

2021 Bokamoso Virtual Visit

February 14,
2021



The Feast of the Transfiguration

Roy Barber and Elese Sizemore spoke about the history of Bokamoso and the project's relationship with Seekers. The following is a transcript of their remarks.

Roy began: Thank you, I welcome the opportunity to talk about this group. I guess I've been committed to them for about 25 years, through Seekers support.

Winterveldt, where they live, is a large settlement where Black people were pushed out of Pretoria during apartheid, and they were pushed away to where the land was not arable, the resources were not available, as a way to cripple those people and keep them under the thumb of white supremacy. But there were some people who all along said "No."

Two of these people were Stephen Carpenter and Marianne Carpenter. Paul Holmes knew them when he worked in Africa for USAID, and he introduced me to them. He gave me a letter of

introduction, and they were very welcoming. Steve, during apartheid, was a conscientious objector and worked as a doctor with the lowest of the low, the poorest of the poor. And he saw that was where his calling was. And Marianne, who's a nurse – fearless! Steve tends to worry; Marianne doesn't worry about anything.

They made quite a team, and they decided to work in the community of Winterveldt and set up programs for growth and development of young people and healthcare for women – this was the beginning of the AIDS crisis in South Africa. One remarkable thing for me about them was that they raised their children – they have two children and then an adopted child – in Winterveldt, in the community.

One day Stephen was held up at gunpoint, in front of his family, in the house where they lived. The people that were holding them up—Stephen and Marianne had helped their families. The children were drawing pictures of it; they didn't know what to do. When he was freed, they drove away, and their response was – my response might have been, “it's time to get out of here, we've done what we know how to do. No more, no more.” Their response was: the youth in this community have nothing to do in their life. They have no future here. And so why don't we create a youth center for them that is about their future. In Tswana the word 'future' is 'bokamoso,' and that's a sort of radiant hope that was created out of this tragedy, which has lighted so many lives around the world, including Else and mine.

We have the president of the Bokamoso Youth Foundation, Connie Sullivan, vice president Jim Cawley, and secretary Kathy Tobias with us today. I'm so proud that Seekers has supported this foundation and these youth for so many years. They were at first supported by the Anglican Church, and then when the Anglican Church wanted to cut all their poverty programs they cut off Bokamoso, and Seekers became willing to be a fiscal sponsor for Bokamoso until we were able to make that happen

and become a nonprofit eventually. Seekers has always said 'Yes' and supported this program with such tenderness.

So we're going to watch a video. One of the missions of both Bokamoso and the foundation is to create learning internships and experiences for the youth, and several of the youth in this video have had those opportunities. The video was created by Kenny, who's a boy who came to Washington in 2005 and went to Obama's first inauguration with all of us (it was freezing!). The film you'll see gives you a picture of what their community is, what the center is, and what they are doing there. Thank you.

Else continued: I would just like to add that Bokamoso has basically given our family a chance to reach across and work with some of the most amazing and remarkable young people, and the people who are the leaders—the teachers really—who have taken a group of kids that haven't had any opportunity, that school wasn't really working for, that didn't have the idea that they could go to a place of higher learning like a college. That became one of our board's functions in the States, as well as to maintain the community center, which had been thought of and brought to light, as April said, by Solomon, or Solly.

It has been amazing for us over a period of time to see young people who in their own way, no matter what they're going through, have this amazing passion for life and excitement. It's been our experience that we've been able, especially through Seekers, to give them an opportunity to have a hope and have a future. It's been more than a generation—almost two generations—in which young people came, had life skills given to them, had this center be a place of sanctuary and hope for them, and for us to get to know some of them in person, those who came over each year, and to watch them as some of them went to college – most of the ones that came here—and actually got jobs where there were no jobs available to them before. They've actually had some people step up into professional

life, and we've watched them as they've grown up, fallen in love and gotten married and had babies, and some of their children come to Bokamoso.

Seekers has been such a vital part of that, and Seekers have benefited, anybody who's worked with these kids can say, with a great joy of life and sense of purpose and just amazement at the amazing kids. Seekers has provided them with the opportunity to think about their futures and jobs by giving them a chance to sit with people in the places where they are interested in making a living perhaps, and letting them see what it would be like, watching people do this here in the States. I thank Seekers for supporting Roy and me in this endeavor and becoming a major sponsor, and giving so much life and love and opportunity to these kids. Thank you.

"A Place of Hope," a video produced by one of the Bokamoso graduates, was also shown during the sermon time.