

www.helplesotho.ca

The following is an overview of the Help Lesotho Leadership Development and Training plus HIV/AIDS prevention and gender equity programming during 2009. The latter remain priority foci within the organization and allowed Help Lesotho to reach over 4,500 participants, of which 55% or 2460 were young women and girls.

Funds from **Pearls for Girls** (<http://www.pearls4girls.org/>) are directed to support these activities. Although Help Lesotho focuses much more on girls, with longer and more intensive programs, it is also essential to help young men realize their potential to be kind and responsible leaders and citizens. Gender equity must come from both sides.

Leadership Camp January 12 – 17

228 participants; 80% girls and women

St. Paul's School, Hlotse

Help Lesotho's 4th Annual Leadership Camp was, as usual, a very successful event. Over 240 adults, children and staff spent 5 nights and 6 days together at St. Paul's School for the Deaf in Hlotse, Leribe. In addition, numerous guests from the community joined the sessions and activities. The camp is an integral part of Help Lesotho programming, providing children with the opportunity to learn new things. The freedom to discuss important topics in a supportive environment is important part of their development. The goal of the camp is to provide potentially life-saving information during six full days where children are loved, cared for and encouraged.



Topics this year included: Grief and Loss; drug and alcohol abuse; building self-esteem; healthy relationships; sexual abuse, gender violence and assault; HIV/AIDS and knowing your status; gender equity; and leadership.

On the last day of the camp both Population Services International (PSI) and Know Your Status (KYS) provided an information session and voluntary testing and counselling for participants, facilitators and staff. A remarkable 63% of participants tested and only one was positive, an encouraging result as such a significantly lower than national average highlights the successes of Help Lesotho's HIV/AIDS programming.

Comments included: "I learned that even if I come from a poor family I can still be a leader"; "for us orphans, it gave us the first time to share ideas and talk and laugh with others"; and "I now know who I am and have learned to love myself".

School Anti-AIDS Clubs

February – June; August - October

12 schools; 500 students

Throughout the year the Help Lesotho Youth Corps (HLYC) members supported HL-established anti-AIDS clubs in 12 of the twinned primary and secondary schools. Five schools received specific support and weekly visits to lead discussions and activities on topics of HIV/AIDS, gender equity, leadership and healthy relationships. An example of HL-supported

club activities is the September event, where the different clubs created dramas about HIV-related topics provided by HL and presented them to judges from the HLYC and HL staff in a competition form.

Basotho Girls' Leadership Corps

Full year on-going program

40 girls

The Basotho Girls' Leadership Corps (BGLC) program began in early 2009 with the selection of 40 girls aged 12 – 15 from the areas of Hlotse and Pitseng. The girls, selected on the criteria of financial need, academic performance and leadership potential, received training throughout the year on issues of HIV prevention, gender equity, leadership, teamwork, healthy relationships, decision making and many other important topics. In October they began community outreach; visiting elderly grandmothers and orphans and collecting clothes, soap, candles and food for the needy in their villages. Fifteen were selected for the residential program at the HL Hlotse Seotlong Center beginning January 2010. All 40 will continue to receive support and training, joined by a new cohort of girls in the new year.



Several twelve year old girls in the BGLC are overwhelmed with shyness at meeting their Monarch, King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho (Oct 09)

Youth Sports Against HIV/AIDS event March 21

31 schools, 3000+ participants; 55% girls

Hlotse High School, Hlotse

On Saturday March 21, Help Lesotho partnered with *The Ministry of Education and Training, Men As Partners (MAP)*, the *Olympic Youth Ambassador Program (OYAP)*, and PSI to host a youth event of track and field competitions and HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity awareness. Boys and girls representing 31 Leribe District high schools competed in various track and field activities while the over 3000-strong audience took advantage of HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity awareness activities run by the 4 organizations, including HIV testing. Help Lesotho had also organized a DJ who played music, announced races and encouraged the audience to participate in activities and testing. As each track event finished different HLYC members took turns presenting medals to the bronze, silver, and gold winners. The Help Lesotho Youth Leadership Officer presented the trophy to the high school with the most accumulated points at the end of the day.

1st 2009 Gender Conference April 23 – 26

26 young women

HL Office, Hlotse

The “Step Up and Speak Out” Women’s Leadership Conference has been an annual event since 2006, became bi-annual this year. The conferences enable Help Lesotho to do intensive training with a focused group of is to build the self-confidence of these young women to equip them with the skills and knowledge to make healthy choices in life.

This three-day conference hosted the same young women from the previous October’s conference, allowing HL to reiterate messages and provide more of a focus on how gender affects women in Lesotho, building leadership skills, HIV/AIDS community action, the effects of Teenage Pregnancy and fostering self-confidence. On the final day of the conference, PSI provided voluntary HIV testing and counselling for the young women; of the fifteen who chose to test on the day none tested positive – another encouraging indicator of the power of HL HIV and Gender Equity programming.

