



# Horizons Children's Centre

"Forward Ever, Backward Never"

## HCC Children Meet Governor General of Canada

Issue 7

February 2007

Last November 30<sup>th</sup>, the children at Horizons enjoyed a rare and truly special honour. They were granted the opportunity to meet Her Excellency Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada! While many of us only know Her Excellency from photos and news coverage, the HCC family had the privilege of performing for the Governor General during her visit to Tamale, Ghana.

According to Paola Bartolacci, our Canadian volunteer who helped coordinate the event: "The children travelled by bus [to Tamale] and sang and played the drums during the trip.



Her Excellency shakes hands with the beaming kids of HCC

Everyone had a really great time despite it being 6 in the morning! The boys were invited to sing for the Governor General as she arrived at Gariba Lodge in Tamale. They did a beautiful job singing and wore pins that united the

flags of Ghana and Canada. The Governor General stopped and listened to the boys as they sang, and she even danced to the Ghanaian beat! Her Excellency took the time to shake hands with each of the boys and

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*"I expect to pass through this world but once; any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now; let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."*

*~William Penn*

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## Governor General Continued From Pg.1

ask them their names. She certainly took her time to make the boys feel welcome and special."

You may be wondering how such a golden opportunity came about. We owe many thanks to Danny Richmond, who volunteered at HCC last year.

Since his time in Sandema, Danny has continued to be involved in numerous community projects, and earned a special place as part of Michaëlle Jean's delegation to Africa.

Danny arranged for the HCC kids to meet Her Excellency, and after the performance, he

spent the afternoon chatting with them before joining the delegation again. Please see below for some quotes from the kids on their memorable day.

We would also like to thank Paola, our Program Coordinator Joe, and the members of the HCC Advisory Board for making the trip such a success!

## A Day to Remember

"When we saw the lady we were very excited. We wear pins with Ghana and Canada on them, and I wear mine to school. She shook my hand and I feel special. She asked me 'What is your name?' and I said, 'James, I am called James.' I feel very good to meet her. (James)



were happy she come to Ghana. I feel happy to be with Mr. Danny and the board



members." (Joshua)

"When I was singing I felt afraid. There were many big men around. Policemen and soldiers were gathering around. But when she shake my hand I felt happy and not afraid." (Peter)

"We see the plane and the one who was driving it. There were some dancers too there. They teach us to dance. We

"She shake my hand I didn't want to leave the hand because the hand was very good. It was nice. I like to see Danny, when he see us he was very happy. He was running to greet us and we greet the lady. I want to thank the Board members and the Coordinator because they take care of us and I'm happy. In future we will go to Canada and greet everybody." (Abee)

"We were all excited especially when Mr. Danny was there. It was my first time meeting a great lady. She is like our President Kufuor in Ghana here. Since she come so many people didn't have the chance to meet her, but we were given time. Our ministers and other great people in Ghana, they didn't get to shake her hand, but I was given the chance. I thank the Centre a lot; it was because of this centre that I have the chance to meet great people." (Prosper)

"She was so special. I was presented to her because I've been doing good in school. She made me feel special that day, it was such a marvelous day. I would like to appreciate Danny. He has brought love and kindness to the family. He

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## A Day to Remember Continued From Pg.2

has shared love for us by sharing the Governor General. There are high, high organizations in the country but Danny

tried his best to show how much he love us. When I went to school the next day most of my friends were surprised I

meet her. They said, "The President Kufuor meet her so how could you?" They thought it was a joke! I always feel

## The HCC Girls' Scholarship Program: Empowering Girls Through Education



With our Scholarship program, we hope to help more girls like Benedicta to continue their schooling

For some time now, we have been searching for a meaningful way to reach out to needy girls in the community of Sandema. Although our Centre is too small to accommodate both girls and boys, we know that girls in northern Ghana must

contend with the same issues of poverty as boys. In addition, they face unique challenges in the household, where the burden of domestic work (cooking, cleaning, taking care of siblings, fetching firewood and water) often falls heavily on them.

After dialogues with community leaders, representatives of NGOs and our many colleagues and friends in Sandema, we are very excited to introduce the Horizons Girls' Scholarship Program. We believe strongly that helping girls to stay in school and further their education will give them more choices in life, and help them to become independent, successful leaders in the community.

