

UNTIL TOMORROW

Newsletter from ART & DOROTHY HELWIG

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2008 – A Year To Remember

The year 2008 will be long remembered as a year of change and growth. Normally, with huge paradigm shifts and challenges seem to be normal as well. With a grant for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, growth was definitely something we were braced to experience. A previous survey of the county indicated nearly 2000 orphaned children under the age of 15! With the geographical area divided into 11 political wards, the same number of outpost locations were established to provide counseling and with a manager to oversee the local operations. This meant 22 new persons added to our staff with an additional four supervisors.

The Lifeline Centre, (clinic) which is supported by AIDS Relief, began to grow quickly with Dr. Stephen Amodu in charge. One year later we are moving toward 700 patients with close to 400 on antiretroviral drugs. Of course the Lifeline staff had to increase since we do CD4 count applications, adherence counseling, pharmaceutical supplies, and a number of support staff just to get all the paper work prepared and submitted to donor agencies.

Rapid growth of this nature will always create problems concerning office and general work space. Donor agencies such as AIDS Relief and USAID do not provide funding for the construction of buildings. Many other basic infrastructure parts of the overall work are not part of the plan either. This leaves a small Non-Government Organization like GECHAAN between a rock and a hard place. Until facilities are in place to accommodate the staff needed to keep pace with the workload, things can become complicated.

Our regular work of meeting the needs of people continues but with all the rapid growth our personal work funds and operational funding is inadequate to carry the load. So far we have managed by being patient and carefully distributing available funding to keep forward motion a reality.

As expansion continues there will need to be some very creative plans put in place to accommodate the needs of those who come for help. Please pray that God will give us the wisdom to cope with the realities ahead.

HIV Testing

The HIV testing continues in the rural areas where village leaders have requested the procedure. Because of hard work and commitment, during 2007/2008 close to 35,000 people have been tested in villages or at the Lifeline Centre. We have a detailed record of each one tested and the pre and post test counseling has been done. The schedule is developed and managed by Zebulon Wanmi, GECHAAN Community Relations Director.

Unfortunately free test kits are no longer available through the regular donor agencies. This is a difficult issue to understand since HIV testing is the most effective method of preventing the spread of the HIV. Comments must be reserved for obvious reasons. From time to time villages send delegations of leaders to come and appeal this decision. This happened at a very critical time since villagers and village leaders agreed to pay for transportation costs for each HIV positive person to travel to Gembu for CD4 testing at the GECHAAN Lifeline Centre. We are busy seeking ways and donors to assist in restoring the HIV testing projects.

Lifeline Centre Focus of 2008 World AIDS Day



All the Jauros and Ardos of the Sardauna Local Government were invited to participate in the official commissioning of the GECHAAN Lifeline Centre on December 1, 2008. The acting Mambilla Chief, Alhaji Ndotti Zubairu Kabri, did the honors of

cutting the ribbon. It was wonderful to note that nearly 100% of the traditional rulers were present. A traditional gown was given to each ruler in appreciation for their exceptional cooperation and support in their communities. Jerry Sheveland and Roy Peacock from Converge Worldwide came to Gembu to celebrate this wonderful occasion.

Joseph's Barn Renovated

The rapid increase in the number of staff has created a major challenge in terms of offices space. As a temporary solution Joseph's Barn is divided into eight offices. Alternate plans have been made to store corn and rice for which the facility was built. As our growth continues, it is anticipated that an office complex and classroom facility will need to be constructed. The number of seminars, conferences, and meetings that GECHAAN sponsors requires the additional facilities.

Couples Seminar a Great Success

Fifty married couples, four from each Ward, met in the assembly hall of a nearby secondary school for a three-day Seminar geared to help parents gain the courage to talk with their children about HIV/AIDS. Many were surprised to have Muslim and Christian couples sitting in small groups discussing the topic. Suddenly the concept surfaced concerning the question, how can we talk to our children about morality and intimacy when we never talk to one another about it? The couples were so excited exclaiming, "this is the first time in our marriage that we talked about such things together let alone discussing it with Muslim friends!" There was so much talk about it we sent a video news report to Jalingo and the seminar was reported on State and National television. We later learned that the TV stations received many calls for information about GECHAAN.

The interest in this topic for seminar studies indicates a huge concern among couples to strengthen their relationships and marriages in the interest of saving their children from becoming victims of HIV/AIDS pandemic.

A Unique Approach To HIV/AIDS Prevention Applauded

Have you ever heard of secondary school students signing up for a chance to compete in an HIV/AIDS Quiz? This was the first occasion like this and the response surprised many people. All secondary schools were invited to send three students to compete on the topic of HIV/AIDS. Munji Ephraim and Tulari Tine, GECHAAN staff, took up the challenge and did a great job of organizing and providing leadership throughout the event. The enthusiasm of the youth to study in preparation for the competition was inspiring and the level of learning about HIV/AIDS was amazing.

Teachers and principals demonstrated heartening attitudes toward the program. Everyone agreed that the process of studying in preparation for the quiz may be the best learning process. News about this event has been discussed far and wide and it even made the evening news on the State TV station. The number of requests received for next year's competition has left us speechless!!!

Immanuel Graduates



From time to time we mentioned Immanuel, the first orphaned child brought to us Christmas Eve, 2004. Julia was ready to take care of the child if we would assist with baby formula. The child was severely handicapped and the doctors indicated his life would be short because of many health issues.

Against all odds, Immanuel survived for four years mainly because of the incredible commitment to his well being by Julia, his foster care mother. He was unable to sit up, crawl, see, hear but Julia's love and concern for the child never faltered. He died in December. We are saddened by this, but he is in a much better place with no more suffering. Immanuel's life was a witness to the people of Gembu

Prayer and Praise:

1. Pray that will give wisdom as the enormous number of orphaned children are processed and placed in foster homes.
2. Thank God for the Foster Care Parents as they do their best for the children assigned to them.
3. Pray for the thousands of children in Nigeria who are orphaned without a suitable and safe place to live.
4. Pray for youth and the THRIVE to STAY ALIVE program

Donations for GECHAAN projects can be sent to Converge Worldwide-2002 S Arlington Heights Road, Arlington Heights, IL 60005 Fund #530131 or just indicate the Nigerian Project.