



(re) connections

2022-23 annual report

message from the president

Our 2020 and 2021 annual reports told our stories of the Covid shutdown and the fire at the Model Library. These, among other obstacles, caused young people to be dispersed from their beloved libraries and to experience isolation. Lubuto has always understood that the solution to isolation is connection. **Post-Covid and rebuilding the Model Library in 2022/23 allowed us to focus on connection and re-connection with the children in our communities.**

Lubuto's founding in 2005 was the result of the belief that libraries can provide a way forward for vulnerable children who have been disconnected from society. We strive to look at the world through the eyes of marginalized and isolated children with empathy, and see what they are drawn to—with many of the Lubuto team having seen the world through that perspective themselves. Our grassroots approach connects children with one another in a caring community, with programs that meet *their* needs with no outside agenda.

Despite library closures, program offerings continued and some even expanded. Some examples:

- Character development and adolescent health mentoring was conducted and evaluated under a Templeton World Charity Foundation grant
- Lubuto's Family Literacy Program expanded with dozens of young mothers completing literacy and income-generating skills training programs
- Early childhood education programs were further formalized and the first Early Learning Center opened at a Lubuto library

We received our 14th and 15th Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award nominations in 2022 and 2023, an award created by the Swedish Arts Council to “promote every child’s right to great stories.” We were also the inaugural recipient of the Library and Information Association of Zambia’s “Innovation and Creative Institution” award recognizing outstanding services, programs and impact of Zambian libraries. We are particularly gratified by this recognition from our professional colleagues and local partners.

The Mumuni Choma Library in Zambia’s Southern Province and Lubuto Comboni Library in Lusaka opened, and a new and improved Lubuto Model Library is nearing completion. In 2024 we will reopen an expanded Lubuto Model Library and celebrate all the libraries in the Lubuto Network.



Jane Kinney Meyers
President & Founder

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Templeton character development mentoring



Lubuto was awarded a grant from Templeton World Charity Foundation in 2020 focused on character development and adolescent health. Over the past three years—partnering with Professor Anthony Ahrens, Chair of American University’s Psychology Department—we have worked to answer the research question: does tradition-based mentoring enable youth participants in Lubuto mentoring programs to modify their life stories in a way that strengthens their ability to change sexual and reproductive health (SRH) related behavior?

Three mentoring cohorts, nearly 500 participants, completed the program combining traditional storytelling and drama with the widely-used, evidence based Stepping Stones SRH curriculum. The graduates had a lot of positive things to say:

One participant shared that he found the program both helpful and interesting. He drew particular attention to a mentoring topic called “how we act” as being transformative in how he understands equality among boys and girls. Learning about HIV/AIDS also helped him know how to take precautionary measures to stay safe.

Another participant said that he had challenges dealing with peer pressure before joining mentoring. He didn’t know how to avoid bad influences because he was shy to speak out and was scared to lose friends. He cites the topic titled “responsibility and courage” as enabling him to know right from wrong, and was grateful to have gained confidence to speak out and steer his friends away from bad influences.

Family Literacy Program

We observed the need for so many out-of-school young mothers to learn to write and read English in order to get a job. This was the genesis of Lubuto’s Family Literacy Program, which is specifically designed to meet the complex needs of young mothers.

In 2022 and 2023, scores of young mothers graduated from the Family Literacy Program—proudly receiving certificates while being cheered on by family and friends. All these mothers completed a four-month English language literacy curriculum. Graduation from the program was based not only on consistent participation, but also on assessments on the mastery of English. A unique aspect of the program is that it not only aims to improve participants’ reading and writing—and help them re-enter school—but also to provide opportunities to learn marketable skills.

Those who attend more than 70% of the literacy program are given the opportunity to participate in a skills training program conducted in partnership with the Dzithandizeni Trust Trades School in Lusaka. There, they receive income-generating training in food production, hospitality, tailoring and design and computer studies. This report’s cover depicts the joyful graduates of the hospitality program.

The girls and their families have given glowing reviews for the program and its impact on their lives. Hannah, one of the graduates, was mocked and lost many friends when she became pregnant. She had lost hope and did not see a future for herself. Hannah’s mother said that her daughter is now well-respected in the community after completing the skills training program. She has higher self-esteem and is convinced that she can follow her dreams.



Early Learning Center



The introduction of Early Learning Centers at Lubuto libraries is the culmination of many years of working with young mothers. When Lubuto began to offer the Family Literacy Program, it became clear that babies and toddlers need care while their mothers learn. We had earlier learned about some traditional approaches to early childhood education from families in rural Nabukuyu. The needs of community members became even more apparent in our outreach efforts. We began to develop a more formal approach to library-based early childhood education and early literacy programming and built collections of books for the very youngest.

