

### *A note from our CEO*

## Worthy of the gift

I knew from the start that children in poor communities lived in challenging conditions. During the first six years of SOHO's existence, I visited many homesteads and wondered how some of the families managed. I remember Gogo Gracie with 15 children in a small room with one bed and a dirt floor, and was so thankful that SOHO was able to help build a safe space for her family.

Then I visited Marekamp. What I saw inspired us to pray and search diligently for a place where traumatized children could find peace, safety and love. Lentsaba Children's Village & Farm was an answer to that prayer. And finding the Greater Works Church to sponsor the first three homes has been a tremendous blessing, along with our contractor Sizo Mamba, a former orphan who poured his heart into the project.

During a recent inspection by social workers from the Deputy Prime Minister's office, we overheard one social worker say "I wouldn't mind living in this house" — acknowledging that the homes are, indeed, a worthy gift to the vulnerable children.

Our journey to develop Lentsaba has had many challenges. The cost of building materials has skyrocketed, and government requirements have increased. We have a donor willing to furnish the homes, but urgently need help with funds for staffing, support services and security.

As you plan your year-end giving, please help us to open the door to the children who are waiting for the gift of a safe, inviting home. From our hearts — and theirs — we thank you!

Blessings,

*Cynthia J. Prime*



## SOHO briefs

**Hope Rising! Summit in Eswatini** — For the past eight years, SOHO has held annual events in the United States to raise awareness for gender-based violence and other issues affecting orphans and vulnerable children. In February 2025 SOHO and the Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA) will co-host the first Hope Rising! Game Changers Summit in Eswatini.

This event will include a summit on Thursday, Feb. 6, that explores the impact of gender-based violence not only on women and children, but also the economy and country. An inspirational "Celebrate the Children" program is scheduled for the afternoon of Friday, Feb. 7. Featured guests include: Yvonne Chaka Chaka, princess of Africa; Josina Machel, human rights defender; Gail Masondo, author, producer, life coach and SOHO's South African adviser; Victor Masondo, producer and musician; and the South African band Gcina & Friends.

**Clean-up campaign** — One of the first things visitors to Marekamp would notice were the piles of rubbish that littered the community. Recently Pastor Nathi Dlamini, our outreach coordinator, engaged the Marekamp children in helping to clean up their environment. Pastor Nathi and his wife, Amanda, also shared the importance of a sanitary environment with the community. The children and youth participated enthusiastically in the project.

**Vocational Bible school** — In late September our outreach team worked with three volunteers from the South Africa Northern Conference of the SDA church to conduct a vocational Bible school program for the children at Marekamp. The team was led by Estelle Baker, children's and women's ministry director, who drove to Eswatini with gifts and teaching materials. (*see page 3*)



# Update on the Children's Village

In a country where there is a backlog of children in crisis, organizations that house children for the first time are subject to intense scrutiny. Homes and caregivers are evaluated, programs are discussed and the credibility of benefactors is assessed. This is, in part, to stem the tide of abuse that has swept many children and youth into a sea of hopelessness.

In September we met with representatives from the Hlatikulu Regional Deputy Prime Minister's staff to discuss criteria for accepting children into Lentsaba Children's Village. Our delegation included: Lentsaba COO Carey Carscallen; Dr Muyabala Muna, a HOSA public officer; David Mwangi, a contractor; SOHO CEO Cynthia Prime; and Linda Taliaferro, a volunteer assisting

with resource development.

During the meetings, social workers discussed challenges we would face in meeting the needs of children in crisis. Because of the prevalence of abuse and lack of resources, social workers are asked to find temporary homes for children — with the hope of returning them to their homesteads when deemed safe. Yet a two-fold quandary exists: 1) foster homes are unavailable, and 2) many children do not have homes to which they can return.

The SOHO team also met with the director of social services at the Hlatikulu Deputy Prime Minister's main office. Dr Muna and Cynthia Prime shared SOHO's vision of providing stable homes where children could grow up without fear of displacement or abuse.

Department leaders expressed appreciation for SOHO's plans and told us a physical inspection of Lentsaba premises was required before they could issue a certificate of approval for occupancy at Lentsaba Children's Village.

A few days later, two social workers from the Hlatikulu Regional Deputy Prime Minister's office visited the farm and inspected the homes where children will live. They were thrilled to see the homes are well built and the environment welcoming. Once we have hired security guards, caretakers, social workers and counselors for the children, the social workers will return to interview the new staff. At that point, they can give us the certificate of approval so that Lentsaba Children's Village can begin to open its doors and accept children.

