



Action Lesotho

32, The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry. Charity No: 17838

Newsletter No 4: March-May 2011

Dear Supporter,

We bring you the fourth Action Lesotho Newsletter. In this bulletin, there's news of a grant we received from Irish Aid, updates from our team in Lesotho, an article from recently returned volunteer Tony O'Connor, a report about award-winning school pupil Leanne O'Driscoll, money matters and other snippets of news and information.

Projects boosted by Irish Aid grant

In January, Action Lesotho was delighted to receive a very welcome grant from Irish Aid under their scheme for funding micro-projects. The grant of €30,000 was awarded for 2011 in order to enable Action Lesotho to do the following:

- (1) To turn neglected land into a tillage farm to help reduce dependence on imported food;
- (2) To re-locate & develop a grain-milling enterprise, whose profits will be used to feed disadvantaged

families in the community, thus reducing their dependence on foreign aid; and (3) To employ an Irish manager/consultant in Lesotho, whose main function will be to build the capacity of Basotho staff & committees to take over responsibility for Action Lesotho projects.

Action Lesotho's approach involves developing deep links with the village communities, and our policy of building their capacity for self-help has helped win the trust of government Ministers and the local Chiefs. Their support has been vital in securing access to land, and this has given us a unique opportunity to address the problem of under-utilised land and falling agricultural output which is leading to serious food-security issues in Lesotho. If this project is successful, we hope it will provide a template for self-development and food security which can be applied in other areas of Lesotho.

The farming of several fields is already well under way; the maize is growing vigorously (see above left) and is expected to produce a much better yield per hectare than last year; the purchase of land for the new mill, funded by IMPACT Trade Union, was completed in February (pictured left); building of the mill and

enterprise centre on the new site is due to begin later this year; and former Board Member & volunteer, Pippa Kearon has been employed as a consultant to the projects (see P2 for more details). All in all things are progressing well!



Tralee girl is Young Ambassador 2011

Leanne O'Driscoll (pictured centre), who is a volunteer in the Action Lesotho bookshop in Tralee, has won the title of Young Ambassador of the 21st Century for 2011. Leanne was nominated for the title by Tralee Lions Club, Co. Kerry, and she won the Munster section of the competition before progressing to the finals in Dublin, where she won the title on 15th January. In recognition of her achievement, she received the Tommy Byrne Perpetual Trophy and a bursary of €550 to help towards the advancement of her community concept.



Leanne's community involvement truly impressed all three judges. Apart from being a volunteer in Action Lesotho's bookshop, Leanne is a junior leader with Springboard (a disadvantaged children's project); a Youth Advisory Panel member of Jigsaw (which promotes mental health); and is a founding member and Chairperson of her school branch of Amnesty International. Leanne also impressed the judges with her plan to use the bursary to assist Action Lesotho's Keyhole Garden Project, which aims to improve Lesotho's two biggest problems; HIV/AIDS and malnutrition. Leanne explained to the judges that although some anti-viral medication is available to people in Lesotho who have contracted the deadly virus [a recent UNAIDS Report indicated that Lesotho has the second highest incidence of HIV/AIDS in the world] she pointed out that the medication is of little benefit if the patient is not receiving adequate nutrition. Thus the provision of keyhole gardens, which are designed to ensure ease of access to sick patients, whilst also providing food throughout the year, are an essential part of the care of HIV/AIDS patients.

Action Lesotho congratulates Leanne on her outstanding success and wishes her all the best for the future. This is a girl to watch!

Leanne is from Ardfert and is a student at Presentation Secondary School, Tralee, Co. Kerry.



Moilemo in the maize © Pippa Kearon



Signing over the land (Pippa Kearon back; and Ntate Mankoe, right)

Clara & keyhole garden © Eileen O'Leary

People

Changes on the Board of Directors



Outgoing: Pippa Kearon (photo left) stepped down from the Board in December 2010 to move to South Africa. As well as being a Board Member, Pippa had spent many months, over several years, working as a volunteer in Lesotho. Fortunately, with help from an Irish Aid grant, Action Lesotho has now been able to employ Pippa as a Consultant for twelve months. She began her contract in January

2011 (see front page article). Pippa is based in Ficksburg, South Africa & is working five days a week with our local team in Lesotho.

Her work will relate primarily to the training of Action Lesotho's in-country team in the proper management of Action Lesotho's projects. The prime objective is to ensure that in the long term, the Basotho staff and local volunteers will be capable of running Action Lesotho's operations in the Maputsoe area without the continuing presence in Lesotho of an Irish representative of the organisation. We wish her all the best in her new role.

