

Maura and Sheila's trip to Lesotho--Feb 26 to March 9, 2010

Mo and I had a great trip to TTL. As always, there is nothing like being there. So many challenges, such spirit and joy amidst all the issues. The population continues to decline, from 2.2 million to 1.8 million and it is those in their most productive years who so often fall victim to HIV. But TTL soldiers on in this war, with great courage and huge humanity.

The Babies

First and foremost we held and fed and played with some beautiful babies. You may remember the twins who arrived as little peanuts in October. Their too young mother (17) died during another pregnancy so they ended up (happily) on TTL's doorstep to get a good start on their challenging lives. Here they are now, thriving because of the round the clock care, treatment, feeding and, most crucially, love from the wonderful bo'me who care for babies at the safe home. Take a look at these pics:



They are happy and, with a really good head start, they will be able to go back to their relatives in their village. So sweet, very content, sleep and eat well and as you can see, really great dispositions.

Let me show you three more at the home right now: first Masella, just the cutest babe. She is very special. She was born with pointy ears (which suit her well) and 6 fingers (the extra digits have been removed) but again, she is sweet and happy and doing really well. Here she is:



This one is so cute you need another picture:



There are a number of other babes in arms along with two older kids. Thuso is the alfa male. He likes to take toys and grab attention but he is a sweetheart as you can see from this picture. He is 18 months old and when he came he was so undernourished he couldn't walk. Three squares a day and now you can't keep him still.

Meet Thuso:



It won't be long before he can go back home to his village. The thing that really struck me on this trip is that what TTL does for some of these kids is just get them over the hump--from being unable to be supported by their already taxed relations, to being in a state where they are healthy and stable enough and, often, fat enough, to be able to cope with the level of more limited care they will get. A bit further on I will show you two village kids who, poorly dressed and probably not fed quite enough and certainly left to their own devices for amusement, can function in the village because they are just self sufficient enough to get by alright. Not what we would think of as ideal, but it has been working for centuries and but for HIV would still basically work. But if you are sick or frail or really malnourished, your challenge in surviving in this environment is a lot greater. TTL bridges that gap.

Let me give you one more little one. And little she is, even though she is the oldest kid in the safe home. Her name is Setathi and she is three. Her mother 'disappeared' and she was being cared for by her grandmother (who, herself has a young child and other grandchildren to care for). After a village health worker training being done by a TTL outreach team, this grandmother approached, saying her granddaughter wasn't doing so well. In fact, Setathi, at 3, is about the size of Thuso, the 18 month old. Her default position was just to lie there. Her head is so heavy compared to her skinny little limbs. She was way off the charts in terms of weight and height. (Her vitals are on the ttf.org website as she is February's child of the month). She just hadn't had enough to eat and landed at her maternal grandmother's as an undernourished and underdeveloped 3 year old. Here is the perfect candidate for our bo'me at the safe home. They will fatten her up, ensure her HIV status is known and get her on meds if she is positive, and she will return to her grandmother able to cope and a heck of a lot fatter and healthier. When I say she is underdeveloped, let me be clear. She is as smart as a whip. I taught her how to count to 10 in English in a matter of minutes. She sings. She has an extremely high EQ--acting as mediator and leader in the playroom. She is very gentle and loving with the infants at the safe home. And she loves to laugh and draw and play house. Totally wonderful kid who will now have a real chance.

Meet Setathi:





She loves lunchtime (and the two snacks and breakfast and dinner!) Here you also see one of the bome's and Kevin Rector, one of our two TTLF fellows.

Here are the two little guys from the village I referred to earlier who are just self sufficient enough to survive in the rough and tumble (and definitely not infanticized) environment of a mountain village. You grow up fast there.



Just for interest, here is a shot of the toy they play with. It is two metal caps attached with a strip of canvas, and the tyke puts it on like thongs and clomps around in these 'monster shoes' --no limit to human ingenuity. But these guys are able to get enough to eat, they amuse themselves all day, go to sleep and get up the next day and start all over again. There are elementary schools out in the mountains so they should get to school, an important element in getting them on their way.



Village Health Workers

TTL has continued to expand its program of training and supporting village health workers (typically well trusted women--although there are some men--who are chosen by the village to be the barefoot docs in the villages). A pilot program last year in the San Martin area was very successful. VHW's were trained to weigh, measure and take the mid upper arm circumference of children in the villages and compare them to a grid which can identify malnutrition. Underweight kids may also have medical issues, like HIV. TTL supports this work, both with training, provision of materials and follow up for babies and children identified as needing assistance. Maura and I went with TTL's outreach team of Matello and Keonane to a training session in an expansion area. After the usual harrowing drive, we met a room full of caregivers and babies and kids, all lined up for the measurements:



Here is a common sight. A grandmother with the infants--in this case, twins:



From this village health worker training, three babies were identified as needing help--one was being served already by TTL, one by the World Food Program and the third became a client of

TTL and the mother (who, herself looked frail) was given food and supplies and will be followed up with on outreach on a regular basis.

The Village Health Worker program is a way to increase TTL's reach. I will give you a couple of photos of the landscape TTL works in. It can take hours to reach a needy child. Some days seeing a couple of clients is all that can be done before it is too dark to drive on these treacherous roads. The VHW's can help identify those in need and they can be built into the outreach plan or when the child is in grave need, brought to the safe house. The VHW program is an extension of the approach of TTL itself. These are Basotho serving Basotho. What you and I can do is supply funds, to allow this life saving work to go on but it is only going to work and be sustainable because people in the community, like the bo'me, the outreach workers and the VHW's are delivering the service and developing the programs in a way that works in these communities.

Here is the landscape:





These villages are located in this vast gorgeous mountain landscape . No water, no electricity, no cell phones, no communication with the outside world. Challenging. But TTL gets there. But for everyone TTL finds, we know there are many others who need the help.

Thank You

Thank you for being part of this effort. There are hundreds of children who are alive because you have supported this work. Hope you enjoyed the report of Mo and Sheila's great adventure. We went, as we always do, as volunteers, paying our own way. Every cent you donate goes to the work, which shows no sign of abating. Our donors are a sign of hope and renewal where before there was only the inevitability of terrible loss. Thank you again and email with any questions or comments. Maura and I would love to rabbit on even more with info about the trip, the babies, the signs of hope and the wonderful resilience of these people being helped, and in some cases, saved by TTL.

Yours in peace, Sheila