

## **Harnessing the Power of ONE: The “Q” Fund Offers New Hope to African Children**

Article for Interair inflight magazine.

June 2006

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**H**IV and AIDS is real. Really, really, really, don't be silly. HIV and AIDS is real.” Chellie Kew is overcome with emotion as she watches the beautiful faces of the children singing at Zambia's Chimoza Community School. Before her non-profit organization, The “Q” Fund, raised funds to build Chimoza, most of its students were street children, homeless orphans – a devastating consequence of a virus that has cut a deep swath through Africa's adult population.

Although Kew is American, she resonates deeply with Africa and its people. So deeply, in fact, that what began with husband Kevin's two-year business assignment in Johannesburg in 1997 has now evolved into her own lifetime commitment to serve the children of Africa. It was during those years that Kew came face to face with the orphans who found themselves abandoned in the wake of Africa's spiraling AIDS epidemic.

“I gained an entirely new understanding of life,” says Kew, who visited villages run solely by children after the adult population had been wiped out. “I was equally devastated by their circumstance and inspired by their courage. I knew I wanted to do something, and anything was better than sitting by in stunned avoidance.”

A lifelong photographer, Kew took action behind the lens of her camera, spending five years traveling and photographing hundreds of sub-Saharan orphans. Her book, *African Journal: A Child's Continent*, is a compelling photojournalistic account of her travels in 2001-2002. Her images, however, are not what some readers might expect. “Many people have captured the horrors of the AIDS virus on film. My focus is quite the opposite. I want people to see and experience the hope that these children exude. They are the future of Africa, and we must keep their hope alive,” she explains.

Vowing to improve the quality of life for African orphans, in early 2000 Kew formed The “Q” Fund, a non-profit organization whose mission is to build sustainable communities throughout sub-Saharan Africa. In 2002, with *African Journal* hot off the press, she began crisscrossing the U.S. to share her message and raise funds. “Whenever I spoke to high school students, they sat on the edge of their seats and hung on every word. I quickly realized that this was a real call to action for them, that they were not content to merely hear my story. Time and time again students would ask me why this crisis was not front-page news in every American city, or for that matter around the world, and what they could do to help. I saw the same hope in their eyes that I had seen in the eyes of the orphans, and it moved me beyond words.”

Inspired by the enthusiasm of so many students, in 2005 Kew took her mission to the next level. On World AIDS Day last December, The “Q” Fund sponsored the first International One March for Children. Its purpose was not only to raise funds, but also to raise awareness of the plight of millions of African orphans.

In a moving show of solidarity, thousands of students participated in the March, embracing Kew's philosophy of "ONE," which refers to "one voice, one vision, one world, one humanity." She uses the metaphor of a camera lens to explain how "we must each 'widen our aperture' to expand global consciousness and gain a new perspective on our role as caretakers of one another and the world."

At the heart of ONE is the idea that within each of us is the power to effect profound change. "As communities and people come together, the sum of each person's contribution is greatly magnified," Kew explains. "For example, most of us doubt that a dollar can really effect much change in the world. But when one million people contribute one dollar each, the synergy they create through their combined effort is enormous." With that philosophy firmly in mind, each participant in the inaugural ONE March donated a single dollar.

A few weeks after the March, photos, letters, and poems from participants poured into The "Q" Fund headquarters. It was clear that the ONE March had made a lasting impression. Nowhere was it more evident than at Los Angeles' Marlborough School for girls, where students conducted their March in complete silence. Out of that event emerged their commitment to raise enough funds to build another school like Chimoza. A fashion show, dance and music performances, a "Chocolates for Charity" sale, and numerous other fundraising efforts enabled the girls, who range in age from 12-18 years, to raise over \$USD 20,000 in only four months.

Kew was deeply touched by their accomplishment. "These young women exemplify the essence of ONE. They came together as a community with an understanding of their immense value as participating individuals. They are truly the leaders of tomorrow," she says.

The ONE March represents only one of Kew's many accomplishments. Her efforts brought in nearly \$USD 300,000 for The "Q" Fund in 2005 alone. Kew is also quick to acknowledge that many business people have been instrumental in her success over the years. Among the most notable are Interair South Africa founder and CEO David Tokoph and his wife Denise and Crocs Shoes co-founder George Boedecker. "Words simply cannot express the gratitude I feel for the unwavering support of these wonderful people," Kew says.

In addition to building Chimoza, Kew's business savvy has enabled her to make wise investments that will help secure a brighter future for the African children. The purchase of a banana plantation in 2005 will fund the construction of a new elementary school and enable additions to Chimoza's campus. The "Q" Fund has also committed \$USD 50,000 of the \$USD100,000 needed to build a school in Kenya that will eventually provide a quality education equal to any private school in America. The school, which will be sustained by income from a tea plantation, will offer a state-of-the-art education from kindergarten through college.

In everything she does, Kew's commitment to excellence is apparent. Each of her schools has met with government approval, and last year Chimoza test scores topped those of neighboring government schools.

At present, Kew is finalizing the purchase of a property to construct a high school that focuses on agricultural methods with both teachers and students in residence. She is as adamant as she is passionate about building sustainable communities. “The sustainability factor is critical. Only by educating this generation in sustainable methods can we effect long-term change. Any other approach is merely a band-aid,” she says.

Plans are in the works for a South African company to produce a documentary about Kew and her work. With so much success under her belt, she is excited about the future, and in particular about the summer of 2007, when students from the Marlborough school in Los Angeles will travel to Africa to work hand-in-hand with the very children who are benefiting from the funds they raised this spring. And for Kew, who is rapidly watching her ONE vision become a reality, there can be no more perfect picture.

*Additional information may be found at [www.qfund.org](http://www.qfund.org)*