



VULNERABLE CHILDREN SOCIETY

Annual General Meeting Minutes

Meeting Title	:	Annual General Meeting
Date	:	January 27, 2015
Time	:	9am Pacific time, 12pm Toronto time, 1pm Atlantic
Place	:	Facebook Group Chat
Chair Person	:	Arnica Rowan
Invitee List	:	<p>Internal: Arnica Rowan, Dacia Douhaibi, Nicole Bellefleur, Pam Carlson, Tawnya Pattie, Flora Meier, Menbere Shiferaw</p> <p>External: Birhan Ejigu, Bisrat Sime, Stefan Jasuira, society members, the general public</p>
In Attendance	:	<p>Internal: Arnica Rowan, Nicole Bellefleur, Tawnya Pattie, Dacia Douhaibi</p> <p>External (actively or passively): Allison Orr-Smith, Andrea Lee, Angela Schneider, Beth Marshall, BG Lawrie, Birhan Ejigu, Bisrat Sime, Brad McCandlish, Britta Joyce, Bruce Frankard, Carolyn Usher, Catherine Vasilaros, Dana Hiebert, Deborah Northcott, Dorraine Gustaffson, Emily Neufeld, Erik Matchett, Heidi Burzinski, Jennifr Meyer, Julie Evans, Karen Tobin, Kerry Worth, Kim Custance, Kristen Murphy, Laura Livingstone, Laura Morrison, Leslie Kudna, Lisa Lawrie, Lisa Vitols</p>

		Lori Tanizawa Marie Allison-Matchett Megan Kemble-Lescanec Nirpinder Sandhu Paul Maarschalk Rita Churchill Sheldon Duek Silena Ewan Siobhan Key Stefan Jasuira Stephanie Dobrowolski
Absent	:	Internal: Flora Meier, Menbere Shiferaw, Pam Carlson
Agenda	:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project Updates: Love and Hope Centre Progress, Garden Project Progress, Teenage Sex Trade Worker Retraining Program Progress, Ebola Support in Liberia ▪ Review of Annual Financial Statement/Sponsorships/Program Financial Needs ▪ Ways for people the get involved with VCS ▪ Election of Board of Directors
Minutes Submitted By	:	Dacia Douhaibi
Minutes Submitted On	:	February 19, 2015
Next Meeting	:	Date: TBA Time: TBA Place: TBA Chair: Arnica Rowan

#	Discussion Items
1.	<p><u>Love and Hope Center</u></p> <p>This centre is just outside of Addis Ababa. Stefan Jasuira is currently working there as a volunteer, and Tawnya and Arnica both had the opportunity to visit the center in the last year, since the AGM. Arnica was there in February, and Tawnya was in there in October.</p> <p>The Center is in a community with a lot of displaced persons. That means much of the community is made up of people who were brought in from other places. Therefore, there is an extremely high unemployment rate, not a lot of jobs, and not a lot of infrastructure in the community. There are 70 children currently attending the Center. These kids have been in one of Canadian Humanitarian's other programs for the last two years, before we started the Center. Most of the children live with</p>