Incoming: Meath man Brian Flaherty joined Action Lesotho's Board of Directors in December 2010. Born on a farm in Co. Galway, Brian is a veterinary surgeon and works as a Veterinary Inspector with the Department of Agriculture, Food & Fisheries and is also a farmer. He is involved with various community groups in Meath and is also on the board of a local school.



Brian Flaherty in Lesotho © Pippa Kearon

In his role as a Veterinary Inspector, Brian's job brings him in contact with many areas of society and outside bodies both in Ireland and abroad. He regularly advises and speaks to organisations on veterinary and related topics. Brian was also involved in a managerial capacity in a meat processing business. Brian's diverse agricultural and community background means he brings a wealth of expertise to Action Lesotho in the farming and agri-business arena. He is currently acting as an agricultural advisor to our farm & mill projects in Lesotho and is maintaining close links with the team out in Lesotho, including Hans Taljaard, an agricultural consultant who is advising us on growing maize & other crops.



Pig project Chairman dies unexpectedly

Action Lesotho was very sorry to hear of the death of Ntate Anton, who died suddenly in mid-February. Anton was a founder member and Chairman of the Ha Chonapase Pig Project which has been running since 2007. Anton was instrumental in the setting up of this project, which involved Action Lesotho providing micro-loans to farmers to enable them to set up pig-breeding projects. The loans are being 'paid' back by the farmers through the construction of key-hole gardens for people with disabilities & sufferers of HIV/AIDS

Action Lesotho would like to acknowledge the huge contribution of Anton to the pig project & we send our sincere condolences to Ntate Anton's family & his colleagues in the pig project.



Photo: Ha Chonapase pig project committee constructing a keyhole garden © Pippa Kearon

Changes to the Action Lesotho team in Lesotho

❖ In our last newsletter we reported that Malithlare had just been appointed as assistant to Ntate Mankoe (Action Lesotho's General Manager). Unfortunately for Action Lesotho, Malithlare was offered a post in education in Mhales Hoek. We wish her the very best in this new position, which allows her to move back to her home town and care for her elderly parents.

❖ The good news is that we have been able to appoint Mojalefa Olifans as an Enterprise Development Officer. He is trained in delivering a programme designed by the International Labour Organisation (a United Nations agency) which aims to help people start and run small businesses. He was involved in delivering the ILO programme in Maputsoe and elsewhere. Now he will work with the committees at all of our projects in Lesotho.

Annual Action Lesotho Gathering, Tralee 2011

On the 19th February, Action Lesotho supporters and volunteers gathered in the Manor west Hotel, Tralee for the annual gathering. The event kicked off with an entertaining performance by a young and very talented local dance troupe from Shiva Stage School. Action Lesotho's Chairman, Paul Hanrahan, then outlined the work that Action Lesotho has been doing for the last year and described the plans for 2011 and beyond. He particularly thanked all the volunteers and supporters without whom Action Lesotho could not function. There was a lovely video message from the team in Lesotho, which one volunteer described as 'bringing all our friends from Lesotho right into the room with us'. Beautiful photographs from some of the volunteers were on show. Mayor of Tralee, Arthur Spring, was present to say a few words and he congratulated everyone present

for being involved in such a worthy cause, saying it was a source of pride for Kerry and beyond [STOP PRESS: congratulations to Arthur Spring who was elected as a Labour TD for the first time in the recent elections].

A volunteer's impressions of Lesotho

Words and photos: Tony O'Connor

Tony O'Connor & Gaeboising kids © Maria Deady



Modern travel's a strange thing. There's no sense of accomplishment anymore, no physical effort. All you do is sit in a series of increasingly uncomfortable chairs, try to sleep and when you wake up you're in someplace wholly different. This has its advantages, at least for me. I quite like the feeling of being tired, hungry, sweaty, exhausted and then dropped into this foreign place that I have to learn to live in. It sharpens the mind pleasantly. There's no such thing as being fully prepared. Find transport, find someplace to eat, find someplace to sleep and then get some rest. Once you have all that done, you're quickly able to get by wherever you are. That said, the shock of being dropped in Lesotho was like being hit by a hot, dusty freight train.

