

Bridgeman Phila Camp

Just imagine that you are a child taking full care of your mother without help. Your mother is dying from the AIDS virus. It is out of this kind of situation that Phila camp was initiated. Many children are taking on adult roles and they need some respite care, some time to be able to be “a kid” if only for a weekend. The first camp took place December 2003; it was both exciting and rewarding to be involved in such a program.

One particular camper touched everyone in a very special way. The young boy had looked over his mother until she passed away. He expressed how happy he was to have a chance to “just be a kid”. Many of the teachers and volunteers wept, realizing his joy and freedom to not have to deal with a “grownup” situation that weekend. The teachers at his school reported, that after that weekend at Phila Camp, he had a smile planted on his face for the entire school week!

The campers participate in activities such as arts and crafts and sports. At camp, they do not just play but also learn about HIV/AIDS. Coping skills are also talked about. Phila Camp responds to the many needs of the children of the community. The camp is held in various rural locations and provides a weekend of respite from the challenges faced by the children of South Africa.

Counselors are trained through the project giving them an opportunity to develop leadership skills while providing peer support. Children are brought in from urban communities as well as informal settlements. The Camp offers a child a weekend of respite, recreation and renewal.



Inspired

By

South Africa



Inspired by South Africa (ISA) is a mission project that was founded by a group of women from the First Congregational Church of Lebanon Connecticut following a mission trip to South Africa in February 2006. As one woman wrote...

What could we do on our return home that would say, "We haven't forgotten"? We haven't forgotten the bright shiny faces of the children nor the extreme poverty. We haven't forgotten the hand of friendship that was extended to us; the faces and feelings are embedded in our minds. We each carry a picture of South Africa with us, the sheer beauty of the land, the majesty of the animals, the faces of the women who are making their way out of poverty. Life for each of us is forever changed. Beads were everywhere, fashion, jewelry, the AIDS pins; and of course the African Angels. With the vision of beads in our heads, we returned home. We let our ideas expand and grow into what you see. When you purchase one of our creations, you are bringing home a bit of South Africa and are making a difference.

There is always HOPE and we can make a difference! ISA was born and beading began and our creations include necklaces, bracelets, earrings, bookmarks, key chains, mud cloth purses and a tea bag pouch containing a South African tea bag.

All proceeds from our sales will go to support women and children empowerment programs through the Bridgman Development Center in Zola, Soweto, South Africa or to other needs that may be brought to our attention through Global Ministries in partnership with the United Church of Christ South Africa.

**YOUR PURCHASE MAKES A DIFFERENCE!
THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT**

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GASA (Girls Against the Spread of AIDS)

34 percent of the community's population is living with HIV and most are not even aware of their situation. The most affected are females between the ages of 15 and 45. The GASA girls program was introduced in 2003; it includes girls between the ages of 15 and 17 through 18. The sessions are intensive training for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. The girls share what they have learned with other youth in their community.

No one is absolutely sure but it is said that 1 in 4 women are HIV positive compared to 1 in 14 are men. This disparity is one of the tragic legacies of rape. The training involves empowering the girls to make a difference in their community and to help them become peer educators for HIV/AIDS. Once the training is completed the girls move on to the life skills portion of the GASA program. Here they help to choose the topics that are relevant to their lives. Anorexia, bulimia, rape, abortion, intimacy, love and dating seem to be the subjects close to each one. Once a month, everyone goes into the community to volunteer at an orphanage, nursing home, soup kitchen or preschool. Members of the group struggle with circumstances such as attempted suicide, death of a relative and addictions to drugs and alcohol. The focus is also on beauty, their own and the beauty that God provides.

The GASA program generally meets twice a week with the girls who have finished the program staying on with the new members. Because the aim is to educate and empower these young women using comprehensive sex education, it will decrease teen pregnancy and protect them against HIV/AIDS. They will feel more empowered as women to make a difference in their community and to have a greater appreciation of one's self.



