

Message from Ma Jaya

Many are hurting at this time all over the world. Please keep them in your heart and prayers; the sweetness of prayer goes out far and near. We all must care, rather than sit in silent agony; we will not know of quiet solitude while our brothers and sisters cry out. Suffering does not disappear without leaving an imprint on all of our hearts. We must all help to serve humankind simply because we are humankind. Do not forget to serve those in need, wherever you are.



River Fund In India

In late 2004 The River Fund learned of "Little H.E.A.R.T.'s" Orphanage in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, India. This area has one of the highest incidences of HIV/AIDS in India with an estimated 30% or more of the population affected. "Little H.E.A.R.T.'s" had begun by taking in neighborhood orphans, but closed because of lack of funds. Reverend Shambo Brackston went to Nellore to see the project firsthand and to help with the rebirth of Little H.E.A.R.T.'s. A plan was formed to house up to twenty-five children who had been located in the surrounding villages.

Along with the Director, Mr. Prasanna Kumar, Shambo traveled to these villages, meeting the children and seeing the situations they were living in. Most were in despair with their parent's dead or dying of AIDS, often leaving the children alone with nowhere to go. At one village they found two children, a brother and sister aged five and seven, alone. Their mother had gone to the rice fields looking for work and their father was dying of AIDS. The villagers had banished him to the edge of the village. Unfortunately this is a common practice in these villages. Once AIDS has struck a family, they are segregated from the community and very often isolated from their remaining family. He died a few weeks later, after agreeing to let the children go to "Little H.E.A.R.T.'s."

Shambo and Mr. Kumar set up the house by adding five new toilets in the back yard and buying cooking and sleeping equipment. All twenty-five of the children living there get three meals a day and glass of milk. Each child has the opportunity to attend school. This is the first sign of hope these children have had in years.

"Whenever I see a child begging on the streets, my heart starts breaking into pieces."

– Prasanna Kumar, Founder & President
Little HEARTS Orphanage, India

The story of "Little H.E.A.R.T.'s" reminds us of the orphans center in Uganda, which also started with kind-hearted people taking a few children into their homes and now cares for 900 orphans. The next step at "Little H.E.A.R.T.'s" is to put a second floor on the house, to house a total of fifty children.

"Little H.E.A.R.T.'s" is still fragile, and without more financial support will be limited and at risk of closure. With support, they can serve as a model for community orphanages throughout the region. We cannot ignore this need.



From the Executive Director

As I watched the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, I thought often of Ma's words, "There are no throw away people." This is the most basic lesson of compassion, yet it is one that was often forgotten.

When I heard about nursing home patients left to the rising waters, I thought about our long-term commitment to the elderly and of our dream to build affordable senior housing. To learn more, visit our website, www.by-the-river.org. When I saw images of abandoned corpses, I thought about how Ma has taught us to honor the dead. When I heard the horror stories of how the poor were left to fend for themselves, I realized that they too were being treated as "throw away people." When I heard about homeless people being housed in trailers, I remembered that there are many people right here in our community who are still living in emergency housing after last year's hurricanes. And when I didn't hear anything in the mainstream media about the special problems of people with AIDS in New Orleans, I realized that the HIV/AIDS community was in danger of being forgotten yet again. And now, weeks later, as I listen to discussions



of money and reconstruction, I fear that the most vulnerable people in our society will be pushed aside again.

We always knew that our work is far from done; we always knew that the needs usually outrun the resources, and we have been powerfully reminded once again. The River Fund has been taking donations for an AIDS organization working in and around New Orleans. Our financial contribution will help one of the groups most in danger of being forgotten in the storm's aftermath – the HIV/AIDS community – because truly no one can be thrown away.

Our work continues locally and in Africa, and we have just started to help AIDS orphans in India. As you read about our projects, won't you please ask yourself how you can help?



"Everyday there is a funeral ... and children left behind with no one to care for them. As a priest, they call me Father. How can I sleep at night if I don't try my best to look after these children."

– Father Centurio Olaboro
Ma's Centre/UMOP

www.ugandamartyrsorphansproject.org

Camp Heartland

by a 12 year old boy

This was my third year at Camp Heartland. The first year I was really excited and a little scared about going to camp. Once I got there and realized how awesome it was the fear went away and I have looked forward to going back each year. My favorite thing to do at camp is archery. I am really good at it. This year I also did rock climbing and canoeing. I was the only kid to get all the way up the rock-climbing wall with a blindfold on! There are about 8 kids in a cabin and you get to do lots of cool stuff with them. We were part of a fair where each cabin had its own theme or game. We also did skits with our cabin groups. Those were really funny. Everyone who goes to Camp Heartland has HIV/AIDS or has someone in their family that has it. We don't talk



about it much, but there is a place called the Comfort Zone that you can always go to if you have questions or want to talk. A couple of people work there that are easy to talk to and know a lot about HIV/AIDS. There is a book at the Comfort Zone called the Journey of Hope. It is where kids get to write their stories and tell about their lives. I read it this year. One of the coolest things about camp is that nobody looks at you funny when it is time to take your meds because they are used to it too. It is nice to go somewhere and not feel different from everybody else. I know I don't have to keep secrets at camp. I don't have to worry about anyone being afraid of HIV. I can be myself. I want to keep going to Camp Heartland and someday I might get to be a counselor there.



Back to School

For parents who struggle every day to provide the most basic food and shelter certain times of the year are especially difficult. Annual events that for most families are a time of joy and hope and excitement are painful times for many poor families. Perhaps no time of year illustrates this as much as the end of summer. Kids are getting ready to go back to school and parents who still dream big dreams for their kids



and who try so hard to keep them clean and healthy and fed have a painful dilemma. Where is the money for the pencils and crayons and notebooks and glue that each kid is required to show up with to begin the school year? How do you encourage and support your kid to go to school and try their best when they might be shamed at the get go because they don't have the appropriate supplies?