Through this program, we will be targeting needy girls at the transition stages: from JSS (Junior Secondary School) to SSS (Senior Secondary School) and from SSS to university/college programs.

Many girls drop out of school at these transition stages as fees increase sharply and their families can no longer afford to pay for their schooling. Our scholarships will be tailored to meet the needs of each girl, and may include: tuition fees, books/school supplies and residence fees.

Beyond their formal education, the candidates will also participate in HCC-led workshops on topics ranging from leadership and computer skills to "finding ways to give back to your community".

Paola Bartolacci, our Canadian HCC volunteer, will be busy in the next few months, putting together application forms and meeting with school/ community leaders to share information about this initiative.

We look forward to sharing with you stories of our first group of selected candidates in the next newsletter.

## SRC Opens a Window to the World

Kip Clifton recently returned to the USA after two and a half years of service in Sandema as a Peace Corps volunteer. His crowning achievement was the establishment of the Sandema Resource Centre, a cutting-edge computer centre located in Sandema town. Below are excerpts from Kip's speech to the community leaders and townspeople on the day SRC was officially 'commissioned'.

Today we are commissioning the Sandema Resource Centre (SRC), Sandema's brand new link to the outside world. This center was built in collaboration with Horizons Children's Centre and the profits earned from the business of Sandema Resource Centre will help maintain the Horizons Children's Centre.

I would first like to take a minute and thank the people most responsible for our presence here in front of you, the three sisters of Horizons Children's Centre. These three women have constantly given their support to the community of Sandema, and today you are seeing one of their biggest donations come to life.

The children's centre provides the children with three square meals a day, school fees, and an after-school tutoring program. Today you are witness to their further commitment to the development of

this community. SRC was built in collaboration with Horizon's Children's Centre and the profits earned from the business of Sandema Resource Centre will help maintain the Horizons Children's Centre. So a big thank you to HCC.

Let us now talk for a moment about what the resource centre can do for you. The main goal of the Sandema Resource Centre is to empower the Builsa people through information, communication and technology. We are going to achieve this goal through our services to you.

*"We will offer classes on everything from typing and windows XP to Internet explorer and Microsoft office applications"*

We will firstly train the Builsa community on computer use through our bi-monthly classes. We will offer classes on everything from typing and Windows XP to Internet Explorer and Microsoft Office applications. The courses are offered at modest prices and will continue to be so in the future.

Secondly, we will connect the Builsa people to the outside world with our connection to the internet. This connection will be offered every day for a modest price of 8,000 cedis an hour, the cheapest rate any-

where north of Kumasi. Browsing the web, you will be able to check commodity prices, search for that item you have always wanted or instantly e-mail a friend in a far off place. The window to the world is now open to the Builsa community.

In order to fully utilize this window, we will post the Ghanaian commodity prices from the internet on our announcement board on a weekly basis.



Eric and Gloria (staff) pose with Kip outside the Sandema Resource Centre

This will allow farmers and marketgoers to check how much a commodity is selling for in Kumasi and Accra and assess whether or not it is worth the effort to send their product. This price index will have seed, wood and livestock prices at all large markets in the country.

Finally, The Sandema Resource Centre will cater to all of your business needs. Long gone are the days when the people of Sandema had to

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## SRC Continued From Pg.4

travel to Bolgatanga just to get a paper typed. We offer typing, copying and printing services during business hours of the work week. We will soon offer lamination services, binding services and also take passport photos. These will be at the modest prices you will come to expect from Sandema Resource Centre.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that the resource centre you see in front of you is not a resource unless you use it. We are here to offer you services that are seldom found outside of major cities, so please take advantage of this opportunity.

Sign your children up for

computer classes so that they may know how to use a computer before they have to enter the realities of the working world. Come in yourselves and take classes; learn what is at your fingertips. We are here for you. Thank you for taking your time and attending this event. God bless you all.

## A Lesson in Service

In April 2006, we sent four of our older children to volunteer with Dr. Abdulai, a reknowned humanitarian in Tamale. Among many other activities, Dr. Abdulai, his wife Doris, and his team of volunteers provide meals for the homeless. Our kids helped with food preparation and delivery. Here is their perspective on their work in Tamale:

We feel so excited when we meet the Dr. because we were there to help him at the clinic and help serve food to people. That made us excited!