I dozed the thirty-odd hours from my home in north Kerry to the outskirts of Ficksburg, South Africa. A town all of faded colours, empty spaces and perfectly geometric streets. Arriving at midday, we sought out a restaurant and I downed three cups of strong coffee. I then tried to make polite conversation with the members of the Action Lesotho team that were eating with us, but after a day and a half of travelling my scraggy hair, wild caffeine eyes and jabbering nonsense-speech probably gave off less of an 'enthusiastic volunteer' impression and more of a 'give me some loose change and I'll go away' impression. We were straight across the border from there. It sounds like a big deal, crossing an international border twice a day, but during that first journey we were too flustered to care and that's the right attitude. Be polite, have your passport ready, but don't stress about it.

N'tate Mankoe drove us around in Jeepy (that glorious turquoise chariot), bringing Action Lesotho's Field Officer to meetings and letting her check in on different projects. Their speech was a code, full of names and phrases that had little meaning to me. Not that there was much room in my head for anything more as I tried to take in Lesotho. The place is so very, very different from Ficksburg. It's easy to say, but the fact that I noticed this on my very first day is something special. I'd never been to Africa before so the whole experience was new to me, yet everything about Maputsoe was different from Ficksburg; this I could sense already. There are no fences. Few good roads. There's music playing everywhere. There is a deep air of friendliness. In Ireland you might say hello to someone in the street if you pass within four feet of them. Not so in Lesotho. I always got a kick out of hearing a piercing, distant whistle, stopping, looking around and around until

I spotted a tiny stick figure a hundred meters away, waving wildly at me. The kids will speak any few words of English they have to you and seemed to get endless enjoyment out of my stumbling attempts at Sesotho.

By the time we crossed back over the bridge I had nothing left. Being catapulted across the world and experiencing two very different countries back to back had my head spinning. I was worried enough about teaching the next day. I had little previous experience. I went to bed wondering if, in the six short weeks I had there, I would be able to acclimatise enough to be of any use to the people of Lesotho. I envied the ease with which the repeat volunteers moved around there. My goal at that time was to know the country well enough to function within it, because I couldn't imagine attaining the kind of warm friendship with the Basotho that I saw the experienced volunteers had, in my brief time there. I'm happy to say I was wrong about everything.

Fast forward a few days, to after the fledgling attempts at teaching had given way to a more comfortable approach, to knowing more and more people by name, to 'Dumela' [hello] and 'Kea leboha' [thank you] and chatting with the border guards as we crossed the bridge.

Having lived in China for a while, one difference between the two countries was very apparent to me. The Chinese have thousands of years of culture and innovations to draw on in their daily lives. Ancient and proven philosophies, medicines, physical exercises, mental pastimes, unconscious and beneficial patterns of living. The Basotho, on the other hand, live day to day. They seem to work today to buy food tomorrow. There is an air of steel determination to their labours that drives them on, but also moves them to laughter, banter, music and dance. Just to live requires tremendous energy and effort, and in that environment, motivation wasn't a concern for me. I worked as best I could, and I very much felt that it was appreciated, because of the intention as well as what was actually being passed on.

We don't realise how many unconscious skills and how much specialised knowledge we have locked away in our heads simply because we grew up in a developed country. Trust me on this: being able to check your email is an accomplishment, as well as a privilege. Things that I'd never given any thought to, like setting up an internet connection or drafting a spreadsheet became so very valuable to my work over there. You may not know exactly what you can contribute (and certainly, with my degree in Chinese and Music, or 'Disparate Insanity' as I like to call it, I was curious, to say the least...) but it's a certainty that there is something.

(Continued next page)





One skill I definitely didn't think I'd be using over there was my clumsy tai chi. But we spent a few hours with the kids in the Ha-Maqele centre and they were demanding performance, so I gave a quick demonstration. Whispers of how I looked like an 'angry lion!' passed amongst the children but, judging by the amount of laughter, I was not a *frightening* lion. When, a few weeks later N'tate Mankoe was trying to come up with a Basotho name for me I told him this story and, with laughter, he bestowed upon me the name 'Abuti Tau

Mankoe' (subject to receipt by him of a six-pack of beer) and a tongue-numbing Sesotho sentence to go with it, which translated as 'the wild lion appeared in the grass'. From then on he took great pleasure in introducing both myself and my fellow volunteer Maria in our Basotho names. 'This is Ausi Lerato (Sister Love)', he would say, with an arm on Maria's shoulder. The assembled ladies and gentlemen would smile and repeat it to themselves. 'And this', he would say, pulling me forward, 'is Abuti TAU! (Brother Lion)', to which the room would erupt into laughter. I'm reminded of one committee member in Lepoqong who, for the six weeks I was there never spoke a word to me... until I got my Basotho name. From then on, every time she saw me she would say, 'Dumela Abuti Tau', before descending into paroxysms of mirth and wandering out of the room.

