A Royal Effort

Sentebale gives Lesotho's children affected by HIV/AIDS a brighter future.

June 29, 2015 By Jennifer Morton

Prince Harry traveled the globe in 2004, spending two months working in Lesotho. The experience had a great impact on the young prince, but his visit had an even greater impact on the small, mountainous country surrounded by South Africa.

With Prince Seesio of the Lesotho royal family as his guide during his visit, Prince Harry met many children whose lives had been torn apart after the deaths of their parents due to AIDS-related illnesses. Lesotho has one of the world's highest HIV infection rates. Prince Harry saw the harsh realities of life for Lesotho's children. More than half of the population is living in poverty, and according to the Lesotho Ministry of Development, one in three children are orphans.

To combat these issues, Prince Harry and Prince Seesio joined together to create the charity organization Sentebale in 2006. Its mission is to help the most vulnerable children in Lesotho get the support they need to lead healthy and productive lives. Sentebale does this by working directly with grassroots organizations to make sure those organizations get the support they need.

Through its Letsema initiative, Sentebale works with all levels and sizes of service providers. "Letsema" means "collaborative working," and Sentebale's network of providers includes more than 300 organizations, 60 of which meet monthly to share information and knowledge.

About one-third of Lesotho's young men are sent away from their families to become "herd boys." Often as young as 10 years old, the herd boys tend livestock in remote mountain regions of the country. Because of their nomadic and isolated lifestyle, many herd boys lack any formal education, and as a result are often stuck in the cycle of poverty.

Sentebale's Herd Boys Program aims to change that. It provides these young men with access to education as well as teaching them other life skills, such as HIV prevention and sexual health information. According to Prince Seesio, he and Prince Harry wanted to "give the less privileged and often forgotten vulnerable children a chance of some schooling, and thus a ray of hope for a better future." Click here to watch a short video about the program.

In May, Sentebale was granted the annual Crystal of Hope Award at this year's Life Ball in Vienna. Donated by Swarovski, the 100,000-euro award honors extraordinary commitments in the fight

against AIDS and also provides a worldwide spotlight on the worthy organization. This year's award focused on Sentebale's Herd Boys Program.

Sentebale helps other vulnerable children in the country too. The Mamohato Network and Camps program offers children living with HIV the opportunity to deal with the struggle and stigma of living with the virus. At the camps, children are educated about the virus through HIV-focused games, sports, arts and crafts, and other activities. The Mamohato camps provide a place for the children to be accepted and talk openly about their experiences living with HIV.

Additional support is provided to the children in each district of Lesotho through follow-up programs and monthly camp reunions as part of the Mamohato Network. The camps and programs have had a significant impact on the physical and emotional health of the children. The Mamohato Children's Centre is scheduled to open later this year. It will be the flagship center for all of Sentebale's work.

Through community grants, Sentebale also provides scholarships to cover school fees, uniforms and other related-education costs. By covering these costs, Sentebale gives children who may not have the means the opportunity to further their education. In 2014, 256 children were awarded such scholarships. In addition to the scholarships, Sentebale provides support to cover transportation and nutritional costs to many other needy children.

Sentebale also provides grants to local community partners who provide shelter, clothing, food and education to orphaned children and to those living with disabilities. Touching Tiny Lives, an organization dedicated to providing care to severely malnourished, critically ill or orphaned babies, is one of Sentebale's local partners.

Ultimately, the goal of all of Sentebale's programs is not to offer short-term solutions, but to provide communities with the means to support themselves. By fostering networks and providing opportunities for children to further their education, Sentebale is making a difference in Lesotho.

On the Sentebale website, Prince Harry writes, "This charity is a way in which Prince Seesio and I can remember our mothers, who both worked with vulnerable children and people affected by AIDS. I really feel that by doing this I can follow in my mother's footsteps and keep her legacy alive."

In Lesotho, the word "Sentebale" means "forget-me-not." Thanks to the work of Prince Harry and Prince Seeiso, there are many children in Lesotho who have not been forgotten.

Watch Prince Harry's video message about Sentebale at Life Ball 2015:

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