We served food to men who are on the street. We brought food to people. We helping cooking and washing utensils. We cleaned the rice because there were some few things inside.

We have friend with the homeless people. We feel happy when we do this. We were there for

four days with Dr. Abdulai.

Somehow we were happy but we were also scared. Some of them were saying God blesses us, and that made us feel good.

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*"We were sent there to observe how things were being done so in future we can also help others like that."*

We think that HCC sent us there because we feel sorry to them because there are not many to help them with food service. We decided to go to Tamale and help with food, anything to help them. We were sent there to observe how things were being done so in future we can also help others like that.

We learned how to cook, and how to serve food in equal amount. We learn how to make



Kevin and Peter cracking some groundnuts for the lunch soup

friends with them (needy people) and laugh with them.

We would tell other children to do what we did, because they will learn some things. They should go and learn it and come back. When they come back they can tell us what they experienced because they also have experienced different things. If everyone goes we all learn from one another. Because we all helped different people.

## A Record Time

Laura Donovan is an intermediate teacher with the Durham Board. This summer, she took time out of her travels in Ghana to organize a fantastic summer program for the kids at HCC, as she describes below:

There is something to be said about time here in the north. Without a watch, people seem to have impeccable timing. Richard (the fantastic HCC volunteer) and I pulled up to the volunteer house, just as Joe (the incredible coordinator) and Roland (the amazing watchman) were finishing up, and awaiting our arrival.



Kojo, Peter and Awudu Sr. drumming with gusto

After an evening's rest, Richard and I made the short trek over to Horizons Children's Centre. From a distance I could see Yaw in his wheelchair, surrounded by a few of the younger boys (his helpers I

was told). Greeted by handshakes (with a snap), eager smiles, and a welcoming celebration with songs, drumming and dancing, I knew a week was going to slip by way too fast.

Richard had explained to me just how hard the boys study during the school year, so I thought that while school was out, I'd give them some time to play. My plan was to run collaborative games for the week, to teach them how to work as a team and trust each other. But I learned quickly that they would have nothing of the sort before a competitive game of football (on a bumpy dirt field in bare feet!) or volleyball. I'll play, I said, but they'd have to try mine too!

By the end of the week, the boys had experienced many new games. One HCC favourite was a spin-off of a volleyball game called Nuke'em, where we all realized that it was avoidable for the big boys to run over the little ones. It worked out so well that Joe says they are still playing it today! Other activities, meant



Laura surrounded by a large group of rambunctious HCC kids

to build trust and team effort, were performed better than any group of Canadian kids I had ever witnessed. They carried their teammates over small planks, supported each other using only branches, and ran full speed through trust waves like no others! Observing their daily lives, I learned that this was because these boys had to rely on each other everyday. They're family, and they can already trust one another.

Before I knew it, Peter and Prosper picked up the drums once again, and it was time. I have an everlasting impression of all the wonderful, hardworking people that bring happiness to the boys at HCC and the good people of Sandema. And special thanks to Richard, Joe and Roland, for seeing to it that I made the bus to Bolga ... just in time.

## Our New Program Coordinator

Joe Abobtey is our Program Coordinator, a true 'jack of all trades'. Joe's diligence and responsibility are matched by his total dedication to the kids at HCC. In his quiet and humble way, he makes sure that EVERYTHING gets done at HCC...everyday. Here's his take on his year at HCC and plans for the future:

This academic year was good in terms of working as Assistant Program Coordinator. On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 I became the Program Coordinator. With my new position I make sure the administration work should run successfully. I am the accountant of the centre; I am specialized with the accounts.

I have put the centre in my hands and I look at it like my family. I was an orphan myself, and I have made someone of myself and I am proud. I tell these children that they need their education; they need to take advantage of the support they are given so that they can make something of themselves and be productive members of our society.

I think that within 2007 I will have new plans to move forward with the centre. If the new centre construction begins I will have to make sure this can happen. I will be very happy to see the centre de-

velop. I need to work hard and work with the volunteers. We must cooperate, if you do not, then development cannot happen. I like working with volunteers, they help a lot, and the work will improve if we keep having volunteers who want to work hard. One of the things I've seen is that the children are proud. I think there always needs to be a volunteer here because it makes the children happy. It is something they always remember; what the volunteers have done for them.

