

# ‘PEOPLE LIKE US’

## A ROTARY CAMPAIGN OFFERING HOPE, RESPECT AND FRIENDSHIP

GLOBAL GRANT 1474791

PDG John Philip

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*“The top priority is now to continue these workshops in both villages and schools. People are recognizing how life-changing this knowledge is, and asking that we return, not only to their own villages but to more villages. We believe they have the potential to make the longest-term impact on the lives of people with albinism in Tanzania. Many thanks to Rotary for supporting us along the way!” Sister Martha, Albino Peace Makers*



**Watu Kama Sisi** in Swahili means **People Like Us**. This is the slogan Rotary adopted for its campaign in Tanzania to offer hope and friendship to a section of the community, which is living under the shadow of fear and persecution.



**A FULL SET OF BODY PARTS ARE SAID TO CHANGE HANDS FOR USD75,000**

The Albino community in Tanzania have suffered from body part snatching and murder for many years as a result of ignorance, myths and alleged complacency of the legal and political establishment.

Four years ago, Rotarian Faye Cran from Moshi and I received a global grant to build bridges between the communities and launch a campaign to offer a helping hand to the People with Albinism (PWA). We faced numerous frustrations, but persistence has paid and now we have some good news.

The heart-breaking stories from the PWAs had attracted many charities to the Lake zone area of Tanzania. Some of the stories we heard were beyond belief. One little Albino boy had his arm hacked off by a gang which included men from his own family, one young girl with incurable cancer wanted her body to be buried in concrete to deter her father from digging

the grave to sell her body parts, some mothers even told of advice from doctors to get rid of their albino child to protect the rest of the family.

When we planned a typical Rotary intervention getting down to the roots of the problem working alongside traditional healers, village leaders and most importantly the PWAs, we so much wanted to collaborate with other organisations. We reached out to them and held a partners' meeting two years ago in Arusha. This was well attended by charities, PWAs and government representatives. It concluded with a touching statement of intent, but as time passed we realised that translating the intent into action was virtually impossible. Some of the charities had unlimited funds with ability to pay local officers *per diem* – a bribe in all but name – offer them perks, run local offices and even build resource centres and conference facilities.

Faye and I had hoped to decentralise skin cancer screening and train Community dermatologists. But as a result of the involvement of another charity, we had to scale back the plan and focus our efforts in a smaller area through the goodwill of a local Member of Parliament.



## MYTHS

- Body parts have magical powers
- Sex with Albinos will cure HIV
- Do not die
- Cursed
- Retarded
- Glow in dark
- Contagious



**SKIN CANCER IS EASILY PREVENTABLE. YET, MANY PWAs HAVE NO ACCESS TO PROTECTION, SCREENING OR EARLY TREATMENT**

We had hoped that we will be able to train local optometrists to offer high quality eye care for the PWAs but that faced stiff competition from another charity – we felt it wise to abandon the idea.

Thankfully, we found ourselves as the only group interested in reaching out to the remote communities where some of the PWAs had taken refuge for safety. Some of these places were very remote and accessible by long drive on bumpy roads. But we did it. Our aim was to set up village meetings and by a combination of films, talks, songs and drama try to demystify albinism, a genetic condition and explain its medical effects. We gained the support of a group of enlightened traditional healers who condemned the myth that Albino body parts have magical powers.



**THE ALBINO PEACE MAKERS ASSISTED BY ROTARY HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT GIVEN A BIT OF HELP THE PWAs CAN USE THEIR SKILLS TO EARN A LIVING**

During the three years, we also helped the Albino and non-Albino community to work together, develop skills and improve their earning potential. One has succeeded – the Albino Peace makers in Arusha is a well-knit organisation which is marketing locally produced goods and making some money.

A microcredit programme run by the Igoma Rotary club has just completed its first year and showing potential of reaching out to both communities.

A third microcredit programme in Musoma has suffered due to poor governance by the Rotary club and the unfortunate involvement of an NGO.

## PEACE BUILDING

Our greatest success – the education campaign – has yielded good results.

I was privileged to travel to Tanzania in February 20128 with a small team and saw the tremendous impact of the Rotary campaign.



Below is a summary of the feedback reports shared by PWAs at a meeting in Singida.

At this meeting, I thanked everyone for making time to attend and explained that it was essential that feedback about the Peace-making meetings was shared so that we could evaluate the programme. Each of the representative was asked to briefly report on what they had learned from the meetings, and if they had an any way changed people's thinking about albinism.

