

News

Cork Orchestrates Donation to Thatu

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Thatu is about to receive several hundred pounds (Euros!) from the Cork School of Music's *Children for Children* concert held on 16th April 2005.

Five orchestras made up of pupils of the Cork School of Music played in the Cork City Hall. The concert gives young, budding, classical musicians an opportunity to play in front of a large audience, and the students themselves decided to donate the proceeds from the day to charities helping other less privileged children in the developing world.

Thatu was one of two nominated charities. Many thanks to Amanda Dillon who nominated us, and who made an introductory address at the concert, highlights of which appear below.



Sanbonani -- good afternoon to you all.

As you know, the phenomenal spread of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa is literally wiping out an entire generation of people. The middle generation -- your generation -- the parents! According to the United Nations, 12 million children in Sub-Saharan Africa have lost one or both parents to AIDS. By 2010, they suggest, this number will reach 18 million.

However, despite these daunting numbers, children orphaned by the epidemic can still have safe, healthy and productive childhoods and that is the primary concern of Thatu and the other charity, Kwakhaya, represented here today. A key aim is to enable children to stay in their communities and at school. We need to strengthen the family and social structures that do exist in their communities to enable them to grow up in a home, perhaps their own family home, or with members of their extended families. Many teenage orphans manage their own households and care for their siblings. This has been and can be successful if their households have adequate support from the community and if the children can remain at school.

Many orphans go to live with their grandparents. While they may receive much love and gentleness from their grandparents, the situation is often very stressful for the grandparents as, often, they no longer work or have the means to earn an income. They may even have been financially dependent on their children who have died. Traumatized at the death of their own children, they can find the emotional and financial responsibility of taking care of their grandchildren very stressful.

I met a woman in South Africa recently, a widow and grandmother in her 70s who has lost all three of her adult children to AIDS in the past two years. All five of her grandchildren now live with her, and they range in age from three to 13. She is heartbroken -- for herself, for her children and for her orphaned grandchildren. She has buried all of her own children, who have died in their twenties and thirties. She is also very poor. She told me that one day she only had four eggs to share between the six of them. She is not coping with this kind of stress at her stage in life and

she wants the two eldest children to leave school to earn some money for the household so that they might survive.

Thatu is focused on developing and sustaining school and community gardens. School gardens are becoming increasingly popular in South Africa as a way to combat a number of the different effects of HIV/AIDS in a community. Many schools have plots of land around the school grounds that are big enough to be turned into a garden. School gardens are a stroke of genius for several reasons. Gardening is a life skill: by incorporating gardening into the daily activity and life of the school, children acquire invaluable life skills. A child may over a few years work with many different types of plants, fruits and vegetables through different seasons. This is knowledge that might carry them through life. They will always know how to grow their own food -- if they have a patch of garden at home.

The gardens are also used as tools for education. A maths lesson for example might include working out how many cubic litres of water are needed to water the garden. The fresh produce from the garden can be used in the school to make a midday meal for the students. Food is the single most important element in keeping people with HIV alive for longer. Food is essential to healthy immune systems. A healthy diet is key to physical and psychological health. School gardens also enable children to take food home. By placing the school and school garden at the centre of the community, there are many benefits. There is a great incentive to finish primary education and by remaining at school the children can contribute to impoverished households, and parents and grandparents are therefore less likely to send them out to work.

By remaining in school, the children have a stable and supportive environment with their friends and peers and adult supervisors. Children forced to leave school to make a living suffer enormously. Already traumatised by their parents' deaths, they are very vulnerable to exploitation – especially sexual exploitation – putting them at huge risk of contracting the same disease from which they have watched their mother die. The poverty cycle is closed and despair is perpetuated. Keeping children in school, well fed and able to contribute to their families while learning and acquiring life skills makes great sense for both the short- and long-term future of orphans. Let's do it. Thank you for your support of Thatu today!