

Report from South Africa, March 2009

Larry and I just returned from two weeks in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Kwa Zulu-Natal, even more gratified and inspired than ever. Teach with Africa appears to be making a real difference in the lives of the LEAP students, who are succeeding beyond all expectations. We had a warm reunion with the eight "Ambassadors" who visited in February, and it was delightful to see them confidently pursuing their academic and personal goals.

LEAP Schools I and II in Cape Town appear to be more cohesive and well-structured than on our site visit last year. They are now in the same building and under able leadership, while the Teacher Training Program is in the adjacent building, with master teacher Pete Van Jaarsveld supervising the group. This is an important addition, since the teachers-in-training are in a remote learning situation which was breeding isolation and frustration when they were faced with challenging new concepts.

Larry and I also had the opportunity to meet with Solomon Madikane, creator of the Realistic program in Langa. Realistic has counseled over 100 young parolees since its inception; not one has returned to prison! Our psychology Fellows were highly positive about the work they participated in last summer and we plan to place additional team members this year. Another program we're excited about is the new project for HIV/AIDS prevention, developed by Carmen Shadwell, OT. Carmen received a grant from MAC cosmetics to attend a two-month seminar at Columbia University, and she has begun a creative program for the students at LEAP and the primary feeder schools for 11-13 year old girls, assisting them in making healthy choices around their sexuality and their futures. Carmen is eager to welcome our Fellows to support her in this new venture.

Much of the time in Cape Town was spent with LEAP Board members and the Rotary International Club of Newlands, formalizing a \$25,000 grant for the LEAP School that has been facilitated by Teach with Africa and the Foster City Rotary. This is clearly a major gift that Larry has been pursuing for over a year, and we are thrilled that TWA could assist in this important way.

Then, onto Johannesburg, to view the new LEAP III. This recently opened school is in an idyllic setting of lawns, flowers and waterfalls, and yet just across the highway from Alexandra township, perhaps the most dysfunctional in all of South Africa. The atmosphere is a replica of LEAPS I and II: high academic standards, life orientation and code of conduct, and engaged and motivated students. We are looking forward to sending a team of Fellows to LEAP III this summer, expanding TWA's reach into another part of the country.

Finally, the last leg of our journey took us to the far eastern coast of South Africa, to Kwa Zulu Natal. It has been our dream to support the rural schools and communities, since the resources are so very scarce and the needs so enormous. After spending several emotionally powerful days with the indigenous community leaders in villages near Phinda Safari and Rocktail Bay Camps, we are continuing to explore the

feasibility of a pilot project in one or both of these outlying regions. How very painful it was to see the children at the Nkomo school unable to receive their one meal that day, since they ran out of water in which to cook. Or, to meet with the lovely Zulu children who walked for countless miles to sing and dance for us, whose parents (if they have them, most don't) have no jobs or prospects and no money for the bare essentials. Before last year, their school was literally under a tree!

Along the way, we also held some fascinating and high level meetings with: The Director of the Office of the Director General of South African Education, the Founder and Director of the African Leadership Academy, the Director of Corporate Affairs for Intel in South Africa, and the Director of Edunova in South Africa. Each of these advanced our understanding of the national framework for education in the country, as well as suggesting creative alternatives in the non-governmental sector.

Home again, we are both humbled and energized, committed to do what we can to teach and to learn.

Warmest thanks to John Gilmour, our wise guide and mentor, and to all of the passionate supporters of Teach with Africa. As John has said, "Only good can come of this".

Margie Schlenoff, Founder and President of the Board
Teach with Africa
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