The testing counsellors themselves remarked that they had never encountered a group of young girls with accurate knowledge on prevention, transmission and treatment.

According to post-survey evaluation a large majority of girls felt that they benefitted most from the discussions about teenage pregnancy and self-esteem and provided comments such as: “I am now strong enough to face any challenge”; “I now know if I become pregnant I cannot achieve my goals”; “I have the power to make my own decisions”; “I have the right to say yes or no”, and “I know that people believe that I can do something with my future.”

May 16 Drama and Poetry HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity Competition

4 High Schools, 300+ people; 65% girls

Pitseng High School, Pitseng

On Saturday, May 16th 2009 Help Lesotho held an HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity Awareness Club Competition with four high schools in Help Lesotho’s network: Molapo HS, Pitseng HS, Khethisa HS and Bokoro HS. Each school has an ANTI-AIDS Club, with memberships of over 50 students which receive support from the

Help Lesotho Youth Corps (HLYC, guiding the discussions, providing accurate information and motivational ideas. The

weekly meetings discuss issues surrounding HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity in their communities, debate, write poetry and perform dramas. Students to discuss freely and openly the challenges they face as youth today in Lesotho.

Feedback from the clubs brought forth the idea of holding an event where the clubs can meet and share what they have been working on. The event enabled the clubs to perform a 25-30 minute drama on any topic surrounding HIV/AIDS and recite 5 poems on Gender Equity. Judges from LENA (Lesotho News Agency), support group Phelisanang Bophelong and Leribe English Medium School evaluated each performance awarded trophies and medals. The event also included a demonstration debate around the issue of Gender Equity in Lesotho. The event was considered a huge success!

June: Pitseng Seotlong Center celebrates its 1 year anniversary.

Approximately 500 visitors per month; 55% young women and girls
Pitseng

Located in the village of Pitseng, Leribe district, the Help Lesotho Seotlong Centre has become a landmark in the community. Open Monday through Saturday, the center provides programming including a well-stocked library, daily children’s story times, space for study groups, book club, youth club, volleyball league, discussion groups (around issues such as drug and alcohol abuse, grief and loss and elder mentoring), space to use the educational games provided, community group meetings, craft activities, regular grandmother support days and monthly community HIV/AIDS and gender equity education events.

Recently a soccer team for out-of-school young men between the ages of 19 and 27 has been created; the team also meets for weekly discussions on issues affecting them such as HIV and ideas about gender roles and masculinity. Films



A student participates in a debate on gender equity



A young girl takes part in a daily story time at the center, aimed at increasing literacy skills

are also shown weekly; every Thursday morning a women's group watches and discusses a film together (topics include HIV infection, gender roles, stigma etc.) and on Friday afternoons educational films are shown for youth – attracting dozens of boys and girls each week. There is also a Drama and Poetry club for Primary and High School students which meets weekly and creates poetry about gender equity and HIV. At the end of each month they will come together for a presentation.

All activities promote Help Lesotho's key objectives to increase HIV/AIDS awareness, gender equity, leadership and literacy. As an example of the use by the community, during a two-month period shortly following the opening, over 1,000 visitors were recorded, ranging from two-year-olds to grandmothers in their seventies.



Girls take part in after school center activities

HLYC training September through December

3 young men and 6 young women

HL Seotlong Center, Pitseng, and HL office, Hlotse

From September through December training of new recruits for the Help Lesotho Youth Corps (HLYC) is taking place. The young men and women are from both Hlotse and Pitseng and receive multiple trainings per week on topics such as: How to be a role model; healthy relationships; self-esteem; self-awareness; leadership; gender issues; HIV/AIDS; anatomy and puberty; conflict resolution and stress management; and community engagement and facilitation skills. Following completion of the training program these youth will join and strengthen the HLYC in their support of HL programming and the activities at both the Pitseng and Hlotse centers.



Above, HLYC learn about HIV transmission

2nd 2009 Gender Conference October 22 – 25

26 young women

HL Office, Hlotse

A new group of young women from the mountains were able to attend the 1st portion of the Gender Conference for Young Women. This conference allowed HL to address issues of HIV/AIDS and Gender Equity in an intimate, all-female group setting. Following the same timeline as previous conferences, this was a three-day event which addressed issues of gender, relationships, death and grieving, rape and sexual abuse, sexual health and anatomy, HIV/AIDS and self-image. Attendees were selected by HL staff, principals and twinned school orphan leads based on their leadership potential, academic success or were thought to benefit greatly from the conference. This same group will be invited to a second conference to take place in April 2010 to allow for reiterative programming as described above.

Girls Activity Day December 12th:

Potential reach of 100s of youth including over 100 young women and girls

HL Pitseng Center Football team will partner with Population Services International to run a soccer tournament for dozens of youth at the Help Lesotho Pitseng *Seotlong* Center. The day will include soccer games, music, an information session and testing for HIV.