

Street children's film premieres at American Centre

By Lwanga Mwilu

'Kids just like you' a thought-provoking documentary film about street kids produced by Lubuto library project last week premiered at the American centre, evoking many emotions among the audience.

The 10 minute film features National Arts Council chairman Mulenga Kapwepwe, US ambassador to Zambia from 1996 to 1999 Arlene Render, street kids from Lusaka and students from Edmund Burke and Green Acres schools of Washington DC area.

Narrated by Julian Bond, the film was produced to support the creation of libraries for street kids and other vulnerable children in Zambia. It is also meant for use in high schools and middle schools in the US and Canada to raise awareness on the effects of HIV/AIDS on young people in Africa.

Director of the documentary

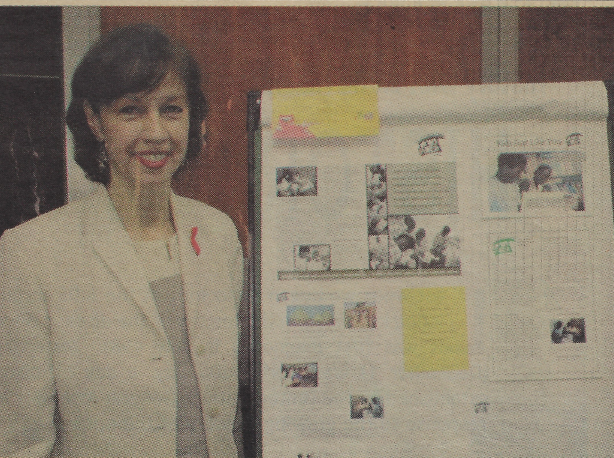
Jane Kinney Meyers said after years of working towards it, she was very happy to see the first library for street kids just about to open.

"I'm thrilled to see the library just about to open in Lusaka after years of pushing. From the plan I knew it would be beautiful but there is nothing like sitting in it and using it. I'm overwhelmed to see street kids that I read different books to at Fountain of Hope centre some years back still involved and now helping others," she says.

Meyers said street kids needed to be helped become literate.

"The libraries are for those children who have no access to books and street children are the most vulnerable because they can't be in school and it's hard to reach them so I think a library is the bridge they need," said Meyers. "Many people both in Zambia and Washington DC know that you need to give the street children something more than lunch. They need to enjoy the freedom that comes from reading and becoming enlightened.

Lubuto is more than people's traditional idea of a library. It will be more than books, it is to be a safe place where street kids can be helped to deal with the



Director of the documentary Jane Kinney Meyers during the premiere

trauma they have been through. It is to give them a place where they feel safe and secure."

U.S Ambassador to Zambia, Carmen Martinez said the concept of Lubuto libraries included the same standards of library services as provided for children in the U.S and reflected the American tradition of free access to information and learning.

"Libraries in America have, for generations, been sacred places where people from all backgrounds can gather and improve themselves. Likewise, beginning here in Zambia, Lubuto libraries will provide an opening into the world, making available education and information and most importantly giving children hope by offering them a window from which to look at a great big world outside," said Martinez. "I know that after watching this film you will

better understand the

urgent need for this project. You will also appreciate the efforts of the people who have their mission to help provide street kids, orphans and other vulnerable children with access to libraries, giving them opportunities for non formal education, improving literacy, language skills, general knowledge, artistic expression and their participation in society."

And founding Lubuto Library Project Advisory Board member Mulenga Kapwepwe said it was critical that street kids have a library. She noted that sufficient interventions are not created to ensure that children learn how to read, write, read poetry and attempt to write their own poems.

"The dream for this library goes back about ten years and that is the time the footage was taken. That time no one was paying attention to the problem of street kids and that is why my views then may sound too strong now. We used to visit the streets at night and I'm happy to say that more attention is being paid to street kids," said Kapwepwe. "I grew up in a home where the library was the centre of life in the house. I feel we don't do enough to help these children over come their trauma and gain the freedom of education."

Among the people present at the premiere was 24 year old Humphrey Mulenga, who was a street child at the time the documentary was being filmed.

Today Humphrey is not just off the streets but he is also helping street kids. He has been brought on board the Lubuto library project and he says he is enjoying trying to bring out the children's potential.

"I have been there and I know exactly what state those children are in, both mental and physical. I'm an example of what those children can become with some support. There is a lot of potential which can be developed if adults do what they should and that is care, love and teach," he says. "I'm now a Child Care worker and I do voluntary work with Africa Kid Safe. I feel good to see the Lubuto library Project come this far"

The Lubuto Library Project is based in Washington DC and had an inaugural event in November, 2005 at the Zambian embassy in Washington DC hosted by Ambassador Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika.

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Former street child Humphrey Mulenga

