

# BROOKLINE TAB

Community Newspaper Company ■ www.brooklinetab.com

THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 2005

Vol. 27, No. 11 ■ 44 Pages ■ 5 Sections FRE

## Sharing their vision for a better world *Local nonprofit donates to global causes*

By Shawn Macomber  
CORRESPONDENT

Founded on the premise that "graced with abundance" Americans are "called to action to make a difference in the lives of people who are born into staggering poverty and disease," the Brookline-based nonprofit SHARED has spent the last three years turning local dollars into global solutions.

"Our thinking starting out was that the problems in the world were huge, but that you cannot simply say you want to see change and do nothing," SHARED President Elizabeth Ziemba said.

"We really do believe that shared responsibility and participation can improve life for people struggling throughout the world," she said. "The key is synergy: The more of us who accept this calling, the greater a positive impact we'll be able to make together."

Basically, SHARED, in Brookline Village, goes out into the world and finds like-minded community-based organizations in countries in need and partners with them to increase their access to medicine and health care.

So now in the small African country of Lesotho — whose suffering is high, but name recognition low — SHARED has begun working in tandem with relief organizations on the ground to help alleviate the suffering of more than 100,000 orphans the AIDS epidemic has left in its wake.

"Imagine two orphans for every Brookline resident, and you'll start to get an idea of the scope of the problem," Ziemba said. "Many of these children are starting life with two strikes against them: They are orphans and they are HIV positive. If they get the proper medicine and their immune systems are strong enough, many children can become HIV negative. So our work there absolutely makes a huge

Meanwhile, half a world away, SHARED's "Building a Healthy Armenia" program is working with physicians and patients to provide the least expensive, clinically effective medicines to a nation mired in poverty where 14 percent of children under 5 suffer from chronic malnutrition.

"As a smaller organization, we've tried to concentrate on smaller populations in great need so we can have a greater impact," Ziemba said. "That way we can tell donors exactly where the money is going and exactly how it's being used."

Nevertheless, these initial smaller programs are just the beginning, Ziemba promised.

"Nothing ever happens fast enough, but I am pleased with how far we've come in the last three years," she said. "We're growing quickly, building up our capacities and learning new skill sets all the time, which will have an effect on how many people we can help. Our scope and abilities are expanding all the time."

Ziemba quickly added, however, the pure growth was not the be-all, end-all.

"Organizational growth will never be the measure of success for us," she said. "Our success will be measured by how many people we help and how much of an impact we have on lives."

But one need not simply take Ziemba's word for it. She has made enough of a splash in the international health-care scene to have recently been contracted by the World Health Organization to study ways to create international partnerships that will "discover and produce medicines to treat diseases of the developing world such as malaria and tuberculosis for which there is little or no commercial market."

Ziemba and SHARED have also inspired many in the community to come forward for a cause greater than themselves.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SHARED  
SHARED President Elizabeth Ziemba, left, with Molelekeng Rapolaki, ambassador of Lesotho, at a SHARED fund-raiser for AIDS orphans in Lesotho at the Coolidge Corner Theatre on May 17. SHARED arranged for the first U.S. screening of Prince Harry's documentary, "The Forgotten Kingdom," detailing the plight of Lesotho's AIDS orphans.

Swirda counts herself among them.

"Awareness is a tricky thing, we want it and we don't want it, because once you have it, you realize that when one suffers, we all suffer," Swirda said. "Historically, I think that it has been easy to appease my own sense of duty by sending a check and leaving the 'work' up to the organization. Having SHARED as a neighbor and friend ups the ante."

Ziemba echoed Swirda's sentiment.

"One of our biggest challenges is educating people 'here' about the realities of extreme poverty 'over there,'" she said. "In Lesotho, the average person is living on \$1.50 a day, and some people are making the grim choice between eating and necessary medication. It's difficult to convey that in a real way."

That SHARED is a smaller organization not only doesn't bother Swirda, it's a plus in her

"When was the last time you had the opportunity to directly address the president of an organization about their vision and direction at your local bank?" she said rhetorically, adding, "SHARED educates without shame and coercion. I have often not gotten involved with organizations when I had thought my contribution was too small to make a difference. My experience with SHARED has taught me that size does not matter, intention does."

Brookline has proved a perfect location for an organization such as SHARED, Ziemba said.

"We love being based here," she said. "It's a really diverse [place] and people here seem to have a pretty high level of awareness as to what's happening beyond their back yard. People in Brookline aren't afraid to get involved. They aren't afraid to believe in good causes."

For more information or to get involved visit [www.healthshares.org](http://www.healthshares.org).