	<p>extended family, neighbors, or if they are lucky, one or two parents. They were chosen as program members as a result of their level of need. Many of these children never had had a bath or shower before they started attending the center. And often, the hot meal they receive at lunch is there only meal of the day.</p> <p>Some of the successes this year:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three clubs have started, or soon will be starting: an art club, a gardening club, and a music club. These clubs are very important, as they give the children a safe and accepting community, and a sense of self-worth. Many of these children are on the fringes of society, and not accepted very well at school, due to their level of poverty. 2. The new kitchen. Our society funded the construction of a kitchen for the center, so that the guardians who are paid to cook lunches every day, had a place to work that wasn't just a tarp. 3. The community garden. The garden is a demonstration garden that will teach the children, guardians, and eventually some of the greater community to do small plot intensive gardening. The two challenges of this project are involvement of the community, and sustainability of the project. One of our core values is impact, and we find that many international projects like the ongoing support to make them work over the long term. Stefan, the volunteer in Ethiopia working to get this project off the ground, and Arnica have talked a lot about how to keep the project going, with or without a little bit of funding. The guards who work at the center are already paid employees and have assisted greatly in building the garden. We had a budget for materials and seeds, but it turns out they decided to scavenge the materials for the garden. The added benefit is that now other people can see what kind of materials they can use to build small plots. The only real purchases so far have been a little bit of the seeds, and the soil. Compost bins have also been built so food scraps from lunch will go into the compost bin and be reused to remediate the soil, ensuring that long-term care of the garden is in place. Stefan is on holidays right now, but when he gets back he is going to start a little garden club, to involve the children. The challenge was the 30 children that all wanted to be involved at the same time, but we recommended a couple of little groups, that would be responsible for little plots of their own. Stefan will report further on this project following further updates on the Centre. <p>Tawnya reported that the cost of the centre is approx \$25,000 per year.</p> <p>Arnica added that we are still working on our contract with Hope for Children in Ethiopia for this year. They sent us a budget for an expanded program, but VCS really cannot afford to do something to the scope that they are aiming for. The good news is, however, that they have other donors that might step in for the other components of the project.</p>
2.	<p><u>Garden Project</u></p> <p>Stefan provided an update on the activities taking place at the garden in the Love</p>

	<p>and Hope Centre. Stefan assumes most of the costs for being in Ethiopia. VCS pays for his accommodation, and direct project costs such as transportation to and from the job site.</p> <p>Stefan reported that those working on the garden are doing as much as possible with materials that the guardians and community members can collect, with the idea being that the gardens will serve as demonstrations of small-space urban gardening that community members can do at home. The guards specifically at the centre have been eager to get their hand dirty. They seem to be both very engaged and very content with the addition of the garden. Guardians have also had a few conversations regarding how they will keep the gardens going after Stefan is gone. The guards themselves instigate most of these conversations. Thus far, the guardians are interested in the gardens but have not been directly involved; they tend to be quite busy as it is when they are at the centre. The kids, on the other hand, have been very engaged and have participated in planting and watering. Arnica suggested that because the stipends work so well for involving the guardians in the cooking, perhaps there could be a gardening rotation for the guardians as well.</p> <p>Further discussion of this project, and how to ensure its sustainability will take place at the directors meeting after Stefan has left Ethiopia. At that time, it will also be good to consider what we have learned for future long-term volunteer opportunities.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p><u>Teenage Sex Trade Workers Retraining Program</u></p> <p>In the fall, our project officially wrapped up for the first year. The project is run by a huge, indigenous, Ethiopian NGO called Hope for Children in Ethiopia. They have many projects, all focused on children who are extremely vulnerable, especially those caught in indentured labor. The board was very pleased with the project, even if it needs one or two little tweaks. Our partner did see a need to house the girls differently during the year, so we added \$2000 to our budget to pay for a group home for the girls to live in. The other project funding covers the cost of 10 girls to attend a retraining program for one year. They are trained in up to three vocations such as hairdressing, cooking, and sewing. Importantly, they are given the life skills and tools to be independent and get out of the sex trade. They receive counseling, a lot of support, life skills training, and even small business loans and a little bit of small business training to get them on their feet as a business owner.</p> <p>Menbere, a board member – and a nurse by profession, saw an important gap when she visited in April; the girls were not getting enough access to medical counseling and support. That something that we really want to work on in the next year to improve the program.</p> <p>Stefan is also heading there within a month to start a garden at the girls group home. It will teach them in valuable skills for their culinary training, but also some self-reliant so that they can lower their food budget as time goes by. He will focus on small plot, intensive, and even vertical gardening.</p>

