

# From the Executive Director:

Jaya Canterbury-Counts

This year's International AIDS Conference theme was, "Time to Deliver." As I sat in the opening meeting in August, among more than 26,000 delegates from around the world, I was thinking about "delivering," and what that means for a small organization like the River Fund. In June, I attended the United Nations High Level Meeting on AIDS (UNGASS 2006), that focused on

reviewing progress achieved in the Declaration of Commitment made and signed by the General Assembly in 2001. The meeting involved all sectors of the international community, governments, civil society and the private sector and pounded home the message that the world's governments have so far failed to deliver on the promises made in 2001. If governments, corporations, big foundations, and the UN are still losing the fight against AIDS, what can the River Fund do? As if to answer my question, I discovered that I was sitting next to an AIDS doctor from Fort Lauderdale. He remembered Ma and the River Fund from years ago, and told us how touched he was by what a difference Ma made as a spiritual leader in those days of abandonment and death.

Vicki Priya and I felt the same spirit of commitment and hope when we joined a group of African and Canadian grandmothers to raise awareness of the thousands of elders in Africa who have buried their children and are now raising their grandchildren. Such women and children often live in abject poverty, but we have helped the Women's Guild of Lumino, Uganda begin to support them by planting community gardens. The grandmothers who are able help in the gardens. Some of the produce is sold, and some goes directly to feed the grandmothers and the children they care for. This is an example of the kind of small grassroots projects that find creative ways to deliver

exactly what is needed, the kind of project where the River Fund makes a big difference in people's lives. Marching with these grandmothers, I was inspired again to do more.

This same spirit of direct service is what sustains us, whether we are helping in Uganda or at home in Florida. This is what we do, with Ma's example of one to one service, always "delivered" with love. Small though we are, the River Fund does deliver. Thank you all for your continued support over the years.



## INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE XVI: Facts from Toronto

- Without better HIV prevention, the cost of treatment is not sustainable. In the past two years, for each new person getting effective treatment, ten new people became infected!
- In the past year there have been 4 million new HIV infections worldwide.
- The UN predicts 18 million orphans by 2010.
- There is hope for new treatments and new methods of prevention such as microbicides that will put the power of HIV prevention in the hands of women.
- Even so, gender inequality is one of the drivers of the epidemic, and women worldwide are now carrying the heaviest burden of HIV/AIDS.

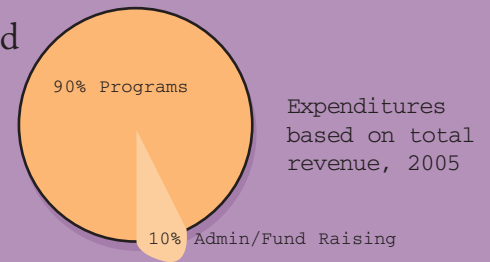
*For example:*

- In the USA, Black women accounted for 68 percent of new HIV infections between 2001 and 2004
- Worldwide, only 10% of women who need it get mother to child HIV prevention
- Empowering women to protect themselves from HIV seems so elemental and yet, around the world, most women do not have the power to demand abstinence or a condom or for their partner to be faithful.



# Who Is The River Fund?

The River Fund is dedicated to providing physical, emotional, and spiritual support to people living with AIDS and other life threatening illnesses, to their loved ones, and caregivers. We serve the poor, those who often are alone and in need — regardless of a person's religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender.



The River Fund wishes to thank the following groups, organizations and people for their compassionate commitment to those we serve.

- Ma Jaya and everyone at Kashi Ashram
- MAC AIDS Fund
- Broadway Cares
- Macho Products
- Jimmy Moore and The Rectory
- The Kingdom Church, Gifford Florida
- The River Fund New York
- Jongs Produce
- Publix Super Market
- Cheney Brothers
- Honey Baked Hams
- Office Depot
- Luis Morais
- Dr. Marvin Sussman
- John Psillas and the Hagerstown Group
- Vicki Gershon and Ross Reider
- Daniel Pingel
- Toni and Arthur Aros
- Mickey Goldstein
- Jack Jackson
- Marielle Sauriol
- Our faithful and tireless volunteers!

