

## **Inspiration for the Mural** **South Africa/Lesotho Fulbright-Hayes Group Seminar**

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Over the summer I had the amazing opportunity to travel to South Africa and Lesotho as a Fulbright Hayes Scholar. The 5-week seminar had me engaged in the culture as I learned about the unique relationship between the two countries. During my time in Lesotho I became involved with a local community center, Bana Pele Youth & Community Resource Center and Leratong Center. These particular centers work primarily with AIDS orphans in addition they also work with the community as a whole.

During my visit to the centers I met some of the most amazing people. The Director/Founder of Bana Pele, Arabang Maruping is incredible. She is a retired pediatrician, former Director of Health for Lesotho, and currently serving on the board of Feed the Children World Relief Organization in Geneva. She started her center 3 years ago and currently assists over 400 children in Roma, Lesotho. Many of these children are orphans living on their own in the village. Orphans in Lesotho receive very little government assistance. Many times they will inherit their parents' homes once their parents are gone, but they are still expected to make their own money, grow their own food and find their own clothing.

Basically every part of what it takes to survive is left up to the children or the village. I was able to work with some orphan families where the oldest member was only 9-13 years of age caring for siblings as young as 2. One of the most difficult areas for the children is school. Education in Lesotho is "free" for grades 1-7 however the educational system is run by the Roman Catholic Church. Their policy is that all students must wear a school uniform or they are not allowed to enter the school. Many of these children have a difficult time finding clothes to begin with let alone a proper uniform. On top of that children are also be required to purchase their own books and school supplies. Again, this task is extremely difficult for an orphan.

Both centers are run entirely by volunteers who are doing some incredible things not only for the orphans but the community as a whole. As an example, while I was there I had the opportunity to assist the volunteers with going out into the village and talking with people about HIV/AIDS, how important it is to know their status, how critical it is to take their medication regularly, and trying to change some of the stereotypes about AIDS. We were able to distribute clothing to those who desperately needed it and provide some one on one time working with the children.

After leaving Lesotho I couldn't stop thinking about the children and the desire to help them grow. I knew my students here at Anthony Wayne would feel the same way when they learned about the center. This is where the idea of the mural first came about.

### **The Anthony Wayne Community to Community Mural**

#### Mural Concept

Student and community members were invited to help with the painting of the community mural. We have had over 50 students from the Junior High, teachers, parents, grandparents, local college students, and even visiting women artist from Tanzania stop in to help us paint the mural. Parent volunteer Cindie Kerscher was instrumental in helping to organize the donated paints and assisting each evening that we were painting. Sherwin Williams, Waterville Hardware, Whitehouse

Hardware, Lowes, and Walmart donated paints. The following is an explanation of the image to be painted:

Center -In the center of the mural is an image of a tree. The tree design is inspired from an image the South African Supreme Court uses. Within the tree are words that I believe relate to not only the goals for children at the community center but of our school. (Words such as *Understanding, Community, Support, Values, Believe, Educate, Hope, Self-Empowerment, Intellectual growth, Life Skills, Self-Respect*) Above the tree would be a unifying title or saying that would help pull the theme of the mural together “*One Community Helping Another*”

On either side of the tree are images from each of the communities, Anthony Wayne/Toledo and Roma Lesotho. Students of Anthony Wayne discussed what images would be appropriate for our community and the children of Roma, Lesotho, with the help of the director Arabang, sent images of their community that was then used to design the Lesotho side of the mural.

Along the bottom of the mural will be a rock wall inspired from images of Lesotho such as their key hole gardening technique as well as old stone walls from our past. Within each of the rocks Community members can have their family names placed for a donation. The idea is that it takes the families to support a community. The money rose would then all go to helping Bana Pele and Leratong supporting the children of their Community.

Families wanting to donate and have their names painted into the wall can contact the Anthony Wayne Junior High at 419-877-5342 or go to our website to download a form.

•**Location:** The mural has been placed on the wall inside the Junior High Cafeteria.

### **Benefits to Creating a Mural:**

•**Bring People Together.** Making murals using collaborative and democratic methods provides a working model of the world we want to build. Even though we cannot create total unity and cooperation among all people, doesn't mean we shouldn't paint and aspire toward it. With this in mind, as an organized tool, murals can bring students, parents, and school staff personally closer together.

•**Have a Meaningful Message.** Murals should be aesthetically beautiful, but should also educate, challenge, and inspire. At their best, murals are layered with meaning and speak to wide audiences, unveiling their messages over time.

•**Build Success and Hope.** Participants not only learn how to make a mural, they gain skill and confidence to take on future projects. If students realize what they can accomplish by working together on the mural, they will take away a powerful lesson on what people can do if they organize, collaborate, and work together to make their school and the lives of their children across the world a little better.