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Cambridge College Student Forms Africa 500 to Collect Books for Children in Zimbabwe

CAMBRIDGE, MA— Alexandra Vanegas, an Arlington resident and Human Services undergraduate student at Cambridge College, is a mother, a Court Appointed Special Advocate through the juvenile court in Boston, as well as a full-time employee with a local architecture firm. She is also inspired. The story of another woman's journey and mission to help children in Africa prompted her to create Africa 500 last November, a drive to collect 500 books for the Mazvisa Primary School in Zimbabwe.

In October 2008, AIDS advocate, author and entrepreneur Getrude Matshe shared her powerful story of success with Cambridge College students. The event, which was part of the Strategies for Success class in the Undergraduate Program at Cambridge College, was so inspiring for Vanegas that she decided to take action. "Her lecture was amazing and I felt personally moved and inspired by her journey," she said. "Getrude Matshe is a woman with a purpose. Through her Africa Alive Foundation, she has made it her personal mission to feed, cloth and nurture more than 350 orphaned children affected by HIV and AIDS who are living in Zimbabwe. If she can take on such an awesome task, I knew that there was surely something I could do to help," Vanegas added.

Motivated by Matshe's advice that "if you want something badly enough you will find a way to get it, even if you don't know how at the time," Vanegas is nearly halfway to her goal of collecting 500 books. However, Vanegas still has a long way to go. "I am seeking people who understand Africa 500's mission and the importance of the work Africa Alive Education Foundation is doing and wants to help with this effort," she said. "While I have not traveled to Africa before, nor have I met any of

the children, my heart already feels connected to the potential in every child regardless of race, economic status, and location. There are 17 million children in Africa living with HIV/AIDS; and that means that 17 million children in Africa need help. Together, we can directly affect 350 of them by collecting books. This is only the beginning.”

Vanegas has started a blog that tracks her progress and provides detailed information about Africa Alive and the Mazvisa Primary School at <http://africa500.blogspot.com>. She can also be reached at 500africa@gmail.com. There are various ways to help with Africa 500 and Africa Alive Education Foundation by sending a book, donating, or helping in whatever capacity one can.

Vanegas is seeking to collect books for children—infants to 18-years-old—including storybooks, math books, English and science books or other educational material. Books can be donated in the following ways: left in a drop box at the security desk located in the lobby of Cambridge College, 1000 Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, MA; left at 14 Hillside Avenue in Cambridge in a bag or box labeled Africa 500 or Alexandra; books can be shipped directly to Vanegas from Amazon or other online book retailers; or donated through Africa Alive’s website at www.africaaliveonline.com. Vanegas is also looking for help in getting these books to Africa and collecting donations to help ship them books to Zimbabwe.

“The Strategies for Success class is intended to help our students clarify their goals, their vision of what they would like to create and to give them concrete skills and strategies to help them implement a plan to achieve their goals,” said Professor Barbara Koffske Reid, who teaches the Strategies for Success class. “Getrude Matshe is a wonderful example of someone who had a vision of what she wanted to accomplish. It is wonderful to see Alexandra be inspired enough to take on this goal.”

About Getrude Matshe and Africa Alive

Getrude Matshe is an international motivational speaker, businesswoman and owner, actress, author, mother and activist. Growing up in Zimbabwe she knew first hand of the poverty, violence, and the spread of HIV/AIDS in her homeland. Now she has founded the Africa Alive Education Foundation in Zimbabwe, which helps orphaned children, widows and grandparents. The first sponsored school, Mazvisa Primary School, serves 350 children. Of those children, 175 are diagnosed with HIV. Africa Alive’s mission focuses on helping HIV positive children and young adults, as well as children who

have lost family members to the virus, obtain education, health, and family support in poverty-stricken communities.

Founded in 1971, Cambridge College is a private, non-profit institution dedicated to providing academically excellent, time-efficient, and cost-effective higher education for a diverse population of working adults for whom those opportunities may have been limited or denied. Cambridge College has sites in Cambridge, Springfield, and Lawrence, MA; Chesapeake, VA; Augusta, GA; Ontario, CA; Memphis, TN; and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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