## Wish List

- Frequent flier miles
- Free or deeply discounted climate controlled storage space
- Bulk canned food
- Volunteer for data entry/clerical
- Copy machine
- Cargo van
- Child sponsors

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## Message from Ma Jaya

Compassion is a gift from the Divine Mother. Let us use it well. If you treasure your life and the life of others, you will find that your heart will open. Along your path, whichever path you walk, give thanks for the life you lead, for the hands you have to help, and for your heart that beats with the universal love of the Mother. When you feel the world's pain upon your shoulders, then do something about it. This is the action of service, yet it serves the one who is serving in a deep way. One day prejudice and bigotry will end, yet we must pray for it. One day peace will come, yet we must pray for it. One day a cure for AIDS will be found, yet we must pray for it. Walk the path of service with gratitude, leaving footprints for others to follow.



## My Trip to Africa by Subhadra Mitchell

When my dad first asked me if I wanted to go with him to Africa, I said no. The thought had never crossed my mind to want to go to Africa. The more I thought about it, the more I realized it would be a really amazing trip. I decided to go, for purely selfish reasons and mostly because I love to experience new things. And seriously, who turns down a trip to Africa? I didn't understand at the time why my dad wanted me to go or why it was so important that I experience it. Now I do.

From the moment I arrived in Uganda, I was greeted with open arms. This was the reception we got from everyone remotely linked to Father Centurio. I was very shy at first, but everyone went out of their way to make me at home.

I've read about Africa, seen pictures and documentaries, but nothing could have prepared me for the reality of being there. Electricity is only on every other day, if at all. All water has to be carried, sometimes for miles. There are so many children everywhere, many orphaned and hungry. It broke my heart.

I became friends with young women, who live 30 to a room in the dorm the River Fund built. They have no other homes, no parents and no hope or future without our help. And yet, even in such harsh conditions, these were some of the happiest and most welcoming people I have ever met.

My favorite place was in the kitchen, hanging out and getting to know the women. Many are HIV+ and widows, and yet filled with gratitude and joy, and make it their business to help other women in the community. We talked and laughed as we learned about each other's culture. The day I left they hugged me and told me to remember my home, and made me promise to come back. I will never forget them.

There are some things in life that touch you in a way that can't be defined or explained, and it changes you. This trip was one of those things for me. From the truly amazing people I met to the very personal difficulties I overcame, my mind and heart have been touched. I will carry these memories with me for the rest of my life and know that I will always have a home in Uganda, and for that I am truly blessed.



# Feed Everyone - Florida

## Feed Everyone Does Lunch!

Sometimes, you just can't look away. The anonymous statistics become the hungry faces of our neighbors from just up the road. Not only don't we look away, we actually do something about it.

Almost 70 percent of all newly diagnosed HIV positive women in the United States are black women and most of these women are mothers. Children, who have already been suffering, suffer even more, and grandmothers who have already raised one family open their arms, their humble homes, and their limited pocket-books, as they step forward to enfold these grandbabies into their arms and into their care.

The African American community in Gifford is being ravaged by an epidemic of HIV/ AIDS. And because we could not look away in February of 2006, we joined forces with one of the oldest and poorest African American churches in the county (The Kingdom Church) and started serving lunch. Two Saturdays per month we prepare and serve 250 lunches and give away 200 bags of groceries. Every lunch is a party, with games and treats for the kids and conversation and hugs for those who give to us by allowing us to serve them.

At the conclusion of the meal, we bring 100 lunches to an outdoor neighborhood hangout where many unemployed, multi-addicted and ill people gather to spend the day. The town of Gifford has no day center and minimal social services for these people, many of whom are HIV positive.