*(The responses were given in Swahili and translated by an invited interpreter who was a local secondary school teacher from Singida.)*

1. A lady from Illapa: It has been very good; the presentation helped people to understand the problems we face as PWA's I know our community has learned a lot.
2. George: I am so thankful to Rotary for this project. I personally have learned how I have Albinism. Before I didn't understand. I hope the programme will continue. Everyone should see this video. It was very helpful.
3. Miriam: It has provided information to our community. We (the PWAs) are so happy to learn from this project ourselves. We can now understand who we are. I am only sorry that we did not have more notice to invite people. I would have liked everyone to come and hear the message.
4. Emanuel: My district has many challenges. Albinos did not fully understand our risk from being in the Sun. We are very thankful to Rotary for the hats. And for the sun screen lotion too. The community are working with us now to help us because they understand our difficulties.
5. Zahuri: Thank you Rotary for this education you have given about how we can protect ourselves. We do need more training. The time of the programme was too short. I hope you will run the video again so that more people will lean from it.
6. Amida: Thank you Rotarians that you have been touched by God to come and help us. It is very important that non-Albinos know and understand about us. Please I hope you will continue this work – possibly in our schools.
7. Emanuel: It is good that we can have special cream to help us and protect our skin. In my village a girl who was 25 was kept locked indoors by her family all her life. They didn't understand how she could be helped. I am very pleased to hear about the Cryo gun being given to Singida hospital. Thanks to you Rotary.
8. Rose: I want to say Thank you for the love shown us by the teachers in this programme They made us feel special and valued. It has helped our community. Before that we were all scared. After this



training we don't feel scared anymore. Please I urge you continue this programme. The sunscreen you have given us is so precious. Thank you.

9. Rashid: Thank you to the Peace Makers. They have given us a different understanding. We are so glad that we can live together with our neighbours.
10. Charles: Thank you for helping us with our problems – and for giving us hats, sunscreen and sun glasses. We will need more sun screen Thank you for the teachers who came with this programme. We need to train more teachers because we are not all aware of how we should protect ourselves. Now we know we need to tell others; this programme must continue.
11. John: Thank you so much for this teaching. People in my area have received it very well. Please come again so that more people can hear the messages you bring. It's just the education we need. The sun is very intense in our area and our water is salty too It makes our skin feel very brittle.
12. Rose: I just want to say how much I have learned about myself. I know now that I am not cursed by God. It was very helpful, and I want more people to hear the teaching. Thank you very much for your help to us,

Following this session, we heard that Singida District Social Welfare officer invited the Team to hold a meeting to train all 104 members of her staff in the Singida Region about Albinism.

## IKUNGI PRIMARY SCHOOL



We attended a Peace building meeting at the Ikungi Primary schools in Singida. There are 1,520 schools in this school of whom 96 were disabled. There were also 42 children with Albinism. The school had 30 teachers of whom 5 were trained in Braille.

Although the Peace building meeting took place on a Sunday, it was attended by about 120 people including many teachers, a local member of parliament, doctors and community leaders, traditional healers and about 40 PWAs. They sat

through and intently listened for 2 hours, to the genetics of Albinism and its medical consequences.

One traditional healer said: 'When I was young I thought that the Albinos were cursed. Now I know that they are just like us. We are educating our colleagues that PWAs do not have magical powers.'

I've never attended a beneficiary meeting where Rotary was so visible and so often mentioned. It made be proud to be associated with this project.



The Headmaster Ibrahim Kullaya told us that they would welcome volunteers to come to school and get alongside staff and pupils. He then pointed out to us that this resident school had no source of water.

We just could not walk away from this school without making a commitment – that we will help provide a source of safe water to the school!

I contacted Good Earth Tanzania, and NGO which specialises in building rain water

harvesting systems. A survey is being undertaken now and the estimated cost of providing rain water harvesting in this special school is about £2,000.

I look to my friends and supporters for helping this school and providing the children the very basic necessity in life – water.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This project would not have reached the stage it is now without the tireless energy and commitment of Faye Cran (Moshi Rotary club), Sister Martha and Terry Morton from the Albino Peace Makers.

I also place on record the support I have received from my Rotary colleagues in the UK and beyond especially the team who travelled with me.

Rotary makes a difference to people's lives.

## **FOR MORE INFORMATION AND/OR A PRESENTATION:**

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