*"I have put the centre in my hands and I look at it like my family. I was an orphan myself, and I have made someone of myself and I am proud"*

We have been able to plant 200 trees at the new site. The children's academics they are all doing very well. Educational background for all the children is improving. As Program Coordinator this makes me feel that I am doing something well. With this year too we set up a water pipe at the new site [in preparation for upcoming construction]. I am happy to see that the children are sending emails to the director in Canada.

With the end of 2007, Benedicta and Joseph will be gradu-



Joe poses with HCC volunteer Richard Sewell, from England. Richard spent 6 months with HCC and worked closely with Joe to help him manage the Centre.

ating. I will be happy to see their performance and this will also motivate the other children to perform well academically. Our current volunteer is working on the girls' scholarship program. For 2007 we are planning for this, we have laid the foundation. I think the girls will like the opportunity in the Builsa District.

Working with this centre I think I can do very well and I will be with the centre as long as possible. I want to know I have done well for the people. This work is God's work. People thought I would not be able to manage the centre and with God's Grace it has been possible. I will manage it in God's name.

## A Proud Father written by Dr. Mark Wise

Dr. Mark Wise is a travel medical doctor who has been instrumental to the HCC program. We rely on him to provide medical advice to all our volunteers. He has linked us up with many valuable partners in the NGO community and continues to send amazing volunteers our way. Last year, Dr. Wise travelled to Ghana to visit his son Ben who was volunteering with HCC. Below are excerpts from an article he wrote last May for the Medical Post about his time in Sandema:

I HAVE AN UNWRITTEN rule that I don't go to the same place twice. Tim Hortons is an exception... and Ghana was another exception. I had travelled there in 2003 with my youngest son, Michael. We toured much of the country and visited several volunteer organizations with whom I work. But this time was different. This time was to visit my 23-year-old son, Benjamin, who has been volunteering in West Africa for several months.

Benny graduated last year from the Ivey School of business and the University of Western Ontario in London. He could have walked into a well-paid job. Instead he decided to take some time off and volunteer in Africa. Some people asked me if he was following in my footsteps. Well, he

never wanted to be a doctor, and he has greatly exceeded my footsteps as far as working for the good of others in a less fortunate country.

The week spent in his town of Sandema was one of the most enjoyable and proudest weeks of my life. To see Benjamin in his element was more exciting than any waterfall or ancient ruin that I have visited. He lives in a small house which HCC provides for him. There is a never-ending parade of wildlife crossing his yard - pigs, goats, cows and turkeys. Thankfully, no snakes. Much to his surprise, he has running water (usually cold) and a ceiling fan, which works when the power is on. To make life even more comfortable, he has his laptop, an iPod with four billion songs and a cell phone. For the latter to function he has to ride his bike 20 minutes out of town, face in a certain direction and chant an ancient Ghanaian prayer.

The children living at the centre range from five to eighteen years of age. Some are orphans and others come from families who just could not afford to look after their children and send them to school. HCC provides the kids with food, shelter, education, recreation and an enormous amount of love. The kids are up each day at four in the morning, cleaning their living quarters and sweeping the yard, before



Dr. Wise and Ben together in Ghana

getting a hot helping of Madam Judith's porridge. Then it's off to school.

Benjamin has many roles at HCC. He helps the kids with their homework, teaches them English (the national language), assists them on the computers and spends a lot of time just playing and having fun with them. When the kids are at school, he helps Ambrose and Joe, the local staff, with any chores or administering that needs to be done at the centre. Hopefully before he leaves there will be a small library for the kids, and an Internet centre to help the entire town.

His latest task has been to seek out medical care for people infected with HIV. He has unfortunately become acquainted with the reality that is Africa.

As a travel medicine specialist, I see countless travellers destined for different corners of the earth for infinite reasons. But I feel most privileged to see those who are travelling to less fortunate destinations to

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## A Proud Father Continued From Pg.8

volunteer their time, skills and spirit. I am a proud father to number my son Benjamin

among those travellers. He will surely return home with much more than he left behind. A

better paid job he will never have.