The people come to us on bicycles, canes, or with several families carpooling together. Our volunteers join church members, many of whom benefit from the groceries as well, and welcome excited kids and tired grandmothers, as well as solitary gentle men who have known lifetimes of sorrows. With no fanfare or bureaucratic hassle, people are offered food and drink, basic HIV/AIDS education, evidence-based prevention tools, and the message they are not forgotten.

We looked up the road and started with a simple question: who will help take care of these people? Our answer is even simpler: We will. With your generous help.



## Back to School: A New Collaboration

The River Fund has a long history of successful collaborations. For us the math is simple: we like to join with other like-minded organizations because more ideas and resources usually equal more people served. Our *Feed Everyone* program in Gifford has made a lovely bridge for us. As our visibility has grown locally, so has our positive reputation. This year we were able to join forces with the Gifford Youth Activity Center and the Riverside Bank, the Vero Beach Museum, Gifford Front Porch and Matilda's Services to make sure that over 450 local kids had all of the school supplies they needed to begin the school year. It was a great day, with music and food and face painting and that very special excitement and high spiritedness that all of us remember from those grand possibilities of a brand new box of crayons, a new backpack, and a new school year beginning.



## Stamp Out Hunger

Imagine if you can, what 17 tons of dried and canned foods looks like. Imagine if you can, how exhausted and exhilarated over 60 volunteers were after sorting those 17 tons. And now the best part, imagine if you can, the

delight and relief of the poor and hungry of our area as they prepare and eat these groceries all year long. For the 5th year in a row, the River Fund has been one of the organizing participants of the U.S. Postal Service's local Stamp Out Hunger



Food Drive. The 17 tons were divided between five local organizations that work at the grassroots level to combat hunger. In addition to our Feed Everyone Program, the food was distributed to: Faith Ministries, The Lord's Table Soup Kitchen, Sebastian Ecumenical Council, and Shiloh Youth Ranch. Because of this drive and the generosity of everyone who participated, our Feed Everyone clients will eat well!



# Uganda: Women's Workshop

by Joyce Campbell-Counts

In rural Uganda, women have few rights. Sexual exploitation, polygamy, female genital mutilation, extreme poverty, lack of medical care, and the destruction of families by HIV/AIDS are all common problems. With the strong support of Father Centurio, all River Fund projects in Uganda include the education and empowerment of women. In late March thirty-two women returned for Part 2 of the HIV/AIDS Survival Skills Workshop in Tororo. Also returning was Lynde Francis, the facilitator from The Centre in Zimbabwe.

This year's workshop focused on "Training the Trainers," preparing these rural women with the knowledge and skills to teach others in similar workshops throughout the area.

Subjects for study included: HIV/AIDS, stress, nutrition, disclosure issues, malaria control, science-based tools for HIV prevention, and skills to negotiate safe sex. Meeting with facilitators in small groups, the women learned how to apply each lesson to their lives, producing solutions that are meaningful to them.

Meanwhile, the women learned and practiced methods suited to leadership in a community, such as voting, reporting, involving others in a cause, and role-playing to illustrate behavior and outcomes. The women took turns running the meetings and making presentations, giving each woman a voice and a chance to practice speaking. Each participant also had to handle questions and criticisms from her peers, and "think on her feet" to provide a response to them.

Accompanying the workshop was a parallel activity about gardening. Gangaji Ma (Suzanne) Baird demonstrated soil preparation, irrigation, and seed placement patterns. The women also learned about grow bags - small, economical, and portable gardens suited to those who are ill, weak, elderly, or refugees far from home. Placed near the door to one's house and watered from the "kitchen", grow bags are easily tended and harvested.

This was the second of a three part workshop series, which will be completed in the summer of 2007. With this second workshop, the women showed their growth in skills, intent, and confidence, sharing stories of their work over the past year and their plans for the coming year. The success of these workshops has shown what can be accomplished by giving local women the tools to make a difference. As each woman matures in her knowledge and leadership, she becomes a powerful force for change.