	<p>We had some awesome fundraisers who fundraiser in the file to support the 10 girls. We would like to run this program again, as it was very effective; they raised half of the money needed for the 10 girls to go to the program. The three biggest fundraisers were actually teenage girls. Further to the fundraising strategy, in December Nicole did a presentation at a local high school, for the global issues class. She spoke at length about the teenage sex worker program and the teacher contacted her afterwards to say that the class wants to take on VCS as its partner charity. The funds raised can be directed to this program, as it is aligned with the unit they covered in class on human trafficking. Nicole offered to share the presentation she used with any other board members that are interested in making presentations. Arnica will post it on the VCS website as a resource.</p> <p>Some of the girls did not make it through the whole year, for various reasons, but they were replaced immediately with other people.</p> <p>This year the board approved for us to spend up to \$15,500 for the 10 girls, to go through the program, as well as a new host mother to watch them at night. The relative weakness of the Canadian Dollar is a bit of an issue this year, particularly as compared to the strength of the Birr. Our commitment may, accordingly, pass \$15,500 this year.</p>
4.	<p><u>Ebola support project in Liberia</u></p> <p>This project began because Arnica has two cousins who live in Sierra Leone. Years ago, they started a literacy project for Liberian refugees in Ghana. When the Liberian community was allowed to return to Liberia, the project went with them. Their registered foundation, registered in the UK as well as Canada, now operates literacy programs in both Liberia, and Sierra Leone. When the Ebola outbreak came to our attention in the west, we contacted them to see if we could get involved in supporting their work. Children in Liberia and Sierra Leone have not been permitted to attend school during this time, and to mitigate this, teachers in Liberia have been visiting the children, house to house, to tutor them. Teachers have also been bringing snacks to the children to replace the one meal per day that they would normally receive at school. Teacher also bringing sanitary supplies and educational materials to keep the children and their families from getting sick. This is a wonderful adaptation in a time of crisis. Our VCS board approved fundraising for this project, and whatever we raised, up to \$3000, would be passed to the Canadian registered foundation arm of their organization. Thanks to Nicole's fundraising and other generous donors, we have raised more than \$2000. Some of these funds came in on the fundraising page and some of it came in through other avenues, but we are somewhere between \$2000 and \$3000. This project has also been an opportunity to expand our donor base; some people were moved to donate are not usually involved in our organization.</p>
5.	<p><u>Financial Report</u></p>

The financials have been reviewed and passed by the Board of Directors twice. This is all we need to officially fulfill our obligations, but for the record, the financial statements will also be presented here allowing for any questions that our membership may have.

There are several financial highlights: VCS made a little bit of money last year, so we took in slightly more than we spent. It is important to consider that Arnica did not travel this year, which usually costs about \$3000. There were informal check in trips, which are good for oversight, but they are not good for program development. Arnica will be taking another trip this coming year, as it is slightly overdue.

VCS has around \$40,000 in the bank. It is important that this sort of buffer is maintained so that we can rise to the challenge of funding projects, as they emerge. An example would be the group home for the teen girls. We also have a policy that we never signed a contract unless we have the money in the bank to cover that contract. That is an official board policy. So, for example, if we signed a contract with Canadian humanitarian to cover \$25,000 worth of programming, we make sure that we have that money in the bank.

On the negative side, currently our monthly funding does not quite pay for our monthly costs. There are several reasons for this. The first is that Arnica is usually responsible for communications, and she has been quite busy over the last year. Communication strategies are important to maintain presence in people's minds and to recruit new monthly donors. There have been improvements over the last few months as Arnica's time has become more open, Andrea has come on board to help with newsletters, and Stefan has been posting blog entries. We could consider recruiting a communications person to the board to maintain frequent presence. The other reason that our monthly donations have gone down is because of a technical glitch. We use the CanadaHelps system, which costs money and serves tax receipts for us. It is a very cost-effective sensible way for a small charity like us to do our tax receipts and monthly donations, however, when we started using the system, the default for donors to set up their monthly donations was an expiry of one year. We did not realize this until our monthly donors started dropping off. We had to contact them individually to restart their monthly donations, and had to do this every month as our donors were expiring at one at a time. For the most part, we have almost all of those people back into the cycle. CanadaHelps also has now changed the default to "never expires." People can still cancel their monthly donations, of course, but they do not end automatically after one year. It is hard to overstate how much of a financial hit this little technological glitch was and we are grateful to everyone who signed up again. We did lose some of those monthly funds that reliably came in, and because a few of our donors have disappeared for natural reasons, we are still down in our monthly donations.

