

## Lubuto Libraries Transform Youth Services in Africa

By Chris Vestal

Imagine both your parents dying by the time you're five. Now imagine just a few years later the grandparents that took you in are both dead too. You've been chased out of their home by other relatives, forced to face the streets of Zambia with only your brother. After being separated from brother you're beaten and threatened with being jailed over false accusations.

While this may be reminiscent of *Slumdog Millionaire*, this was the life of a young man named Humphrey. With nowhere else to turn, Humphrey found the Fountain of Hope Drop-in Center where he discovered a small library collection; a collection that helped save Humphrey's life.

Today Humphrey works as an outreach counselor helping other street youth and he credits the education he received from that library collection with helping him turn his life around. That collection had such a profound impact on his life that he tracked down the librarian that created it, Jane Meyers, and shared his story with her.

Today Meyers is the founder and president of the Lubuto Library Project (LLP) and through its work hopes to help other homeless African youths like Humphrey. The LLP develops libraries geared



Youths gather around the Talking Circle for motivational mentoring (Photo provided by LLP)

toward children and teenagers living in the streets or not enrolled in school. It builds the libraries, develops culturally and age appropriate collections, and trains local people on how to run the library. The LLP's libraries are non-lending so its agreement with community that owns the library requires that it be open for a minimum 40 hours a week and aim to be open during the time users most need it. It also requires that the libraries be accessible to all youths who aren't in school, including those that have to care for younger relatives-so they're allowed to bring the infants they care for with them. The LLP has currently opened one library, in Lusaka, Zambia, with plans to open about 100 and spread the program to Rwanda and other African countries.

While the youths enjoy the books in the collection, perhaps its greatest impact has been in serving as a focal point for other services. Prior to the LLP, social-service programs predominantly only had access to youths in school. With a large number of Zambian children not in school, such programs had limited impact. "It's like the collection is just an excuse to have the library so we can offer other programs," Meyers says, "there are a lot of Zambian professionals that came forward to offer different programs without pay because we could finally reach kids that no one could reach before." According to Meyers of all the programs the motivational mentoring, which focuses on empowering youths, has had the most profound impact youths not enrolled in school, serving about 650 children and teens each quarter.

Another program the LLP is writing a grant for will use open-source software in conjunction with the



Meyers gave a talk about the LLP at the World Bank on 2 February (Photo provided by LLP)



*The library's architecture is faithful to the indigenous culture (Photo provided by LLP)*

libraries' One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) laptops to teach children how to read in their native language. "A child's first encounter with reading really needs to be in their own language. The first language most youth's speak is a Zambian language but there's not a lot of print material in those languages. Our plan is to engage reading teachers and have them write literacy programs that teach reading in seven major Zambian languages. We're excited that everything will be open-source so other countries could translate and adapt," explains Meyers.

A large part of the libraries success is due to their architecture. The architect responsible for the design, Eleni Coromvli, wanted the libraries to be completely faithful to the indigenous culture. Coromvli was inspired by Christopher Alexander's concept of pattern language and sought to utilize this in the design. "The issue was how to use traditional building patterns to create a space that would be a strong centre and able to accommodate the functions of a library," states Coromvli.

In order to truly represent the culture Coromvli knew the libraries would have to be composed of more than one building. "A typical Zambian homestead comprises a number of buildings, some more important and bigger than others. The building housing the book collection of the library was done; I needed at least two more structures to complete the pattern of a Zambian homestead. Thus, the Arts Room was created as a secondary in size building, and the entrance building was added as the smallest building of the complex, which needed a point of

entry anyway, in the pattern of the traditional *insaka*," Coromvli explains.

So the prototype library consists of three round buildings with thatched roofs. The first building modeled after an *insaka*, a focal point in a village where villagers gather, is an open building with hand washing stations and the entry point to the other buildings. The next building, the "Arts Room" is where children can engage in arts and activities. The final building, the "Reading Room", houses the library collection itself in its periphery, along with private seating, and in center there's a sunken-round seating area, called the "Talking Circle", used for story time and group discussions.

"The buildings make Zambians feel proud-that it represents their culture and are more grand than the western buildings. People think it's cozy and beautiful and they want to be there. It helps us get adults in there with the kids," states Meyers.

Not surprisingly librarians have embraced the LLP as well. In fact it was from posting a question on the DC SLA discussion list that Meyers was put in contact with Carol McClarnon, who not only helped LLP achieve its a non-profit status but serves as secretary on LLP's board of directors. Several librarians also sit on LLP's different boards. Sally Sinn is a board member and also working on establishing a union catalog for the collection using LibraryWorld. Because of connecting with the



*The Reading Room building contains the library's collection, private seating, and the communal Talking Circle (Photo provided by LLP)*

National Geographic Society through Susan Fifer Canby the society's chief financial officer has gotten a tremendous amount of support for LLP including offers for free shipping.

Librarians have also had an impact on the LLP from organizing book drives, to cataloging books every Sunday, to packing up the collection for shipment. The LLP is still recruiting volunteers, particularly those interested in assisting with its website.

Because of the work it's doing the LLP has even come to attention of celebrities. Actor Danny Glover will be present at a benefit for the LLP on 15 April at the National Geographic Society.

The LLP and its staff have also received numerous awards. LLP won the ALA's Presidential Citation for International Innovation and for second consecutive year is a nominee for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award. Meyers herself was honored with a lifetime membership to the Zambia Library Association, SLA's Dow Jones Factiva Leadership Award, and the University of Maryland's College of Information Studies Distinguished Alumnus of the Year.

For more information on the LLP visit [www.lubuto.org](http://www.lubuto.org). To find out more about volunteer opportunities email [info@lubuto.org](mailto:info@lubuto.org).



Youths make use of OLPC laptops for a number of programs at Lubuto Libraries (Photo provided by LLP)



Librarian volunteers help catalog books for the collection (Photo provided by LLP)

## Librarians Explore Living in Multiple Worlds

By Eileen Boswell



Navigating through multiple worlds and its impact on an individual's professional and personal life were the focus of the chapter's 26 January, book club meeting. Members gathered at the

Taj Mahal restaurant in DuPont Circle, to discuss *Living in More than One World: How Peter Drucker's Wisdom can Inspire and Transform Your Life*. The author Bruce Rosenstein, a chapter member himself, was present to participate in the conversation and to autograph copies for attendees.

The book is a primer on the work of renowned author and management consultant, Peter Drucker, and serves as a guide for applying Drucker's principals. Rosenstein explained how living in multiple worlds enhances one's work and enriches one's life. In fact, Rosenstein has firsthand experience juggling several worlds; while he wrote this book he also worked as a writer and librarian for USA Today, and as an adjunct professor with the Catholic University of America's library science program. More information about Rosenstein and his books is available at [www.bruceroenstein.com](http://www.bruceroenstein.com).

For more information on the chapter book club visit <http://units.sla.org/chapter/cdc/book/bookclub.html>