I don't want to call my Basotho name an icebreaker, because that implies there was ice to break. The people we work with over there are actively looking for any way to connect and get to know you. I enjoyed making them laugh. It was explained to me the name is funny for a few reasons, one of them being that there's a local guy also called Tau who's a bit of a big shot businessman. I imagine it may also be partially due to the fact that I'm a foot shorter than most Basotho men, but whatever. It was always friendly laughter. N'tate Mankoe went to the effort of explaining this fact to me, but it was unnecessary. I was delighted with my name.

The work progressed well. When I looked at my timetable back in Ireland it seemed pretty intense, but that's because I was thinking in terms of hours per week. Once you get over there, you start thinking in terms of finishing projects and it suddenly seems like a lot less time. I think I was there for about three days when I realised just how quickly the six weeks would pass, and I wasn't wrong. But none of it was impossible. It required thought, commitment and more than anything else, flexibility. I won't bore you with the details of my teeth-grindingly frustrating time trying to get an internet dongle to work with a computer in Lepoqong. Suffice to say, if something goes wrong, you have to roll with it. If you forget your lesson plans or your flash drive there's no popping back to Ficksburg to get it. You just have to keep working with what you have, and once you resign yourself to this & get familiar with these resources, it can be very



rewarding. I remember a few times near the end of my time there when I was left in Maputsoe for a few hours with a job to do, a few ideas of how to do it and a mobile phone full of the numbers of people I could call for help. I very much enjoyed those times.

It takes a bit of work to translate things you know how to do without thinking into skills you can break down and teach but it's not so hard, especially when you have such dedicated students. You'll quickly get to know what they are and aren't capable of. Most students have some level of English and while you have to go slowly and carefully, language usually isn't too much of a barrier. It was also a good incentive to get me learning a few fragments of Sesotho. About halfway through the course I realised there wouldn't be time to cover everything with each group, so after introducing them to the basics of computers we moved on to teaching each group different, applicable skills. It was quite rewarding by the end of our time there to see our students not just with abstract skills, but able to do things on the computers that were of real use to them.

I've been home a few weeks now and I'm still readjusting. Not sure what more to say, so I'll just leave you with some of the disjointed images in my head. Dust tornadoes blowing through playgrounds. The smell of eucalyptus in St. Monica's school. The singing of prayers. Watching speechless as Nurse Futho finished her computer lesson, thanked me, swung her laptop up onto her head and sashayed gracefully out of the classroom.



Fundraising for the trip

Raising funds wasn't easy. As you may have picked up if you listen to the news for more than six seconds, there's a recession in Ireland. I tried a bunch of different fundraisers, the most successful of which was the tried-and-tested bag-pack. Charity fashion shows, themed garden parties, gigs & pub quizzes were performed as well, to greater or lesser effect. I got 400 ticket/flyers donated by a local printing company, so I used these to advertise the various fundraisers. Though I don't think it led to many more attendees, what it did accomplish was to let every friend & family member in the country know what I was trying to do. From this, personal donations came pouring in. I was amazed at how generous people were. Though this method is rarely going to raise huge money, it serves a secondary & very important purpose: it provides a personal connection between these people & the country of Lesotho. They now know someone who has been there. We live in a globalised society, where actions in one corner of the world can have immediate and powerful effects in another. There are so many negative aspects to this phenomenon that it's good to make people aware of the potential for positive effects too, through something as simple as donating a small amount of money.

Tony O'Connor is from Co. Kerry and graduated from UCC with a BA in 2010

Fundraising news

West Cork Inspires

In January, Alison Ospina, craft-worker & author, organised a joint fundraiser for Action Lesotho and West Cork Inspires. The event was a High Tea in the Riverside Café, Skibbereen to coincide with Women's Little Christmas. West Cork Inspires is the title of Alison's new book (just launched 1st March 2011) which documents the history of the craft movement in West Cork. There was particular interest from the attendees at the event in the craft projects that Action Lesotho is involved with in Lesotho e.g. the Ha Nyenye Craft Group (a women's cooperative) and Setsoto Designs. Apart from raising funds, the event also established links between the craft movement in Ireland and the craft movement in Lesotho. And it is hoped that at least one craft shop in west Cork will stock some of the felt nativity figures made by the Ha Nyenye Craft Group.