The first Early Learning Center opened at the Lubuto Comboni Library in 2023 as a space tailor-made to early childhood education programming. The center is not only designed for young children, but also for their caregivers—children’s first teachers. Separate rooms for imaginary play support the five important research-based practices: talking, singing, reading, writing and playing. Comboni’s Early Learning Center serves as a model that can be used at all Lubuto libraries in the future and at other libraries serving children in Zambia. The second Early Learning Center will open its doors in 2024 at the Lubuto Model Library in Lusaka.



new librarians

Throughout 2022 and 2023 we were training members of Lubuto Library host organizations and their librarians in all aspects of running a Lubuto library and effectively offering services. Model Library Manager Given Besa developed a weeklong training program combining instruction with hands-on practice that is contributed to by all staff (including Jane Meyers from Washington). In addition to refresher training for existing staff, we welcomed two new libraries to the Lubuto Library Network:



**The Mumuni Choma Library—
hosted by Brethren in Christ
Church Choma Child
Development Project—located in
Choma, the capital of Zambia’s
Southern Province**

**The Lubuto Comboni Library—hosted by the
St. Daniel Comboni Missionary Sisters of
Zambia—located in Kanyama, Lusaka South**



new connections

When U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona led his country's delegation to Africa's Summit for Democracy hosted here in Zambia, American Ambassador Michael Gonzales brought him to see the new Lubuto Comboni Library. He was so impressed with our music program and its singers and drummers, the arts program and its artists, and the drama performance of an original play about democracy. He clearly enjoyed discussing democratic ideas and the purpose of the Summit with the young actors. And he was totally charmed with his visit to the Early Learning Center. Children had so much fun with his interactive reading of Bill Martin Jr. and Eric Carle's *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?*

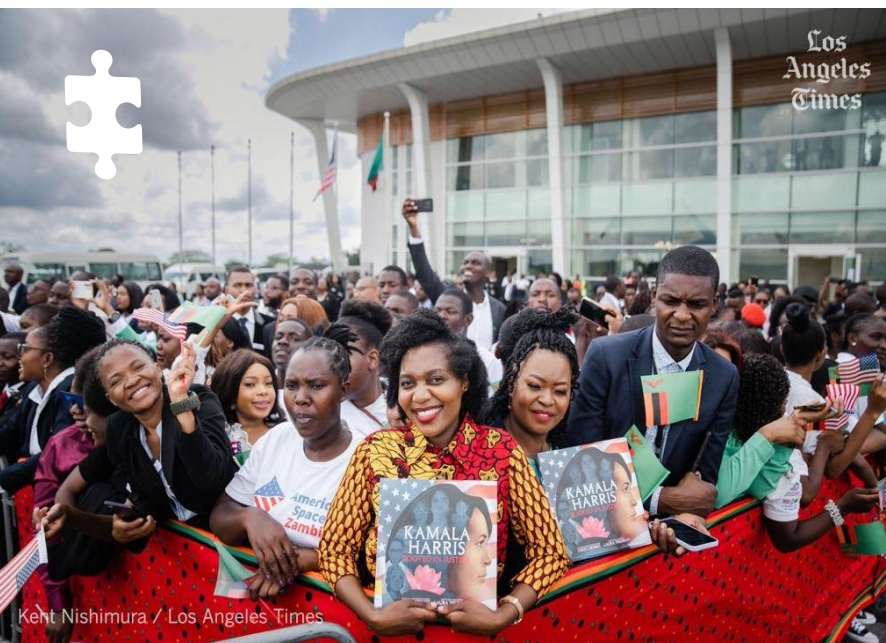


A classic for me is, *Brown Bear*, by Bill Martin Jr and Eric Carle. I was able to read it to children in Lusaka, Zambia. They loved it as much as I did.

I'll never forget how excited I was reading this book as a kid & how excited children still get half a world away.



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Given Besa and Lubuto's Director of Operations Hadassah Kasukumya were invited to welcome American Vice President Kamala Harris arriving at the airport in April 2023 for a personal visit to Lusaka to revisit the home where her grandfather lived when he worked in the Zambian civil service. Naturally, Hadassah and Besa brought along copies of Nikki Grimes' *Kamala Harris: Rooted in Justice* from the Lubuto collections, which certainly caught VP Harris' attention. The LA Times' photo with Hadassah, Besa and the book front and center shows the power of beautiful picture book illustration.

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