## Community, Church and Children: Breaking the cycle of HIV in Uganda

**Issues:** AIDS orphans/vulnerable children (OVC) in rural communities lose educational opportunities, social standing, and family property. All OVC are especially susceptible to HIV infection in a continuing cycle. Boys are at risk for lives of petty crime. Girls often turn to sex work.

### *The Cycle Can Be Broken at Two Points:*

- Education and vocational training of OVC
- Sustainable income for widows to extend survival/preserve family structures.

Working cooperatively across national and religious lines, this project in rural eastern Uganda focuses on the immediate needs of the OVC, but also develops institutions for long-term sustainability for the larger community. All staff is from the local community, with the international organizations providing program development, funds, educational materials, and technical help.

Activity	Outcome
Food, shelter, education	978 children
Schools, library, student housing	2 schools (1 academic, 1 vocational), 4 story library with computer and science labs, 3 story dormitory/hostel housing for schools
HIV/Aids education & support network	Trained 35 women as peer/educators
Trainer education	33 of 35 returned for 2 <sup>nd</sup> training
Agricultural co-op provides equipment & training for tailoring and organic farming	113 women-headed families in advanced training
Assist widows to build & operate 2 hostels	623 widows participate: Housing 80 young men and women
Provide income-generating animals	63 families

**Recommendations:** After meeting immediate needs, organizations should address long-term links between poverty, HIV/AIDS, and the status of women.

*These issues are best addressed by:*

- Integrating community-wide umbrella organizations
- Using knowledge of local and international providers
- Serving all regardless of religious or ethnic affiliation.

**Supporting organizations:** The River Fund – USA, Uganda Martyrs Orphans Project – Tororo Uganda, The Centre – Zimbabwe.

This project is a model of community, church and international cooperation to break the twin cycles of extreme poverty and HIV infection.

# INDIA PROJECT

by Jaya Deva Sturm

In March I visited the River Fund's India project, the Little HEARTS Orphanage in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh. Although it was still early in the year, the temperatures were already reaching 100 degrees, Fahrenheit and Nellore, which has grown tremendously over the last decade, seemed hot, dusty and dirty. As arranged, Mr. Prasanna Kumar, the director of Little HEARTS, met me on the main road of the town with his two young sons.



The three of them jumped into the car and directed the driver to their home, which was only a few hundred meters away, where Mrs. Kumar was waiting to serve us a generous traditional lunch and make me feel most welcome.

Later that day, we went with Mr. Kumar to the orphanage to see the facilities and meet the children. Though the house is small by US standards, it was spotless and well cared for, and had a real feeling of home. The three staff people who care for the home and the children all seemed happy, and clearly care for the children very much. The children themselves were a delight. Though it has not been all that long since they left their families and the villages in which they were born, all of them seemed relaxed, happy and well adjusted at Little HEARTS and seemed comfortable with each other, their care givers, and Mr. Kumar and his family.

The children are extremely well cared for. They get three good meals a day as well as snacks. They all attend a local school and also have tutors who come to the house daily to help with their lessons and enrich their education with subjects such as spoken English. They are given several sets of clothes, which the staff keeps immaculately clean and pressed. They are surrounded by people who truly care for them and do their best to nurture them. They are free to be children, knowing that their basic needs are being taken care of. This in sharp contrast to the lives of many other local children, who often live without even the basics, and who must do physical labor to help support their families.

Because of the quality of care, Mr. Kumar receives constant requests to take new children, but at this point he cannot, as the facility and staff cannot handle more than the current group of 25. When he can raise the money, Kumar would like to find or build a larger facility in order to house an additional 25 children and to move on site with his family so that he can take an even more active role in the day-to-day life of the children. I am confident that any support the River Fund provides will directly benefit the children of Little HEARTS and will be well spent.