# Mission trip: Small team, big impact

Estelle Baker is a petite woman with a big heart. Children instantly know that behind her gentle voice, there is a warm welcome for them. Estelle arrived from South Africa accompanied by two friends, Rene Woodman and Eustasia Kitup, along with a trunk full of supplies. During their week-long stay in Eswatini they conducted a variety of programs including a vocational Bible school (VBS).

The feeding center at Marekamp buzzed with activity as the children shared in dramatized Bible stories about courageous youth. The lessons were emphasized with action songs and colorful pictures. These activities took place after meals, and the children eagerly looked forward to each succeeding lesson.

At the end of the week, children came forward to share the stories as they understood them, receiving hearty applause. Those with perfect attendance graduated from the program and received colorful certificates.

Estelle's team also conducted a VBS program at our Hope Discovery Learning Center preschool. At the end of the week 54 children received certificates, which they proudly displayed. In addition to working with the children, Estelle's team:

- Shared health tips with young mothers and provided each with a package of personal care items.
- Brought small gardening tools and seeds to begin a garden.
- Conducted prayer sessions and discussions on social issues.
- Trained the women on dressing wounds that are common to children and family members.

Volunteers like Estelle, Rene and Eustasia are critical to SOHO's work and help us extend our resources to



Top photo: Linda Taliaferro, SOHO team member; Nathi and Amanda Dlamini; Estelle Baker, Eustasia Kitup and Rene Woodman with Cynthia Prime standing behind; and a representative from the Sidvokodvo SDA Church. Remaining photos are of Bible school activities at Marekamp and Hope Discovery Learning Center.

better serve the children. We are reaching out to churches, schools and groups to participate in mission trips, where they take on projects, conduct programs like VBS and share their affection and talents.

Participants tell us that these trips are life-changing.

To learn more about upcoming trips and how you can get involved, visit our website at [https:// saving-orphans.org/get-involved/](https://saving-orphans.org/get-involved/)

# Partnering for positive change in Eswatini

In Eswatini, the one organization known for gender-based abuse prevention is Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA). Whether the issue is domestic violence, child abuse or other forms of inequity, SWAGAA is the country's primary mediator, advisor, troubleshooter and problem-solver.

SWAGAA is making impact by:

- Educating girls on how to prevent themselves from becoming victims.
- Counseling and educating men and women on strategies to further positive change in their homes and communities.
- Publicly advocating against gender-based violence.

As SOHO prepares to begin a residential program for children who are traumatized and vulnerable, SWAGAA will be an important resource for us. Indeed, SOHO and SWAGAA are co-hosting the first Hope Rising! Game



From left: Cynthia Prime, CEO of SOHO, Linda Taliaferro, a member of SOHO's U.S. planning committee, and Nonhlanhla Dlamini, executive director of SWAGAA.

Changers Summit in Eswatini on Feb. 6-8, 2025, to end gender-based violence. The guests will include well-known personalities and community leaders who will discuss critical issues affecting vulnerable children. This summit will end in an interfaith celebration of prayer, praise and thanksgiving for the children who are the future of the Swazi nation.

## *Understanding the significance of TIC*

An important part of our approach at Lentsaba Children's Village is trauma-informed care (TIC).

This approach shifts the focus from "What's wrong with you?" to "What happened to you?" and acknowledges the widespread effect that trauma can have on a child's life. For example, repeated exposure to trauma can affect brain development, resulting in a rewiring of the brain's response to stress, which may be a root cause of chronic illness, behavioral irregularities or even a predisposition to suicide.

By providing TIC, we at SOHO recognize that healing services for the children is a process. All employees at Lentsaba will receive training in TIC principles so that there is a consistent, organization-wide mindset. This includes understanding what has happened in the past, building an environment of physical and emotional safety — and establishing trustworthy relationships so that retraumatization does not occur.

GIVING TUESDAY

## *Help us open Lentsaba Children's Village!*

Each year there is a global drive on the Tuesday after Thanksgiving for individuals, corporations and groups of every kind to collectively give so that charities around the world can have an infusion of funds to address the needs of the population they serve.

This year GivingTuesday falls on December 3. At this time, we want to thank our current donors for the tremendous support you have given year-round. We also want to take this opportunity to encourage new supporters to join us as we strive to open Lentsaba Children's Village & Farm on our 1,065-acre mountaintop property in Eswatini, which will provide a safe haven for 250 orphans and vulnerable children.

We need your help to reach our financial goal so we can finally welcome the children home. Thank you, and God bless you!



To donate online, scan QR code