Photo © West Cork Inspires

Bantry Bay Lions Club

Many thanks are due to the Bantry Bay Lions Club who organised a table quiz for Action Lesotho at the Bantry Golf Club.

Waterville Friends of Lesotho

Waterville Friends of Lesotho (a local branch of Action Lesotho) organised a double event in December: a Christmas Craft Fair to be followed by a benefit gig with a fine line up of musicians including Seán Garvey and the Kerry Tenors. Unfortunately, after all their hard work, the event had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the terrible weather before Christmas.

Waterville Friends of Lesotho have had a long association with the Ha Nyenye Craft Group and are actively fundraising to help the craft group achieve their dream of building a new enterprise centre. This will provide a place where the ladies can make their quilts and felted figures: at present they work in an outbuilding, in one of their kitchens or sitting outside in the dust.

Action Lesotho bookshop, Tralee

Ever since it opened in 2007, Action Lesotho's charity bookshop in The Mall, Tralee, Co. Kerry, has provided an important source of income for the projects in Lesotho. For example, in 2010 it provided 15% of Action Lesotho's total revenue (see chart above right). So if you're in the area make sure to call into the shop and buy a book or two from their fantastic stock. The shop is staffed by an enthusiastic team of volunteers (including Leanne O'Driscoll – see front page article). New volunteers are always welcome: if you'd like to join the team just drop into the shop or contact Carmel on 087-2460516. Donations of good quality books, CDs and DVDs are always welcome too!



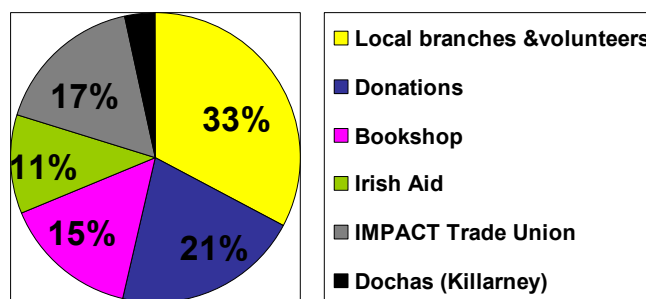
Accounts for 2010

During 2010, Action Lesotho received a total income of €89,000, whilst the total expenditure was €73,000. The breakdown of where this money came from and how it was spent is illustrated in the diagrams below. As you will see from the expenditure chart, nearly 70% of the money raised went directly to the projects in Lesotho. In Lesotho the money was spent on a range of things from building a community centre to funding feeding programmes for nearly 200 orphans and vulnerable children.

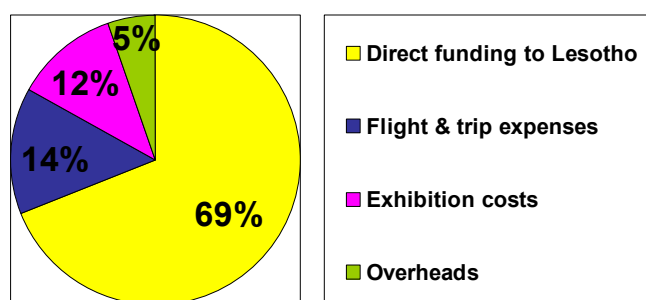
In terms of income we are very reliant on our individual supporters, local branches, volunteers and the bookshop – in total these accounted for 72% of our total income for 2010. The remainder of our income came from an Irish Aid grant (to fund a travelling photographic exhibition on disability in Lesotho) and a grant from IMPACT Trade Union (to purchase land for the new mill). Many thanks are due to everybody who contributed in any way: without you our projects in Lesotho couldn't continue.

Formal accounts for 2010 have not yet been completed, but for anyone interested in the Audited Accounts for previous years (2008 and 2009), they are available on the following page of the Action Lesotho website: www.actionlesotho.ie/reportsandarticles

Action Lesotho Revenue 2010



Action Lesotho Expenditure 2010



Call for positive images of Africa

Kerry Action for Development Education (KADE) is holding an exhibition to coincide with Africa Day on May 25th 2011. KADE is looking for photographs that portray a positive image of Africa. The deadline for submissions is April 15th. For full details see www.kade.ie

VISIONS OF AFRICA
PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS