

Victims of our own Success

When the Centre César opened its doors on June 23, 2006, it welcomed approximately 30 widows into its small, tight knit community. The opportunity to sell many of the sewing, embroidery and artisan works in Canada quickly attracted many more widows to the Centre.

However, the major increase in the number of widows working at the Centre meant there was a problem of adequate space for the 60 or so women. Thanks to a generous donation from one Canadian sponsor, the Centre moved to a larger house to better accommodate the arrival of more women. The women who worked in the sewing workshop secured a contract to make a couple hundred uniforms for students going to school, while even more women arrived to work in the artisan workshop. With such an influx of women in the artisan group, the amount of products made quickly surpassed the amount of artisan-stuff being sold. Faced with such a setback, we were compelled to give the women monthly advances to ensure they would continue working and receiving an income. On the other hand, we were left with a large inventory of unsold artisan products, thus lowering our incoming funds.



Coincidentally, due to our rapid growth, those who work for Ubuntu at the Centre have become greatly overwhelmed with responsibility, making it necessary to hire more people. Currently, a total of 18 employees work at the Centre to ensure the smooth running of business affairs for the 87 women who work at the Center on a daily basis.

With the Ubuntu community growing to include 152 families, for a total population of 721, there is also an increase in the cost associated with trying to achieve food self-sufficiency, especially in the face of major increases in the price of food staples over the past 3 to 4 months. Fortunately, we have just received word from the local authorities that we will be receiving a larger plot of land to cultivate fresh vegetables, since our garden is no longer large enough to support the women.

Every Tuesday, Dr. Daniel visits the Centre to offer his medical expertise to the women and children; while Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are reserved for a massage-therapist to work his magic on the women. More recently, we have started to offer the women Thursday counselling services, allowing our psychologist to help the women work through the scars left from their past. All of the wide arrays of services are carried out in one small 10' by 11' room in the house. One very generous donor has agreed to pay for the services of all the 3 professionals as well as any necessary equipment.

Our daycare has also undergone some changes in the past 8 months; thanks in part to a young Quebec woman who worked with our teachers to develop a new training program aimed at improving the children's education. Games, books, building-blocks and other educational materials were donated to the daycare through the participation of many Canadians, especially those students from Louis-Riel College. A nutritional program is also up-and-running and, thanks to a dedicated group from Kitchener, Ontario, we are able to serve a warm lunch to our 31 children at the daycare, ranging from 1 to 6 years, on a daily basis. There are still another 32 children who are waiting for an opening at the daycare.

We are very grateful to the many Canadian donors who have supported Ubuntu's rapid growth in the past- a growth that has recently culminated in the purchase of land that will become home to Ubuntu's new community village. Our new Centre will house the sewing and artisan teams, have more space for offices, a medi-centre, a daycare-with more than enough space for our current 63 children, as well as a professional training centre where we will be able to teach electrical, plumbing and data processing courses. Although our fundraising campaign does not kick into high gear until November 2008, it was necessary to pay for the expenses of our architect as well as the construction of a fence to guarantee our future building site.

In spite of the generous donations collected on my last trip to Canada, the rapid growth of activities and the increase cost of expenditures means that we must rely on regular donations to Ubuntu, to ensure our day-to-day operations.

As a result, we have enough funds to see us through the next three months but we must quickly find additional funding. We are thus victims of our own success; compared to these survivors of the 1994 genocide, who raise their heads with courage and pride, hoping for a better future, which nonetheless still rests on shaky ground.

Maman Nicole