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BACKGROUND: *The Lubuto Library in Lusaka, Zambia.*

FAR RIGHT: *A Lubuto patron and an adult volunteer read together in the library.*

AS A MODEL OF SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA SERVICES FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

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Introduction: What is the Lubuto Library Project?

With a per capita gross national income of just \$630, Zambia is one of the world's poorest countries (World Bank 2007). The Lubuto Library Project provides library services to impoverished street kids, orphans, and other vulnerable children and adolescents in Zambia and in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Many of these young people have been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and all of them come from poor communities with limited educational services.

According to Lubuto President and Chairman of the Board Jane Meyers, "Lubuto" means "enlightenment, knowledge, and light" in the language spoken by the Bemba people of Zambia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Meyers 2007). While Lubuto libraries are not formally

associated with schools, Lubuto's goal of promoting education and self-improvement for vulnerable young Africans makes it a useful model to follow when planning school library media services for disadvantaged student populations.

The World Health Organization's statistics (2007) show that each year, 840 of every 100,000 Zambian citizens die of AIDS. In the United States just 5 out of every 100,000 citizens die of AIDS each year, making the Zambian AIDS death rate 168 times higher than that of the United States. As a result, thousands of Zambian young people have been left homeless, and many of them do not attend school. Lubuto Libraries provide secure environments where homeless children and teens can keep off of the streets during the day while engaging in educational activities.

The first Lubuto Library opened in Zambia on September 21, 2007. Designed by architect Eleni Coromvli, each Lubuto Library is a three-building complex featuring traditional thatched roofs, an entrance structure with a sink, a sunken African "talking circle" for read-alouds and traditional storytelling events, space for the collection, and an arts and activities center.

Meyers plans to build at least one hundred Lubuto Libraries across Africa (Meyers 2007). The Zambian government has requested that Lubuto build libraries in regional education zones throughout the country to reach the large number of Zambian young people who do not attend school. These plans are contingent on fund-raising and on support from companies such as Brodart <www.brodart.com>. Brodart has recently become a Lubuto Library Project partner



The insaka (right) at the Lubuto Library in Lusaka, Zambia.

and has agreed to provide book protectors, and other library supplies (Meyers 2008).

Each Lubuto collection contains four thousand hardcover volumes, most of which are donations from U.S. and U.K. publishers, librarians, teachers, and members of the general public. Lubuto helps to organize book drives in U.S. schools and community organizations, and the Lubuto staff members purchase additional local materials for the libraries. U.S. and Zambian volunteers help with materials selection, technical processing, cataloging, and preparation for shipment to Africa.

Looking to Lubuto Libraries as Models for Serving Disadvantaged Youth

The Lubuto Library Project can teach us a number of valuable lessons about school library media services for disadvantaged youth. The success of

Lubuto shows us that library services can help impoverished and otherwise vulnerable students in at least five different ways (1) through basic information and literacy services, (2) through culturally-relevant information resources, (3) through outreach services, (4) through community collaboration, and (5) through social interaction and entertainment opportunities.

Basic Information and Literacy Services

Lubuto Libraries show us that even youth in severely disadvantaged situations need and deserve access to high-quality information resources. Lubuto's success at helping impoverished and often illiterate young people become excited about reading and learning reminds us of the importance of basic literacy services to disadvantaged student populations; such services include read-aloud programs, one-on-one

tutoring, hi-lo reading materials, and unstructured time to allow students to explore information resources on their own without assigned tasks to complete.

Lubuto collections are currently limited to books. Meyers has explained that Lubuto Library users must first acquire basic literacy skills before they can learn to use computer resources (Meyers 2008). There are future plans for stocking the libraries with XO laptops through the One Laptop per Child program (laptop.org/en/index.shtml), which provides disadvantaged children in developing countries with inexpensive learning laptops. For now, the book collections are the students' gateways to reading, learning, and, ideally, attaining decent jobs for a brighter future.

Culturally-Relevant Resources

Cultural preservation is a core goal of Lubuto's planned programs, which feature traditional dances, displays of traditional African arts, and other traditional cultural elements. The collections are carefully balanced to support students' educational needs and to help them learn about their native cultures, as well. The Lubuto Project and the Zambia Library Association have recently announced the creation of the Zambia Board on Books for Young People, which will publish bilingual children's books based on traditional Zambian stories (Lubuto Library Project 2007). These books will provide a broader supply of culturally-relevant resources for Lubuto Library collections.

School library media centers can follow Lubuto's lead in collecting culturally-relevant materials to help disadvantaged students, and disadvantaged minority students in particular, connect to their native cultures. Understanding materials

representing other cultures can require complex knowledge of the cultural contexts within which they were produced, creating a learning roadblock for many minority students. Providing culturally-relevant materials helps minority students overcome this roadblock. Agosto and Hughes-Hassell (2007) detailed these benefits of collecting culturally-relevant resources and concluded “that school libraries should be well-stocked with resources representing a wide variety of cultures and that school library media specialists should collaborate with teachers to identify ways to use them in their classes” (Agosto and Hughes-Hassell 2007, 148).

school library media services that exist, or they are aware of available services but do not feel welcome in the library. Going to places where these students and their adult caregivers feel welcome can bring them into the library community.

