

# StarBright Learning Exchange

by Michael Kalinowski

StarBright provides a cross-cultural exchange between Australian and South African early childhood educators. It is intended to offer support for early childhood programs for young orphaned African children who have been infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and builds on the programs currently being provided in the selected services in a sensitive and acknowledging way.



It also enables a cross-cultural exchange for teachers and child care staff from early childhood learning centers, to enhance skills and understanding of each other's work and social cultures. Finally, it establishes links between centers in Australia and centers in South Africa to facilitate counterpart relationships between staff members in individual programs.

Program funding is from Australia Volunteers International (AVI), as well as donations.

According to Carol Allen, president of StarBright, "The program originated when Karen Williams, a colleague of mine, and I decided that we could no longer sit by and watch the unfolding social catastrophe that has invaded my homeland — South Africa. I have also been personally touched by HIV, having a family member who is HIV positive. We wanted to give something back to the vulnerable orphaned children of the AIDS epidemic. Nearly 5 million people in Africa are HIV positive and by 2010 there could be as many as 4.8 million maternal orphans. Without hope they may turn to crime, drugs, and prostitution. Without help or guidance they will not be able to take their rightful place in society."

The program aims to bring together AVI, the Centre for Early Childhood Development in Cape Town, SA, and StarBright Learning Exchange in Melbourne and places EC volunteers in South Africa: one longer-term placement of 2 years and then shorter placements of 3 and 6 months.

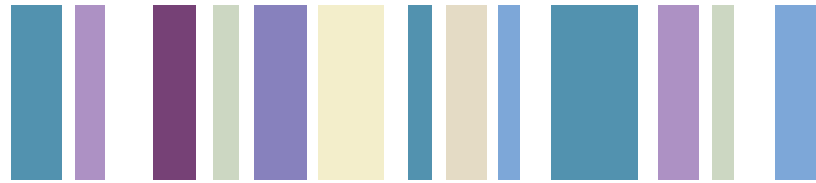
There is a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Center for Early Childhood Development in Cape Town to host the Australian Volunteers within their office and supervise them on a day-to-day basis. They also help establish the project within the daycare centers, shelters, and orphanages in the informal settlements and townships, as well as assist with

The Program Showcase was developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education. The Program Showcase is intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world. Selected programs will appear in future issues of *Exchange*, and are also available on [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com).



appropriate accommodation and local transportation. In addition, the MOU requests support for StarBright by assisting where possible with information for marketing and promotional activities generating further income and advocacy for the project. The MOU also notes the need for ongoing reports and evaluation of each exchange whilst in South Africa.

StarBright manages the recruitment of volunteers, in collaboration with AVI, and is the main project sponsor, generating income to support long-term funding. It is responsible for the Business Plan, and for coordination and implementation of the policy and procedures for the exchange program. StarBright works with AVI to provide pre-departure briefings and debriefings upon



return. They also work with Skillshare (part of AVI) in South Africa. It assumes project and volunteer management while volunteers are in the country, and oversees the administration of living and accommodation allowance payments.

As Allen notes, "Two years ago I visited Fikelela, a church-run orphanage in a shanty town (or informal settlement) of Cape Town for 12 HIV-positive orphaned children. The Matron, Martha Sam, told me a lovely story about this little boy called Thipoli. He was brought to them on a Friday night by a social worker from the court system. She told Martha he had nowhere to go and had been abandoned by his family after his mother had died. Martha looked at him and said 'No I can't take this child; he is going to die. But they did take him in as he had nowhere else to go.' They started to feed him and take care of him and soon he was getting better and had just started on the ART drugs and was getting stronger every day. Martha told us that she looks at him and thinks, 'If I hadn't taken him he would have died from malnutrition; now at least he has a chance!'"



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