

IHMs in Action: GECKO Project

"One of the saddest things I have experienced in South Africa is the high number of street children in every town and village," says Peg (Cornelia) O'Shea, IHM.

For the last two years, Sister Peg, who has ministered in Africa for 14 years, has played a pivotal role in protecting these children through her involvement with the GECKO project - Giving Each Child Kindness and Orientation. GECKO works to provide safe and clean accommodations, food, clothing, substance abuse rehabilitation, life skills counseling and education.



The children of the GECKO project are abandoned. They are AIDS orphans or are former drug addicts. Jenny Uzzell established the project in her small, rented tearoom near Howick Falls, South Africa. Although in poor health and with only a seasonal business, Jenny feeds, clothes and houses 15 to 35 children at a time.

Sister Peg describes herself as "definitely in the background," but she has helped GECKO organize, find resources, as well as with networking and strategizing. She is part of the GECKO Committee, which was established this past spring. The committee will facilitate achieving nonprofit status for GECKO, which will pave the way for future funding, such as the IHM ministry grant for an after-school tutor for the children the project recently received.

Sister Peg's long-range interest in the project goes beyond assisting the former street children currently being cared for.

"We're trying to see the big picture of safety and support for children," she says. "I pray that we will fulfill Jenny's dreams of schooling for the abandoned children now in her care and that we will help to establish safe houses for street children in all the surrounding communities, with education as a centerpiece of their lives."

"South Africa is filled with hope, but we have to do something for the children."