

Friends of Swaziland Board Meeting Summary - January 11, 2015

Friends of Swaziland held its first open board meeting on Sunday, January 15, 2015, at 3PM via videoconference. Board Members attending were: John von Reyn - Group Leader; Scott Lewis - Treasurer, Patty von Reyn - Board Member. Others attending were: Mike Messick - RPCV 2010-14; David Binder - RPCV 1984-87; Bob Chalou - PCV 1980-82; and Steve Kallaugher - PCV 2004-05 and currently the director of Young Heroes, a non-profit working to support AIDS orphans in Swaziland.

John welcomed all to the meeting and asked those calling in to introduce themselves and relate their connection to Swaziland.

Scott then delivered the Treasurer's report: Currently there is \$3,270 in the treasury. In 2014, FOS contributed \$500 to one Peace Corps Partnership Program in Swaziland, the Camp GLOWS (Girls Leading Our World). FOS received \$390 from NPCA for memberships and \$315 in donations. We currently have 29 paid memberships. Scott has prepared a summary of projects that FOS has helped fund over the last 10 years, which was added to the FOS Website and also posted on the SDRPCV e-group news site. FOS has funded over \$34,000 in projects in Swaziland over this period.

John then summarized FOS activities over the last few years: FOS participation in the Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebration in Washington, D.C.; our meeting in DC with the current Country Director, Steve Driehaus, and a meeting with Deja Love, the current American Ambassador to Swaziland, who met with us in DC before her assignment began in Swaziland. He also discussed that our major role is currently fundraising for projects, the last few years being primarily Peace Corps Partnership Projects that have been vetted and to the Young Heroes program.

Mike Messick, who returned from Swaziland in May 2014, then briefed us on the Peace Corps program in Swaziland. He was also able to get some recent news from the Steve Driehaus, Country Director. There are now approximately 75-80 PCVs serving in Swaziland, though for a period last summer after a new group came in there were over 100. (This is up from the usual ~35 of recent years.) Current program areas are community health and youth development in rural areas. There has also been a dramatic expansion in the Camp GLOWS program, as well as the Books for Africa program, where Peace Corps is expecting to set up 30 libraries. Mike is impressed by the high caliber of PC staff in Swaziland and based on annual surveys, volunteers serving in Swaziland have the highest satisfaction rating of all countries where Peace Corps has programs.

We asked Mike whether PCVs in Swaziland are aware of Friends of Swaziland and for suggestions on getting newly returned PCVs involved. He said PCVs are not generally aware of FOS and suggested that we prepare information that could be shared at Completion of Service conferences. Also recommended was sending items about FOS to the volunteer newsletter (the Swazi Sojourner) and the idea of having a poster about FOS in the PC/Swaziland volunteer lounge. Mike said he would also see about getting us email addresses of recently COSed volunteers and also getting us the names of the newsletter editors.

Steve then updated us on the Young Heroes Program. YH will be celebrating its 9th anniversary next month. Currently there are 1000 Swazi orphans being sponsored under the program and 250 still needing sponsorship. Those participating get a monthly stipend and a comprehensive medical program, testing for HIV. There are HIV-positive Teen Clubs and Camps (supported by Newman's Own - "Hole in the Wall Camps" (now called the "SeriousFun Network camps")) which are in their third year. There is also "STEP" - which stands for "Skills Training Empowerment Program" - for Swazis over 19 to get a year-long vocational and business training to help them become entrepreneurs. In 2013, there were 15 students in STEP; 45 in 2014; and an estimated 70 for 2015.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Sunday, April 12 at 8PM EST.

Thanks to all who attended.

Summary prepared by John and Patty von Reyn.