making a doll. While Perth has always been, and is, Uthando's heartland, others from the international community have been inspired to contribute to Uthando's mission and vision to "make a doll to make a difference" for the children of the world.

On a very early visit to KZN, Georgia and I met with a group of men and women, parents and grandparents, who worked for the Africa Centre in Mtubatuba in KZN up near border with Mozambique. We told them about Uthando and gave each of them dolls for the children in their care. One man, a father of three girls, beamed at us as he accepted the dolls for his daughters, and said as he took the dolls into his hands, he felt like he was shaking hands with the rest of the world. So, it has been for me – shaking hands and then holding and joining hearts.

Julie Wignall has recently published a book [The Extraordinary Power of Fireflies: How to Shine your Light Brighter and Transform the World](#). She presents a series of stories about different stellar projects and organisations in her book and includes Uthando as one of them. Julie explains "A firefly is someone who sees past the way things are to the way things can be and takes action to bring about a better reality... each transforms the world for the better in a unique way."

As I stand midst all you luminous and wondrous fireflies today, I feel joy. Thank you. I feel such awe and gratitude for all those who have been part of Uthando Project over the years. Thank you for your creativity, your generosity, your

love for others and your concern for, and commitment to, our world's children. I know no more important or sacred duty than caring for our world's children.

The idea for Uthando came from an experience I shared with my husband Pete on my very first visit to South Africa in 2004. This idea, arose through the eye, heart and mind opening, painful and unforgettable experience of being introduced to the first child I met in Kwa Zulu Natal. A little girl of 7 in Hlabisa Hospital. She had AIDS dementia and was dying. The introduction was made by Tamsen Rochat, then a newly graduated clinical psychologist, and Hlabisa Hospital's first, now Professor of International Child Development at Manchester University. Tamsen began some courageous work for the children who were seen at Hlabisa Hospital, with her Zulu nursing colleague Dudu Kumulo. For the very first time I really understood what it meant to not have enough resources. They had none. Tamsen had furnished the playroom with old toys she could scrounge, among them was a tatty, stark white cloth doll dressed in a kilt and a tam o' Shanta. She told us it broke her heart because all the children wanted to take this doll home, because most of them had never had a doll of their own.

Following this experience, I brought home to Perth the seed of an idea. Georgia Efford, fabulous woman and gardener she is, was the one who nurtured the seed in its fragile beginnings and gathered many willing gardens to join her in encouraging and enabling the idea and the garden to grow. Like all healthy organisms, Uthando grew, developed, reproduced, evolved and was be transplanted to different contexts to evolve in splendid ways of their own... the original Uthando garden is now many gardens, tended and nurtured by many.

Over the last 20 years Uthando has played an important role in widening my heart, my mind and my experience: I have learned and gained so much and met many who hold a precious place in my heart. Thank you to you all. Uthando has been one of greatest gifts and joys in my life. Thank you, may the light of Uthando's fireflies continue to shine and inspire others.

Georgia Efford: Founder, Uthando Project

Shared from a doll making workshop "Difficult Truths" in 2009.

TELL YOUR DOLL'S STORY:

What is your dolls name? *Pumzile.*

She comes from? *Mbali.*

She dreams of: *Healthy and accomplished grandchildren.*

She feels loved when? *Her grandchildren cooperate with each other and go to school.*

Her difficult truth is...? *She has buried 4 children and each died from AIDS. Over a 1000 per day in Southern Africa.*

Her difficult truth teaches her... *If she is not alone, life goes on. The grandchildren need her to care for herself so she can continue to care for and nurture them.*

And she is able to use her unique characteristics of....

- *Capacity for community connecting.*
- *Clarify - for seeing the situation for what it is.*
- *Determination and hope for a future.*

That enables her to do something amazing which is..... Nurture the 12 children in her care – they know they are loved and are part of a family.

Uthando Story: The Four W's

Retold by Georgia Efford

Womb

Once upon a time, there was a loving grandmother who had birthed four beautiful children.

The Wound

And when the children were all grown and had children of their own, a sickness fell upon the land. Many people died, including all the loving grandmother's children.

The Work

With a broken heart and after crying an ocean of tears, the grandmother looked around and saw her twelve beautiful grandchildren. Their hearts too were broken... And they all needed to be cared for. So although she had imagined her life was done with caring for children, she gathered the children together and slowly day by day, meal by meal, much shared joy and shared sadness later, they created a new family.

The Wholeness

A family where grandmother was honoured and her four children (the parents of the twelve children) were honoured and they lived together in love and safety...and the children grew into healthy and accomplished young people who worked to mitigate the devastating effects of the sickness.

From Uthando Project Partners



Happy 20th Birthday to our amazing partner and friend UTHANDO DOLLS!

Here's to TWO decades of spreading joy and love through your commitment to making BEAUTIFUL dolls for the most vulnerable children in KZN, South Africa, it is truly a remarkable milestone.

Your kindness and generosity over the years have brought smiles to countless faces, filling hearts with warmth and hope. Each doll you create is a symbol of comfort and companionship, woven with love.

Thank you for your unwavering commitment to brightening the lives of our children, for every stitch and every moment poured into making these dolls special. Your impact reaches far beyond what words can express.

As you celebrate this wonderful occasion, may your organisation continue to flourish, spreading happiness and inspiration wherever it goes. Here's to many more years of making a difference and being a beacon of light in the lives of those you touch.

Once again, Happy Birthday Uthando!

Love Mam Ruby, Teresa and the TREE Team.



Dear Uthando Doll Makers

The Family Literacy Project of KZN send warmest greetings to you all on this, your 20th Birthday.

Twenty years of love and dedication: twenty years of joy and healing for the children of Africa.

The impact of your gifts is beyond imagination.

Please take pleasure today in knowing that you are deeply appreciated across the continents.

With love

From Jill, Pierre and the team at FLP



To the magnificently creative doll makers of Uthando Dolls, Happy 20th Birthday to you.

In the life of a child so much happens in 20 years. These 20 years are about forming a strong attachment to your caregivers, making way for your teeth and deciding if you like solid food. It's about learning how to walk and jump and run, exploring the wonder of your imagination through play, growing friendships, and learning about what you love. You make your way through school, master tons of new skills, experience your first crush, fall in love for the first time, and learn that in time hearts heal. You fight with your parents who don't know anything, learn what values are important to you and make decisions about what you want to do in your adult life. These 20 years lay the foundation for adulthood and are the most important developmental years in the life of a person.

For children in KwaZulu Natal, many of these developmental steps are companioned by the experience of the loss of a parent, the impact of poverty, the uncertainty of what the future holds and the fact that life is simply not as safe as should be.

For 20 years, Uthando Dolls has been responding to the emotional world of children in this context by providing dolls that invite caregivers and children to play together. Your generous gift of doll making sensitizes caregivers to the importance of play in the life of their children and invites caregivers to build a more open, loving and playful relationship with their child that is both supportive and responsive. For 20 years, 1000s of children have received a doll that is a reflection of themselves, and that communicates to them that they have value and worth.

As you celebrate your birthday, we celebrate you. For all the hours that have been spent sewing and knitting, making dolls and putting together doll kits. You have contributed to the health and healing of children and caregivers that we have the privilege to serve.

Today, on your birthday the dlalanathi team would like to thank you for your vision, your generosity, and your passionate commitment to doll making. You are the best of the best.