## HIV/AIDS Testing: Step by Step written by Ben Wise

Like his father, Ben has a passion for international development and we featured the blog he wrote as an HCC volunteer in our last newsletter. Although Ben has returned to Canada and is now working full-time, he has found a very special way to continue the good work he started in Sandema.

Last year I spent 9 months living in Sandema volunteering at Horizons Children Centre. This was, without a doubt, the best 9 months of my life and I will always remember the time I spent at HCC. All of the boys there are incredibly happy, and incredibly fortunate to be a part of HCC.

The sad reality of Ghana is that most people are not as lucky as those at HCC. Part way through my time in Sandema, someone who I had become very close with was diagnosed with HIV. In many ways this was a turning point for me. Since HIV/AIDS is not something that you can see, it is easy to go about your day-to-day life without noticing the magnitude of this problem. I decided it was time to change

that, and I began seeking out the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS.

I quickly found the local counselor for people living with HIV/AIDS, Mr. Paul Aborik, who shared many stories of the hardships people in Sandema go through living with the disease. What shocked me most was that in Ghana, only 30% of those infected with HIV were actually aware of it. This discovery is what has inspired me to start Step By Step, a not-for-profit organization that funds HIV/AIDS testing in Sandema, and provides assistance to those who test positive.

*“What shocked me most was that in Ghana, only 30% of those infected with HIV were actually aware of it”*

To date, we have already administered more than 175 tests, and after our successful launching event a couple of months ago, have aspirations of many more to come. In the future, we are going to expand to provide nutritional support and monitoring for individuals infected with HIV. We also hope to provide treatment for pregnant women with HIV

that reduces the chance of mother-to-child transmission from about 30% to close to 2%.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa is an overwhelmingly large problem. On a small level, however, it only takes a few dollars to make a substantial difference. Step By Step aims to fight the disease through lots of these small steps – getting the money that is needed, and getting it to the people that need it.

Step By Step would not exist today if not for HCC. Apart from being the reason I was in Sandema to begin with, my experience at HCC gave me the necessary understanding of the culture and environment in which Step By Step operates. Even today, HCC continues to support us through providing advice, helping with the sometimes very complicated logistics of providing funding, and with their volunteers that are in Sandema.

If you would like more information on Step By Step or want to get involved, please check our website – [www.stepbystepafrica.com](http://www.stepbystepafrica.com).

## YOU Made a Difference

When we meet people and tell them about Horizons, they invariably ask the same question: "Where do you get your funding?" When we reply that the vast majority of our donations come from family and friends in Canada and the USA, this is usually met with incredulity. People can scarcely believe that our program has been running successfully for 6 years without

government funding or the support of a large charitable organization. But then again, they don't QUITE know what an amazing group of people our donors are. Most of you give without even being asked, each and every year. Many of you have taken it upon yourselves to spread the word about Horizons to friends and colleagues and/or organize a fundraiser for us. As a result, our donor

base gets a little bigger each year. Most importantly, unlike programs that need to spend a lot of money on advertising and marketing in order to secure funding, we can direct all our funds towards the kids and community at HCC.

We cannot thank you enough for everything that YOU do to make our work possible.

## How You Can Help

We are often asked the question, "What can I do to help?" There are various ways that you can support our ever growing program. These include:

- Monetary contributions – donations can be made by cheque payable to **The Stanley Francis Foundation c/o 5-3062 Lake Shore Blvd. West, Toronto, ON M8V 4C9**. The Foundation issues tax receipts for all donations received.
- Donations of educational DVDs and CD-ROMS
- Organize a fundraiser
- If your company has an annual **United Way** campaign to which you contribute through payroll deductions, you can direct these funds towards Horizons Children's Centre. The United Way gives you the option of directing funds to any registered charity in Ontario. If you are interested in making contributions to Horizons through your workplace United Way campaign, you may indicate this on the form. You will need to specify the name of our umbrella organization, the "Stanley Francis Foundation" and also write the following charity number: **86964 7347 RR0001**.
- Volunteer with HCC in Sandema...please check our website under "How to Help" for more information about applying to be an HCC volunteer or e-mail [jeanette@horizonscentre.org](mailto:jeanette@horizonscentre.org)
- Spread the word about HCC...pass this newsletter on to a colleague or friend!



