

NEXUS NEWSLETTER



Come celebrate with Rainbow of Hope for Children Society (ROHFC) at its 50th Anniversary Dinner June 7, 2025.

PLACE: Prairie Rose Senior Activities Centre
731 - 2nd Avenue
Wainwright, Alberta

TIME: Cocktails at 5:30 pm
Dinner at 6:00 pm

The celebration honours the original 25 years of the NGO as St. Joseph Save the Children Club, headquartered in Edmonton and 25 years as ROHFC with headquarters in Wainwright, Alberta.



Following the devastating 2001 earthquake in El Salvador, ROHFC purchased stable land for 23 families who lost their homes. The legal titles to their family plots were put in the names of the mothers. The people named their new community Arcoiris (Rainbow) after ROHFC and sent us a photo gift of flowers for Mother's Day (top right), preserved perfectly for our 50th Anniversary.

50 YEARS AS AN NGO

(Non-Government Organization)

Working for social justice and international development



ROHFC is a non-profit fully volunteer Alberta Society and Canadian registered charity, with head office in Wainwright, implementing human development projects currently in ten countries - Brazil, Peru, El Salvador, Nepal, Indonesia (Bali), Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Jamaica, and the Philippines. Special performance by the Wainwright Men's Chorus. Dinner Tickets are \$40, cash or cheque, at Armstrong's, Bison Printing, or phone Vera 780-806-3297 or George at 780-806-3674. Table for 8 available for \$300.

WE'RE CELEBRATING

50 years is a long time for a volunteer organization. Rainbow of Hope for Children started in St. Joseph's High School in Edmonton as the Save the Children Club. They raised funds to help people in Africa, Central America and Brazil. When Al Gerwing went to Brazil in 1979 and began to visit regularly, he turned to the Save the Children Club to help raise money for his projects. Al returned to Wainwright where he had taught in the 1950's and asked his many friends there to help in his fundraising. The Wainwright community responded. The club changed to Rainbow of Hope for Children Society in 2000. George Bunz became president and other members of the Wainwright community joined the board. Wainwright, with its many supporters, is still the center of support for ROHFC. Al Gerwing's family built a foundation in his name to provide continuing support mainly for projects in Brazil where his heart was. So the work has grown and continues.

ROHFC still works in Brazil, Central America, Africa and Asia. We are small and all volunteer and we work closely with local communities in these countries to develop projects that many larger organizations won't consider. Small projects such as maternity wards, community centers, classrooms, agricultural assistance and water projects can change lives.

Engaging with the public in both Canada and the areas in which we work, is one of our main objectives. This nurtures relationships and helps us all understand one another all over the world. Not everyone can travel and see for themselves how others live but we can bring that world home to those here in Canada as well. This newsletter is one of the ways we do that. We have brought people from a number of different projects to Canada to speak and learn from us too. Many Canadians have come along on our monitoring trips which provide a check on the projects but also a window on the needs that are so hard to see from the comforts of our Canadian life.

Charlie Matt, current president, tells us about his first experience on a monitoring trip:

"I remember well my first time as a participant in a monitoring trip to Brazil that was led by Al Gerwing in 2004. My partner, Vicki Gerwing, Al's niece and I, along

with George Bunz and 4 others made this trip. A totally new adventure for me. I had never traveled this far from home before. The Miami airport was quite a learning experience, I felt like a very invisible minority there as everyone spoke Spanish and obviously, we were the minority. I was determined to learn Spanish after that (I did take classes later on).



Al Gerwing on the right and Charlie Matt in the hat peeking out from behind one of the Brazilians. They are visiting a fish farm near Palmeira dos Indios, Brazil in 2004.

I was so happy to be on the ground in Maceio, Brazil after several very long connecting flights. Brazil was so beautiful. The greenery, the colours, the fresh air. Just amazing!! We loaded into vans with our many bags tied on to the vans somehow and off we went to our Posada (Inn) to get settled in our rooms. We began to meet all kinds of people associated with Al and his work there. Of course, we faced a new language again. We are like deer in the headlights. Someone speaks Portuguese to us, our heads are like switches, we immediately turn to Al like lost children, waiting for him to translate for us. We then turn back to the speaker nodding as necessary. Poor Al was caught in the middle of this translation quagmire the entire trip.



We went into the favela's (slums) to visit with the families and children that Al had been helping with on his

projects. This is where his heart was. One of our projects in the favela known as Grotta da Alegria (Grotto of Joy) is still today supporting educational and social development for the children and helping single mother's with parenting skills in this very deprived area.

An interesting note. The Canadian and US embassy websites at that time clearly stated "Do not go into the slum areas because of high risk of robbery and personal danger." Yet, here we were with Al wandering through the favelas accompanied and warmly welcomed by the people who were so happy to greet Al and his entourage.

We travelled to other areas where Al's influence was evident. Many were a long hot day's drive inland across the 'sertão' (very dry back country- desert like). It was quite tiring at times and our rooms at the end of the day felt like a godsend. One place we stopped at, Palmeira dos Indios, had a very beautiful closed in driveway surrounded by large mango trees (Yummy) leading up to the front desk office. As it was late in the afternoon the streets were very quiet. Next morning, I was awake early and decided I would take a walk down the street to see

what it was like outside the compound. As I passed through the gate onto the street, I was stunned by the sight!

