



Mothering The World

BY DEBRA MOFFITT-LESLIE • PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOTHERING ACROSS CONTINENTS

"The world will be saved by the Western woman," the Dalai Lama said at the 2009 Vancouver Peace Summit. And the ways women are organizing and participating in Charlotte-based Mothering Across ContinentsSM indicate that's exactly what they have in mind.

Founded by Charlotteans Patricia Shafer, president of Compel Ltd., and Lyndall Hare, Ph.D., of Lyndall Hare Consulting, MAC grew out of Shafer's impassioned editorial published in *The Charlotte Observer* in 2006, on World AIDS Day. In the piece, she appealed to the community to become a world-class city — not only through investing in sports and the arts, but by reaching around the globe to poverty-stricken areas, where small donations, or "seed money," can make a huge difference in children's lives. >



Like-Minded Activism

Shafer's message resonated with Hare, who is originally from South Africa. When the two women put their heads together, MAC was born.

"We really wanted to do something very different," Hare says. "Patricia has a strong background in strategic development, and I have a strong background in community organizing." Prior to the creation of MAC, Hare was involved with the South Africa Development Fund, and Shafer played a role at Save the Children International. In realizing their vision for "something very different," Shafer and Hare wanted to offer a platform that focused on how women could respond to the needs in Africa.

With the help of National Public Radio correspondent Cokie Roberts, the initiative was launched at a Charlotte benefit in 2007. In August 2009, MAC became a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

Drawing on the natural ability of women to network, build relationships, nurture, and reach out to others, the MAC organization now functions as a place where women come together to transform the lives of vulnerable and at-risk children in Africa. Both Shafer and Hare volunteer time to the group, and over 90 percent of proceeds from fundraising efforts go to projects that directly impact African children.

"So many women come to me and say, 'I've always dreamed of doing something in Africa,'" says Shafer, who serves as executive director and chief catalyst for the organization. "We offer a way to help through being actively involved."

The Power Of A Woman's Touch

Shafer says that MAC recognizes women as a powerful force in philanthropy, and that the mothering instinct is universal and is not limited to women with children. In fact, she adds, "We have a number of 'lost boys' now 'mothering' other lost boys who were >

Mothering Across Continents has facilitated projects around the African continent. Pictured at left, clockwise: 1. Boys of the Woza Moya Children's Center, in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. 2. Children at the Woza Moya Play Center, part of MAC's Building Futures program. 3. Students in Sudan educated as part of the Raising Sudan program. 4. Girls of the Nyaarweng School in Sudan.

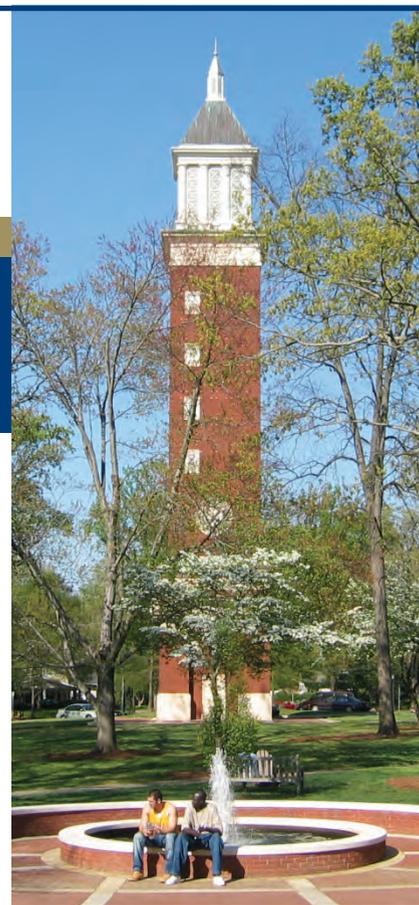
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orphaned due to the turmoil in their countries." The original lost boys were among some 3,800 refugees who arrived in the United States during the past decade, after escaping the horrors of war and genocide in Sudan.

MAC transcends the usual profile of a charitable organization. It accepts donations, but it also strongly encourages people to initiate worthy projects and get directly involved. "We help women identify a project, define and set goals for it, and then move it along so that at some point it can be replicated and taken to scale by someone else locally," Shafer says. So far, MAC has contributed \$13,000 toward funding meals at three high schools, and \$26,000 toward developing a children's education and play center.

Piecing Together A Unified Mission

Hare, a board member and strategic advisor to MAC, compares the organization to a quilt, with many pieces coming together to form a unique whole. For example, Jerri Hatch, who lives near Washington, D.C., approached MAC in 2009, hoping to help out the Mwiko primary school, which she had vis-



Jerri Hatch (pictured at right, in sunglasses) helped coordinate an adopt-a-school program in Rwanda. Here, she visits the Mwiko primary school.

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— Patricia Shafer

ited in Rwanda.

“I went to the school, met the principal and teachers, and was advised by international nonprofit professionals that Rwanda is a good place to pilot an adopt-a-school effort,” Shafer says. MAC will prioritize and clarify the school’s needs and assure the sound use of funds, while Hatch will launch a Mentoring Mwiko fundraising campaign here in the United States.

Karen Puckett, of Salisbury, traveled to Sudan in 2009 and, in conjunction with the Lost Boys of Sudan, is now working with MAC on its Raising Sudan project, which will require \$150,000 to build a school and train teachers for 300 students.

Then there is the Caring Schools project. Shafer feels strongly about the power of education to help children grow out of difficult circumstances. However, when children are underfed, she says, they become listless and unable to study or learn effectively. Through Caring Schools, MAC sets up programs to provide meals to orphaned tenth-graders.

In its first Caring Schools projects, the organization partnered with Save the Children to fund meals, provide education, and create school vegetable gardens in the Free State of South Africa. MAC currently supports four projects in South Africa, Rwanda, and Southern Sudan. The ultimate goal is not only to contribute to the basics of today, but to invest in the futures of these children.

A Coalition Of Caring

Projects unfold after identification of specific needs in areas that are off the radar of non-governmental organizations and government-funded programs. A core group of women who make up what is known as a Guiding Coalition is appointed to advise, guide, manage, and inspire the pilot projects.

One member of the Coalition, Sharon Dempsey, of Greensboro, launched an “I

CAN” campaign to collect money in soda cans for the Building Futures project, to develop the Woza Moya Children’s Center in the Ufafa Valley of Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa. Each can will hold approximately 500 quarters (\$125), which is enough to send one child to school, with books and clothing, for a year. Dempsey, who is also of South African origin, says she learned about MAC at its screening of award-winning documentary director Louise Hogarth’s film, *Angels in the Dust*, a story of HIV orphans.

On another front, South-African-born local photographer Mimika Cooney contributes her photos to create annual Mother’s Day calendars of children and mothers. So far, MAC has received \$5,500 in proceeds from calendar sales.

MAC also sells the *DO Ubuntu* bracelets made by women living with HIV in a region of South Africa that has one of the country’s highest unemployment rates. *DO Ubuntu*, according to MAC, means, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” One half of the money from bracelet sales goes to the cooperative to support the women and children; the other half goes toward funding MAC activities.

Natural bead necklaces, also sold to support the projects, perhaps best represent the underlying essence of MAC. The beads, strung together by the Batwa tribe, are actually seeds that come from the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda. According to Shafer, “The seed necklaces symbolize what can be accomplished when women are connected and equipped as a social network, changing lives in Africa.” **TCW**

For information on how you can become involved in Mothering Across Continents, call 704/607-0098 or visit motheringacrosscontinents.org.

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