(Left to right) Awudu Jr., Nathaniel and Solomon — the Three Muskateers of HCC

## A Little Known Fact goes A Long Way

written by Alfred Francis

“A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away...” Well, only eleven years ago in Scarborough, five friends decided to organize a couple of trivia nights because they had no lives and needed to get out once in a while. They thought that there must be others out there who have a storehouse of totally useless information floating in their heads much like they had. A trivia night would be the perfect use of this useless info. And they could raise a few funds for a worthwhile charity. So it began. Last year we decided to change our charity of choice to Horizons Children Center. The first night brought in \$520 and this past November 24<sup>th</sup> being the second in aid of Horizons brought in \$332.

The evenings are a lot of fun with no skills or knowledge required for a good time. The competitors, if you would like to call them that, are there for a good time shared with friends, new and old. They gather to have fun and raise a little for a good cause. The comrades at arms organizing the events are Sean Leckey, Rob Day, Louis Arnold, Brendan Murphy and Al Francis. They are all teachers in the TCDSB who have been spending a couple of evenings a year at the wonderful Alpine Hotel on Kingston Road to put on this event. The winning team gets to engrave their own names on the Cliff Clayven Trivia Cup. They must do so at their own expense which adds to the fun of winning the event

and leaves a little more for Horizons. Your question for today is, “What can you do to help Horizons?” For the answer check this newsletter and/or the website or come up with a fun fundraising idea!!! Peace from your friendly neighbourhood trivia buff!



Akosua gives a big hug to her little sister

## Local Students Become Global Citizens

This year, several schools took it upon themselves to help HCC, through fundraising campaigns, gathering clothing and school supplies, and letter-writing to the children in Sandema. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the following schools:

- ◆ Albert Campbell Collegiate Institute

- ◆ Annunciation School
- ◆ Brimwood Blvd. Jr. PS
- ◆ Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto
- ◆ Tutorial & Educational Assistance Mississauga

Many of these schools tied their fundraising campaigns to awareness activities, educating students about issues facing people in developing countries

and delivering a strong message about global citizenship and unity.

Congratulations to everyone involved. The funds raised will go towards our Girls' Scholarship Program and/or the purchase of computers for SRC.

## Last But Not Least...

This year, HCC was blessed with many outstanding volunteers. It takes a special kind of person to put their career and life on hold to work in a remote rural town. Unlike some larger organizations, our volunteers cover all their costs of travel and living while in Ghana. To **Ben Wise, Richard Sewell, Laura Donovan** and **Paola Bartolacci**...each of you brought your unique strengths, skills and personality to HCC, and we hope you all feel proud of the rich contributions you made to our program.

Of course, our volunteers worked hand in hand with our talented staff in Ghana: **Mr. Joe Abobtey (Program Coordinator), Madam Judith Adom (House Mother), Madam Julie Adii (Asst. House Mother), Mr. Paul Thomas Azantilow (Night Watchman), Mr. Roland Anakpak (Day Watchman) and Mr. Maxwell Hamidu (Staff Supervisor)**...we thank you all for being excellent role models for our children and showing them the value of commitment and hard work.

Finally, we wish to thank our HCC Advisory Board: **Mr. Donatus Abag-dem, Mr. Gabby Com-mey** and **Madam Janet Apenkum**, for providing us with timely advice and constructive feedback throughout this year. Thanks to you, the bridge between HCC and the community of Sandema is strong and solid.

2007 will see the beginning of our construction at our new site...22 acres of untouched land outside of Sandema town. In addition to building a new dormitory for the children, we also plan to set up a small irrigation farm, using a sweathose system for ultra-efficient irrigation during the dry season. We hope to inspire other farmers in the community to try this technique. We look forward to giving you all updates on this project as it evolves in the next few months.

Here's to our 2006 accomplishments, and all the successes yet to come!

Sincerely,

Heather Menezes  
Executive Director



*Horizons Children's Centre*

Visit us at [www.horizonscentre.org](http://www.horizonscentre.org)

Email us at [info@horizonscentre.org](mailto:info@horizonscentre.org)