

Books for Peace Library Project in South Africa

By Rose "Xiluva" Zulliger

"Xiluva, I teach an after-school reading group, but we only have photocopied pages from text books to use. Do you think you could help me to find some books for the learners?"

I spend most of my time working at an NGO in a rural part of Mpumalanga Province, South Africa, but a love of learning and my work as the orphans and vulnerable children coordinator led me to visit a local higher primary school. The simple request for books by a dedicated teacher served as the impetus to start the Books for Peace Library Project. One appeal blossomed into a project involving 20 Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in 30 communities and 30 schools that brought 30,000 books into South Africa.

A quick web search for an organization that donates books in Africa led me to the aptly named, non-profit, Books for Africa (BFA). BFA is a fantastic organization that ships cargo containers of donated leisure and academic books throughout Africa, but the recipient is responsible for covering the shipping costs.

I created and distributed an application form to all of my local schools and to all South Africa PCVs. The application required each school to have a secure spot for the library to be created, book shelves, and a plan for how the books would be utilized. In addition, every selected school had to demonstrate its commitment to the project by fundraising R1500, approximately US \$200, in a variety of creative ways such as hosting carnivals or taking student photos. The purpose was to enhance community ownership in the project and to also raise a significant amount to help cover shipping. One innovative principal even used the fundraising project as a way to improve her school by issuing fines to teachers who were late and to classes that left messes in the classroom.

The remainder of the funds, US \$5,000, was raised through the Peace Corps Partnership Program. The PCPP requires PCVs to complete an application and to have significant community support and contribution (a minimum of 25% of project cost), but it was a very simple process. The project was then posted on the Peace Corps website where friends and family were able to make contributions in support of the project. We raised all of the money within two months, and the money was transferred to my account in South Africa.



I transferred the funds and book order to BFA, and the books were in a cargo shipping container en route to South Africa within the month. The books arrived in Durban, South Africa, on July 30, 2008, and were then trucked to Pretoria where they went through customs. 40,872 pounds of books arrived at the Peace Corps office in Pretoria on August 14, and that's when the fun started...

16 PCVs, including a few regional PCV medical evacuees, a number of Peace Corps drivers, and a few host country nationals, rolled up their sleeves to unload the container and sort the books according to school orders. We were

absolutely ecstatic with the high quality of books, most of which were brand-new and hardcover. The re-boxed books were then loaded onto trucks, combis, private cars, bakkies, and just about every other imaginable form of transport and sent to the schools by the Departments of Education from the Northern Cape, Limpopo, Northwest, and Mpumalanga.

Now, 20,000 students in 30 schools in 30 communities have access to books that will broaden individual horizons, enhance classrooms, and maybe significantly change a life or two.

Please feel free to contact me at Zulli888@gmail.com with any questions you might have about the PCPP process or the Books for Peace Library Project.