Outreach in public libraries usually means setting up library card registration events, or holding storytimes and other programs at shopping malls, daycare centers, churches, etc. For school library media centers, outreach can mean going to disadvantaged students’ classes and telling them about the library and its services. Outreach can also mean going to local community centers frequented by these students and their adult

Much has been written concerning the need for collaboration with teachers and school administrators (e.g., Todd 2008), but less attention has been given to the benefits of community collaboration (collaboration with those working outside of the school environment). Many disadvantaged students view themselves as “outsiders,” outside of the mainstream school culture and socially divided from teachers, administrators, and other students. As a result, disadvantaged students are often hesitant to use school library media services. Collaborating with an organization that has gained student trust can reduce this service barrier. For example, school library media specialists can work with a local Boys & Girls Club or local church group to learn what services disadvantaged students need and how best to offer these services to target groups.

Social Interaction and Entertainment Opportunities

Lubuto Libraries also show us that the social and entertainment value of libraries is important for severely disadvantaged student populations. Each Lubuto Library complex includes an open-air entrance building called an “insaka,” a traditional African village meeting place. Children, teens, and adults gather there for social interaction and community building within a traditional African environment. Lubuto’s planned entertainment programs include storytelling, plays, bookmaking, and music events.

Similarly, school library media centers can serve as social and entertainment spaces for disadvantaged students. While more-advantaged students often have the financial, transportation, and other resources needed to attend optional education, arts, and sports programs outside of school, many disadvantaged students lack the

Disadvantaged students are often unaware of the full range of school library media services that exist, or they are aware of available services but do not feel welcome in the library. Going to places where these students and their adult caregivers feel welcome can bring them into the library community.

Outreach

The Lubuto Project’s outreach efforts remind us of the importance of outreach in encouraging disadvantaged students to use school library media services. “Outreach” means taking library services beyond the library’s physical boundaries into places that are frequented by the target audience. Lubuto engages in outreach activities, such as offering story readings at a local homeless shelter, to draw hard-to-reach young people into the libraries’ spheres of service. Although outreach is often thought of as a function of public libraries, it is also important for school library media centers trying to reach disadvantaged student populations (Cahill 2004). Disadvantaged students are often unaware of the full range of

caregivers to explain library services to show that the library is open to all students, not just the academically and economically privileged. Additional off-campus outreach locations include public libraries, laundromats, and homeless shelters.

Community Collaboration

Whereas outreach means taking library services out of the library, collaboration goes a step further to involve working with other agencies and organizations to provide jointly-designed and jointly-operated services. Lubuto collaborates with a number of community organizations, such as the Fountain of Hope homeless shelter in Lusaka.

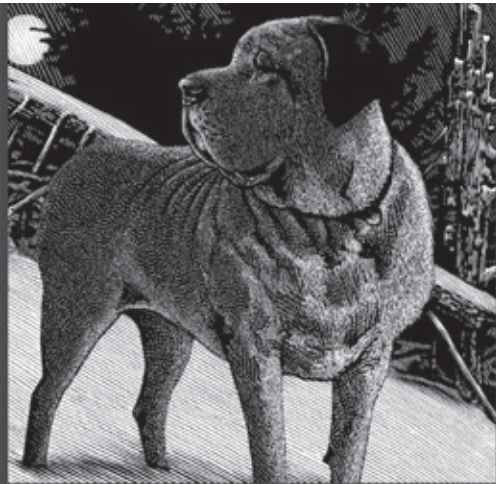
resources needed for participation in these activities. The school library media center can be an ideal place to hold structured and unstructured social and entertainment programs. It is a relatively safe place, often safer than the neighborhoods where disadvantaged students live. Providing book clubs, computer clubs, art lessons, unstructured open library time, etc., can create badly needed opportunities for healthy social and emotional development.

Conclusion: the Global Community

Above all, Lubuto Libraries remind us that we are part of a global community. You can teach your students about the importance of becoming an active member of the global community by facilitating volunteer opportunities. Visit the Lubuto website <www.Lubuto.org>

to find out how to donate time, supplies, or funds. Lubuto is also looking for schools to organize student groups to process, classify, and prepare books to be sent to Africa, and student groups to organize book drives. U.S. high school students have already collected more than sixty-five hundred books for Lubuto Libraries. Through the Lubuto website, librarians and teachers interested in involving their students can request a copy of *Kids Just Like You*, a ten-minute film for middle school and high school students.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The author wishes to thank Lubuto Library Project President and Chairman of the Board Jane Meyers for her assistance in preparing this manuscript. Her selfless dedication to the world's children is an inspiration for all librarians and educators.



JACK LONDON'S DOG

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The story is a remembrance of Jack London's time in the 1897 Yukon Gold Rush and the dog there who became London's friend. This dog was to become the model for Buck in *Call of the Wild*. As they separate, our story becomes the life and intertwined memories of the dog and the man.

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