In summary, we are paying the bills, due to our overall positive income and financial prudence. However, we would be much more comfortable with our monthly in and out if our monthly donors amount slightly exceeded the amount that is going out for

	<p>our monthly contract. We all need to encourage new donors to join.</p> <p>Our income statement from last year is available here: https://vulnerablechildrenethiopia.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/vcs-2014-pl.pdf</p> <p>The financial statements are publically available on the VCS website: http://vulnerablechildren.ca/who-we-are/administration/finance/</p> <p>A recommendation was made by a guest to the meeting, Lisa, that VCS develop an informational brochure that can be circulated, both by the board as well as donors and interested parties, to friends, family and other networks that may not use social media to encourage donations. This will be developed and A PDF version will be circulated so that it can also be printed in hard copy and distributed.</p>
6.	<p><u>Opportunities to get involved with VCS</u></p> <p>There is a demand and need for a long-term volunteer to be at the Love and Hope center. So if you know anyone who is interested, please do have him or her contact us. Also, if someone is in the area for a few days, and has a valuable skill to teach or would like to do a workshop, then feel free to contact us as well. We have previously identified that the girls in the teenage program could really use some medical counseling, such as with a female nurse or female doctor, or female coming to health worker. In this case, a female would be important, as the girls would not speak to a man. Other skill areas that we have identified are nutritional help at the Center for the guardians who feed the small children. The children currently get enough calories, but not a lot of nutrition. The garden should help with that, but education for the guardians would be extremely useful as well.</p> <p>On the Canadian side, we can always use help with fundraising, and, communications. It would be very helpful for someone to organize an Instagram account for us, for example. Also, if there is a specific campaign that people want to run, it can be incredibly effective. For example, last spring Shawna ran a campaign in Vancouver to bring early literacy books to the Love and Hope Center. She supported the program to a huge extent, and along with other donors, furnished the Center with a lot of grade one and kindergarten books.</p>
7.	<p><u>Election of Board of Directors</u></p> <p>There are currently have seven directors in the society: Arnica Rowan, Tawnya Patty, Nicole Bellefleur, Dacia Douhaibi, Pam Carlson, Menbere Shiferaw, and the new director elected last year, Flora Meier. Arnica acknowledged Chris Ardern, a previous director who was invaluable in getting our society off the ground.</p> <p>There were no additional nominations, and no board members requested to leave the</p>

	society, so the previous directors stand as the new Board of Directors for VCS. If there are any members who are interested in getting involved in this level, please contact Arnica, and she will arrange a mentorship program to have anyone interested officially elected next year.
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#	Decisions
1.	Arnica made a motion to bring the meeting to order. Second: Tawnya The motion was passed unanimously.
2.	Arnica made a motion to accept the agenda as presented. Second: Tawnya The motion was passed unanimously.
3.	Arnica made a motion to accept the reports on our projects. Second: Nicole. The motion was passed unanimously.
4.	Arnica made a motion to approve the financial statements as provided. Second: Dacia. The motion was passed unanimously.
5.	Arnica made a motion to close the meeting. Second: Nicole. Meeting was adjourned.

Action Items					
#	Action Item	Owner	Status	Due Date	Comments
1.	Nicole to send her presentation on the Love and Hope Centre to Arnica to post on the VCS website as a shared resource to be used to encourage other donors	Nicole and Arnica		ASAP	
2.	Initiation of a VCS Instagram account	Any interested party		ASAP	
3.	Development of a VCS brochure that can be used by the board, donors or 'helpers' to encourage new donor membership (PDF so that it can also be printed)	Arnica and ALL		ASAP	
4.	Encouraging new monthly donors.	All		Ongoing	

5.	Recruitment of interested board members or 'helpers' that will take on VCS as a cause to support	All		Ongoing	
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