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The Inside Scoop

Jane Kinney Meyers Awarded Dow Jones Leadership Award

We are pleased to acknowledge and support SLA's selection of Jane Kinney Meyers to receive the Dow Jones Leadership Award. Given annually by the SLA Awards & Honors Committee to an SLA member who exemplifies leadership as a special librarian through examples of personal and professional competencies, this award is funded and supported by the Dow Jones InfoPro Alliance. Here is Jane's story,

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are some 14 million children under age 15 who have lost one or both of their parents to HIV/AIDS. And the number is expected to grow to over 25 million by 2010, an astounding figure that triples New York City's population, because of the high proportion of sub-Saharan adults already living with HIV/AIDS and the difficulties in expanding access to life-prolonging antiretroviral treatment.

While international relief and development agencies and national governments are working hard to meet the basic needs of food, medical care, and clothing, most of these children do not attend school and face a lifetime of poverty and despair engendered by a lack of education.

So how can the world find a way to reach the out-of-school children and offer them an opportunity to learn, to become literate, and to be integrated with society? One very special librarian, Jane Kinney Meyers, has set out to create libraries specifically for them, to welcome them and provide for their special needs, as a way to reach those children that are outside of the institutional framework through which governments and aid agencies operate.

Jane has more than 20 years' experience working with and living in Africa. She lived in Malawi for nearly four years, developing a network of research libraries for the country's Ministry of Agriculture, on a World Bank project, and pioneering CD-ROM applications for Africa in the mid-1980's.

Ten years later she returned to neighboring Zambia, and, over the following three years, she became increasingly involved with services to street children offered by the Fountain of Hope, a drop-in shelter in Lusaka. She established a reading program, served on the Board, raised funds, and created a library for the children, among her many contributions to the center. On her return to the U.S. in 2001, she developed the concept, approach and organization of the Lubuto Library Project, based on the success and impact of the library in Lusaka.

Most of Jane's professional career has been involved with international development, particularly in the agricultural sector. She worked in that capacity at the World Bank and the U.S. National Agricultural Library, for USAID, and as a consultant to a number of international organizations. During her seven years living in southern Africa, as well as on numerous other trips to Africa, she taught and spoke to many library groups in Malawi, Zambia and other African countries, and has visited scores of libraries throughout the continent.

The Lubuto Project was incorporated in D.C. in January 2005, became a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charity in August of that year, and had a regional field office in Lusaka, Zambia designated as an official Zambian NGO in September. In 2006, construction began on the first Lubuto Library, and it is scheduled to open very soon. Jane has also recently been named an honorary member of the Zambian Library Association.

The initial plan was to create three model libraries comprised of complete library collections of excellent children's books, already organized, so that upon delivery, an instant library with books covering a wide range of subjects and levels would be created. As the first one prepares for its grand opening, Jane has been approached by others in Zambia to look at other locations and enlarge the program, even in its infancy.

"Lubuto," in the language of the people of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, means "enlightenment, knowledge, and light." The goal of this aptly named Lubuto Project libraries is to provide a beacon of hope and learning to children whose futures have been darkened by the AIDS crisis in Africa.

The outstanding and amazing accomplishment of this endeavor is nearly beyond words, for not only are the children receiving a non-formal education, they are offered a safe place (off the streets) and hope that their future may be brighter. The project fosters partnerships with the government and other libraries and institutions in Zambia, the US, and the United Kingdom (thus far). The process of raising funds and providing materials as well as staff training is a global one. The further development of staff overseas furthers SLA's goals of becoming a truly global organization. Through her persistence, courage, and foresight, one very special librarian with vision -- Jane Kinney Meyers -- is reaching out to the children their society has thrown away.