

Internet buddies

Laurelle Williams

Thanks to American Amy Stokes, a nominee for the 2011 CNN heroes, forty-five children from Nkosi Haven Village have formed bonds with international internet buddies, whom they e-mail and have video chats with on a regular basis. This stimulating programme is called Infinite Family.

Amy adopted a child from South Africa and through this process she questioned what was happening to all the other orphans and this initiated Infinite Family, which officially commenced in 2006 with Nkosi Haven as the pilot project.

"It makes me feel special that she chose me out of all the children to speak to and get to know, it's like we were meant to be together"

Infinite Family said. Tsogang Sechaba Community Project and Alexandra Child Care and Support Centre are also Infinite Family participants. The mentors come from 30 states in the USA and 10 other countries: Belgium, France, Canada, Kazakhstan and South Africa to name a few.

The mentors are carefully screened by security and background checks and go for training; learning about the history and culture of South Africa in order for sensitivity to be displayed toward the child while computer skills are taught to the children.

The match-up between child and mentor is based on similar hobbies and career interests in order to find a mentor who will give positive influences and direction to the child.

tame TIMES spoke to *Emily (not her real name) a 17- year- old female resident of Nkosi Haven Village who is net buddies with a mother of two from Pennsylvania. "We have our video chats every Saturday for 30

Pine Gel Sunlight Soap Bars Pot Scourers Steel Wool Oven Cleaner Washing Powder Floor Polish Air Freshener Furniture Polish Doom Shoe Polish Dustbin Bags	Conditioner Toothbrushes Toothpaste Deodorant Body Cream Sanitary Towels	Mattress protection covers for bed wetter's (plastic/rubber linings) Bath Towels
Kitchen / Dining room: Melamine crockery and cutlery Industrial fans x3 Table cloths	Garden: Garden tools Fertilisers	General requirements: Ceiling fans x2 Electric or wireless drill Digital Camera

minutes and then I can e-mail her whenever I want to. She is like an older sister to me, I love our chats- she offers me solutions to my problems and teaches me so much about her country, telling me about the earthquakes and I have even started teaching her a few Zulu words.

It makes me feel special that she has chosen me out a whole lot of children to speak to and get to know, it's like we were meant to be together"; *Emily said.

"We find that the boys are really benefitting from it as we lack male role models at home and now they have access to males who can offer them what the female care takers can't. We have noticed the children's confidence growing", Gail Johnson, founder of Nkosi

Haven said. "We have 45 children ranging from 8 to 20 years. I mostly help the younger

children if they get stuck using the computer but I leave them to have their own time with their mentors. I think it helps the children as sometimes they are upset with their caregivers and this gives them an outside person to open up to", Nonceba Ngxabi, the video co-ordinator said.

British Telecommunication sponsored Nkosi Haven with the computer cottage and all the equipment bringing joy to a lot of children.



Nonceba Ngxabi (right) helps *Emily to communicate to her international mentor via e-mail.

Thank you so much for sharing the work of Infinite Family with your readers. it is an incredible honour to receive recognition from CNN for the hard work of the 450+ volunteers, donors, directors, advisors, staff, and NPO and corporate partners who have helped us create Infinite Family. It is a true team effort that allows us to work every day to make every child's village include the world. The CNN exposure is helping us raise awareness about our work in South Africa, and allowing us to share the amazing impact that South Africa's teens and pre-teens are having on our mentors in 10 countries (including South Africa) and 30 U.S. states. The learning truly goes both ways. We are all thrilled that this visibility is allowing us to build new partnerships and deepen our commitment to South Africa's youth.

Many thanks, Amy Stokes

Hi tame TIMES