Long ago, The River Fund recognized this need and for the fourth year in row at our end of July dinner provided brand new backpacks stuffed with school supplies for 250 kids.

This year was especially exciting for us, because for the first time ever, we got help from the St. Lucie County United Way. The agency recognized the work that Feed Everyone and its volunteers does in the Ft. Pierce community and agreed to provide 50 of those packs. Other angel donors gave generously and because of those cash gifts, volunteers were able to shop and then stuff the remaining backpacks with most everything these kids needed to start off the school year.

On the night of the dinner, the line of excited kids was out the door. They weren't sure what they were going to get but spirits were quite high. After a good dinner, everyone lined up and the crowd seemed huge. I think some of us had a care that the need of the moment would be greater than we had prepared for. But sometimes, life does give us perfect moments and literally, the last backpack that we had brought with us, was given to the last kid on line.

For many of us who serve with Feed Everyone, the Back to School Dinner is the most moving dinner of the year and as we stood and watched the kids get their supplies, many of us had tears in our eyes. Transformed if only for a moment, with brand new backpacks, crisp notebooks, and pencils that no one had ever used before were 250 kids, feeling as good as anyone, dreaming as big as anyone, and for whom anything and everything is possible. Thank you to everyone who helped make this possible.



"I would like to thank Ma and all of the volunteers that have given so much to make our dream become a reality. We look forward to expanding our services in the months and years ahead."

— Ananda Devi
Program Director, Feed Everyone

Feed Everyone

We bring companionship and comfort to those:

- Adults and children that are afflicted by poverty
- Adults and children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS
- Elders in our community who are home bound and in nursing homes.
- We assist the kids who are going to Camp Heartland with clothes and supplies. We accompany them to Minnesota as chaperones and volunteers each way.

We inspire volunteerism by providing opportunities for service. Our volunteers form bonds of compassion with those in our community who might otherwise be forgotten. We always strive to bring a spark to those we serve. By bringing a nursery school class to people who have not touched a child in years, by bringing friendship and a gentle touch to those who are often overlooked, or by bring-ing Santa Claus with homemade gifts. The result is the same - people feel the love and com- passion that River Fund volunteers so readily share.



WOMEN'S WORKSHOP — UGANDA 2005

In April 2005, The River Fund funded and assisted in a five day "Long Term HIV/AIDS Survival Skills Workshop" in Tororo, Uganda. The co-sponsor of the workshop was the Uganda Martyrs Orphans Project, which hosted us at Ma's Centre.



The author and presenter of the workshop was Lynde Francis, an international expert on nutrition and HIV from Zimbabwe. She has been HIV+ for 19 years and has maintained her health with a holistic approach. Lynde teaches that there are many traditional foods and medicines that are financially accessible that have been discarded in favor of unobtainable Western medicines and highly processed, less nutritious Western foods.

Thirty-five rural women who were selected by their communities for their leadership and communication skills

attended the workshop. They were specifically chosen in the hope that they could take the information back to their villages and teach it to others. About one third of the workshop was devoted to an in-depth understanding of the HIV virus and exactly how it can be fought by fortifying the immune system; another third covered growing and cooking native foods; and the rest was left open for discussion of women's rights and sexual issues. In Uganda, widows often lose family land or are forced in to unwanted marriages as a second or third wife. Young unmarried women are often forced into sexually exploitive relationships just to pay their school fees. The situation of an orphaned adolescent girl is especially dire: with no independent means of support, she must still assume the responsibility for younger siblings, and far too often this means becoming a sex worker and being infected with HIV. The women rarely have a forum to discuss

these concerns, and left very empowered by this discussion.

"We can give rural widows and orphans a chance for a better life by giving them the tools they need."

— Joseph Onyango, Director
Rayland Rural Development Organization
www.rarudo.org

The last night was a graduation ceremony and feast attended by local dignitaries. When one male official asked why only women were invited to the workshop, the reply was the African slogan, "Educate a woman – Educate a nation!"

In March 2006, we will return to Uganda with Ms. Francis for part 2 of the workshop with the same thirty-five women. The first workshop planted seeds that we need to nourish. The end result will be healthier families, more women's rights, and stronger communities.



River Fund in Africa

With our help much has been accomplished:

- Construction of a girls' dorm
- Construction of a library
- Construction of a hostel, offering student housing and jobs for widows
- Support for a farm coop of widows and orphans that serves over 100 families
- AIDS survival workshop for poor rural women
- Support for 900 orphans and street children – food, shelter, education and medical care.

Project Response

Shawn Dougherty, Executive Director

Project Response and the River Fund have a long history of collaboration. Project Response is an AIDS Service organization that provides case management to over 1,400 HIV-positive clients.

This year, with the help of the River Fund, we sent twenty five children to Camp Heartland, a summer camp for children who have been impacted by HIV. Many of the children live in poverty and would never have the opportunity to attend summer camp without this program. The River Fund's assistance was crucial.

Project Response helps to fund the Feed Everyone Dinners. We also get the word out to our clients about the dinners.

The Feed Everyone volunteers make the dinners happen – planning menus, shopping for food and preparing it, collecting gifts and canned goods and sorting and packing them for clients, and making it all work.

Ft. Pierce remains the epicenter of our local AIDS epidemic. Many of our clients are still suffering from the impact of last year's hurricanes. The supply of low-cost housing has been diminished, and housing prices for even the most dilapidated rental units have increased significantly. I am grateful for our partnership and for Ma's blessing as we work together to serve those in need.

