

Stories from the field

how A Child's Hope International is making a difference

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Hope Boxes™

“Where There is No Vision, People Perish”

Swaziland, a small land-locked country in Southern Africa, has the dubious distinction of being called a Nation of Orphans. Thirteen percent of the Swazi people are considered fatherless, and 45% are under 18 years old. The country is ranked 221st out of 224 in the world in life expectancy, and that includes war zones and famine.

Swazis are historically subsistence farmers, but over the past 20 years, their livelihood has been compromised due to severe drought and floods. These challenges,



combined with the fact that Swaziland has the highest HIV/AIDS rate in the world (28% HIV positive), have been extremely detrimental to this country, resulting in poverty, sickness, fatherlessness, and death.

Every single salary earned, on average, supports 13 people in a family, and 69% of the nation goes to bed at least once a week without eating that day.

Clearly, Swaziland is a country in dire need...but God was stirring in people's hearts to bring them life and hope.

In 2004, Matt “Jumbo” Gerber served with Adventures in Missions (AIM), an organization that coordinates short and long-term mission trips for those who feel called to serve overseas. In his capacity there, Gerber worked with Bruce Wilkerson from Heart for Africa on *Beat the Drum*, the largest outreach of its kind in church history. This event brought together 2,000 college students from various countries to proclaim abstinence to students in 194 high schools in Southern Africa, which prompted many to make a public commitment to sexual purity.

As relationships were being forged through *Beat the Drum* follow-up visits, the long-term needs of the families became more evident.

In God's perfect timing, Children's Hope Chest arrived. Hope Chest is a Christian non-profit that connects the U.S. church with a community overseas to help with child sponsorship and to finance larger projects, such as wells and schools. Hope Chest brought with them pastors who became involved in Neighborhood Care Points (locations where orphans who are HIV infected, homeless, and hungry obtain food and nurturing) that had already been established in eight impoverished rural communities.

In 2005, after a short stint with AIM in the U.S., Gerber and his wife, Kriek, returned to Swaziland. It was then they sensed a call to full-time ministry there. To help address the extreme needs of hunger and the orphan/vulnerable child crisis due to HIV/AIDS, the couple offered outside help that was desperately needed, plus a spiritual component that had also been lacking.

In 2007, AIM and Children's Hope Chest combined forces in Swaziland. At that time, Jumbo became the Country Director for both. “We ran Care Points with a very strong focus on discipleship and not just feeding kids,” he said. “That has totally evolved into a cornerstone discipleship, community-asset-based development, holistic approach to helping people break the poverty cycle.”

While the Gerbers were getting established in Africa, the Lord was nudging Pastor Larry Bergeron. While on a trip to Swaziland with AIM and Hope Chest, the precious child pictured here in Bergeron's arm stole his heart. “The thought that this little girl was hungry, orphaned, and alone became a haunting reality to me,” he said. And there was no turning back...

While in Swaziland, the Lord also gave Pastor Larry a vision



for an organization that would help meet these children's needs. Convinced of God's call, with no idea how to begin a non-profit nor any funds in place to do so, he pursued that vision. A Child's Hope Int'l (ACHI) was born in 2008.

One year later, Bergeron telephoned Gerber to offer a tangible high protein sustainable food product comprised of vitamins, minerals, dehydrated vegetables, soy protein, and whole grain rice. Amazingly, this food could help reverse the effects of malnutrition, restore health, improve physical stature, and increase mental alertness in children.



On June 3, 2009, ACHI became the first organization to partner with AIM to send containers when they sent their initial shipment of Hands Against Hunger™ Hope Boxes™ to Swaziland.

According to AIM Senior Manager Swaziland Ministries, Scott Borg,

every child who walks through the gate of a Neighborhood Care Point receives food. Since only 66% of these kids are sponsored, AIM depends on food shipments to stretch their food budget so every child can be fed. ACHI's high protein meals help fill that gap.

Since 2013, besides an improved food product, Hope Boxes™ have also included clean drinking water supplies and life-giving hope through the Challenge™ newspaper.

"Food is a humongous thing in Swaziland," said Jumbo. "ACHI was the first organization to come on a vision trip. They saw the value of providing food for children so they could get beyond surviving and be able to work and think about a future."

Borg defines these organizations' work in Swaziland as transformational. Because of the extreme poverty and effects of disease, children here typically have a "poverty identity." This provision of food, however, has allowed AIM leaders to think beyond physical nourishment to the orphans' future.

To that end, a discipleship program called "Survive—Thrive—Succeed" was developed. Through this initiative, leaders have seen a tremendous paradigm shift.



Many who have gone through the program no longer look at the world as a place of lack, but because of God's grace, they see it as a place of abundance. They are now contributing members of society pursuing whole, healthy, and spirit-

filled lives. They no longer identify first as Swazi, then as Christian, but now as Christian, and secondarily as Swazi. "I would love it if everyone could know their testimonies," said Borg. "It's a beautiful thing, a beautiful story."

A Child's Hope Int'l is AIM's largest contributor, averaging 3 shipments—900,000 high protein meals—each year. "We raise the funds to ship a container, but ACHI provides everything that goes into that container," said Borg. "It's as if someone has handed me a \$75,000 check each time we receive a shipment. That's a pretty incredible gift."

Ten years, 29 containers, and 500 tons of high protein meals later, all of those involved are in awe of how one single 13.5 ounce pouch, prepared in love and multiplied millions of times over, is helping to transform lives and the country they love and are called to serve.



"I believe there is a huge anointing on ACHI. Their impact in Swaziland has always been the most important partnership we've had," said Gerber. "With the help of everyone who has been involved, we are building communities of hope. Without hope, you go nowhere."

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, people perish." Because those God called passionately pursued the vision given them, today, there are over 7,700 children being served at 40 Care Points in Swaziland, with 24 more communities on a wait list.

To learn how you can help fuel that work and have a life-saving impact on innocent children who are victims of circumstance, call ACHI today at the number below or visit our website.



As a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, the mission of A Child's Hope Int'l is to motivate and mobilize the church and community to care for orphans and vulnerable children through adoption, foster care, orphan care, and humanitarian relief. As advocates for the least of these, our programs reach thousands of children worldwide.

We exist because the children are waiting™.

A CHILD'S HOPE INT'L

2430 E. Kemper Rd., Cincinnati, Ohio 45241 | 513-771-2244
www.TheChildrenAreWaiting.org