The Saturday School Grades 11 and 12

Serving between 50 – 80 students each year, the school provides extra lessons and tutoring in math, physical sciences, English and accounting. A Life Skills program has been added to provide computer literacy, career assessments, career development and social justice issues. Each of these topics is presented once a month and guest speakers are invited to present some of the topics.

University students are the tutors and they all have sufficient knowledge of the subjects that they are teaching. The competition is great for university admission as well as scholarships. The Saturday School provides academic tutoring as well as furthering life skills.

The atmosphere amongst the students and the tutors is great. One of the objectives is that the students must leave the program each Saturday having understood the work that they were doing during class, as this is a supplement to the work that the student has done during the week.

The Bridgeman Saturday School started in August 2003; the major reason was to bridge the gap between suburban and township high schools when it comes to understanding the subject content. The goal is to increase the probability for the township students to qualify to study in their university of choice and feel confident that they are on the same par with the students in the suburban high schools.



South Africa is often referred to as the “Rainbow Nation”. A rainbow is commonly seen as a symbol of Hope. Hope for the future as told in the story of Noah. It also becomes a lesson in faith, and the eternal promise that God will always be there. South Africa is a new democracy with a new constitution. There is hope for the future of the country.

There are approximately 6 ½ million, or one in every 5 adults infected with the AIDS virus. They are all real people with real thoughts and ideas. Without the “sickness” they could have become artists, poets, teachers or great leaders. They inhabit houses made of mud and tin, sometimes without running water or proper sanitation. The tiny shacks persist and the people do, too. There is despair but there is also hope. In the middle of one such township is a building made of brick. The building stands surrounded by a wall topped with shards of sharp glass. It is a constant reminder of the apartheid years. It is hard to say if the glass is to keep people “in or out”. An attempt has been made to grow flowers in the very dry dusty dirt. This remarkable place is called the Bridgeman Center. It stands as a symbol of hope and faith for the children who come to this place.



The Bridgeman Development Center Zola, Soweto, South Africa

Dr. F. Bridgeman was one of a few missionaries who worked in Johannesburg during the early days of the Twentieth Century. His legacy is one of social concern and caring for the whole person. Dr. Bridgeman died at an early age in 1925 after helping to establish centers for both young men and women. He helped to create a School of Social Studies for the first black social workers, also beginning a clinic to give medical care to migrant mine workers and others in need. His widow worked hard to establish the Bridgeman Memorial Hospital in 1928.

By the time the UCCSA was born in 1967 the apartheid government had closed all black centers in white areas. It seemed only fitting to name the Community Center in Zola after Dr. Bridgeman, an early pioneer in social activity. Thus the Center became the Bridgeman Development Center.

The center opened its doors in 1974 under the direction of its founder Rev. Bernard Spong. The students who flocked to the Center are from a community riddled with poverty, violence, discrimination and despair. Despite all these challenges that are left from the system of apartheid, the Center maintains its tradition of education and empowerment of its young, and soon to become leaders. Today its biggest challenge is financial resources.

The Program Coordinator is Malusi B. Makalima. Malusi works tirelessly sometimes without a salary. When you meet him, his passion for the programs becomes evident. You are captured by his energy and devotion to the Center.



After Care

The After Care program serves students in grades 1 to 7 and ages 7 to 13. The programs aim is to be a center of motivation that instills moral values in children who in turn will pass it on to their siblings. Many of the students come from single parent homes or live with a grandparent who may not be able to assist the children with their homework, reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Since the children are exposed to drug abuse and crime every day, it is hoped that by having a place to go to they will be encouraged to study and be involved in organized recreational activities. The center becomes a second home to these children, a safe place. The daily program starts with a snack followed by homework time, and of course time for an organized fun activity.

Staffing is university students who volunteer their time. The children spend time in a safe environment rather than on the streets. To broaden the minds of the students, life skills are introduced with the objective of them making a positive contribution to society.

