

Shriver Award
National Peace Corps Association
1900 L Street, NW Suite 205
Washington, DC 20036

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter to nominate Elizabeth Bara for the 2006 Shriver Award for Humanitarian Service. For close to 20 years, Ms. Bara has dedicated her life to serving others through the Peace Corps and as a co-founder a successful non-profit organization in Zimbabwe. She has done so with enthusiasm, idealism, ingenuity, integrity, and commitment – qualities, which represent the ideals and spirit behind the founding of the Peace Corps. Her accomplishments and personal qualities make her uniquely qualified for this award.

In 1987, Ms. Bara was 30 years old and recently divorced. She decided at that moment to join the Peace Corps as a math and science teacher in Swaziland. During her Peace Corps service, Elizabeth met her husband Tom (also a Peace Corps Volunteer) and together, they decided to follow their dream to start an organization that would provide an opportunity for communities to effect fundamental and sustainable improvements in their own lives. After trying to start an organization from the States, they made a leap of faith, buying 2 one-way tickets to South Africa to start an organization in Zimbabwe.

The process of starting the organization was slow. She worked for 5 long years to establish the organization in communities across Zimbabwe. During this time, her idealism and commitment never faltered. She successfully balanced the drive to build an organizational infrastructure with sound programs while simultaneously understanding and nurturing the community buy-in essential to the project's success. The result is the non-profit organization *A Self-Help Assistance Program* with a mission to cultivate self-reliance in Southern Africa by empowering disadvantaged rural communities to effect fundamental and sustainable improvements in their own lives. ASAP's philosophy is to empower those living in their country by sharing their knowledge of how to break the cycle of poverty, strengthen local education, and improve nutrition and health.

Over the next 6 years, Elizabeth was instrumental in laying the groundwork for many of the projects that ASAP supports. Some of the programs that have made a positive and lasting impact on people's lives include:

- **Rural Savings Club Project:** The program brings together small groups of rural villagers, most of whom are women to pool their resources and provide loans to each other, which are then paid back with interest. ASAP's role is training and monitoring, not to provide outside funding. After gaining skills in leadership, resource mobilization, loan appraisal and bookkeeping, members create their own clubs, making all decisions themselves including who is in the club, how often to meet, how much to save, what the interest rate should be, and what to do if a member does not follow the rules which they agreed to follow when the club was formed. Since the project began, more than 14,000 women have participated and **the positive change in the lives of these women is truly inspiring.**
- **Bridge the Gap Project:** ASAP seeks to encourage students to learn and appreciate math through math clubs and school competitions. ASAP also equips teachers to educate effectively through holding teaching technique workshops and helping teachers to develop common exams for their area. Through these efforts at easing the transition in math education between primary and secondary school, ASAP hopes to increase the percentage of students who make the jump with success. The BTG project has supported over 120 schools **with the enthusiastic endorsement of the Ministry of Education and plans are in place to expand the project throughout the Province.**
- **Health and Nutrition Development Initiative:** This project strengthens the capacity of the communities in the Nyanga District to care for the growing numbers of people affected by HIV/AIDS and the orphans the disease creates. The program includes training on HIV/AIDS

awareness, growing medicinal herbs, nutritional gardening, perma-culture techniques, and psycho-social support. It also encompasses teaching vocational skills to out-of-school youth.

After 11 years in Zimbabwe, Elizabeth has established a sustainable organization staffed with competent, enthusiastic Zimbabweans who take a leadership role in developing and implementing projects. Elizabeth and Tom have now returned to the United States in Peachtree City, Atlanta to establish a fundraising plan for ASAP. She has tackled this latest task with the same enthusiasm and dedication as she did with her programs in Africa, immediately connecting with the international and public health community in Atlanta. Her first fundraising event featured representatives from the Carter Center and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to discuss HIV/AIDS in Africa.

I highly recommend that Ms. Bara receive this distinguished award. She has dedicated her life to serving others and has built an organization that not only makes a difference in people's lives, but does it in a sustainable way. She is not afraid of taking risks and has a firm belief that when people come together and are armed with the knowledge and power to improve their own lives, they can accomplish anything. As the enclosed articles attest, Elizabeth serves as an inspiration for the Peace Corps Community of how one person can make a difference.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Karen Voetsch
President
Atlanta Area Returned Peace Corps Volunteers