The street was totally filled with market stalls, tables and all kinds of displays of everything you could think of. Fresh fruit, fresh baking, fresh meat, leather goods, hardware, you name it. Just like magic the street was full. This day was market day and literally hundreds of vendors had set up for the day to sell the produce, goods and wares. You would think we might have heard a commotion of people, and vehicles moving about as they drove into the area, set up their display and chatted with each other. None of us heard a thing. As the afternoon was coming to a close the people and their remaining goods started to leave just as quietly as they came and soon the street was without a trace of the day's events. It was an amazing experience to go through the stalls and do a bit of shopping.

Brazil is an amazing country, there are many levels of poverty there, some more so in cash and social development than in spirit. I am hoping we can visit there in the new year to re-acquaint ourselves with Al's good friends and to see how our projects are doing."

**~Join us in reflecting on and
celebrating our work
for the past 50 years~**

That was Then, this is Now: Inside a monitoring visit in 2025

by Connie Gerwing with contributions from Charlie Matt, Marlyn Phillips and Murray Brown



Marlyn greeting some children at Nzavoni School in the Kinyambu area of Kenya

The excitement of the kids when your vehicle stops in the school yard, the welcome songs they sing, the cries of "mzungu, mzungu" (white person) when you come, the mangoes and watermelon and githeri, and chapatties, swimming in the Indian Ocean, watching the baboons in the morning at the local garbage dump, and also being called out by customs and having to pay duty on the 30 or so soccer balls that you collected and squished into your extra suitcase for the kids, getting sick and throwing up over the edge of the Ngorongoro Crater, picking up the wrong suitcase in the Nairobi airport after a long flight from Canada, travelling for 48 hours through many security checks, hours sitting in airports and on planes coming home from the middle of Tanzania, the heat, getting hassled by the locals in the big cities. All these things and more can happen on a monitoring visit to East Africa.

Part of our responsibility as directors of ROHFC is to ensure that our projects comply with the objectives of our organization and that they conform with the policies of the Canada Revenue Agency, the CRA. As our current president, Charlie Matt, writes: "CRA Charities Directorate requires that all registered charities must be in control and manage the projects that they provide funding for."



All our projects are done with a partner organization in the various countries in which we work. As Charlie continues: "From my perspective, the people we serve in developing countries need the work a whole lot more than we do to feed and support their families, as well as perhaps learn new skills. This is part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that are achieved by standing back and letting the locals handle 'their' project in their country." In these partnerships we make a clear agreement with the local organization and they have to see that the project is completed, reports are made to us and the budget is clearly reported and adhered to.

Phone calls, emails and texts have made it much easier to interact with our partners at a distance. Yet, seeing local conditions help us to understand the problems the people face such as weather, transportation, getting the right materials and so on. A very satisfying part of these visits is seeing a project that is completed and celebrating this with the local communities.

Besides getting ourselves prepared for the climate and local conditions of East Africa our hosts there have to get ready for us to come. They help set up accommodations and organize meetings and visits to schools and community centers and often feed us. They also make sure we are safe and come to understand their world. It's hard work on both sides but very rewarding for us all.

Directors and other volunteers who come on these visits do not get paid of course but we do get a donation receipt for our costs. We also have an experience in another part of the world that is hard to compare. We form relationships with our project partners and get to know them and their families. We can see the struggles and successes they have and share our satisfaction at providing something that their communities really need and can't get without our help.

The second part of this story will continue in the fall newsletter.



Nairobi, Kenya



Teachers and ROHFC monitors at the opening of the classroom at Kinyambu Special School, January 2025



Profiles of Board Members Joe Gubbels 2006 – 2025



Celebration of Joe's investiture as Chief Zii Naara Roona

1. Tell us about your childhood and working background. What are the things in your life that brought you to where you are today?

I grew up in a large family of 12 children with parents and grandmother. My parents were farmers and made a living growing and selling flowers and green house tomatoes. Music filled our home and we formed a family band. I played classical trumpet and became a charter member of the Victoria Junior Symphony Orchestra. Our parents emphasized the need to pursue education, high morals and stand up to truth. We never felt deprived and lived a very happy life.

An Oblate priest inspired me to become a Catholic priest, when he told me to “join the Oblates and see the world”. The eight years of seminary training flew by and I was able to earn my BA with majors in History, French and Philosophy and I was ordained a Catholic priest in 1965. I was assigned to Chinchá Baja, Peru, where for 8 years, I performed my priestly duties and also saw many needs in the community. There was a desperate lack of adequate housing so I initiated and managed the construction of 147 concrete block houses on vacant church land. In the St. Rosa community, I raised funds to purchase materials for a self-help water project providing one tap to 137 homes by extending pipes from the well. In Huaca de los Muertos, I had sufficient funds to provide adobe bricks for the community to construct a two-classroom school for the 60 plus children who were using a private home as a classroom.

In 1973, I returned to Canada and assisted the pastor of a church in Vancouver, BC, while I attended UBC to graduate with an MA in Adult Education. This formed the basis for my second career in post-secondary education ending as president of a community college. In addition, I completed a diploma in Information Technology and a certificate in International Development. After officially resigning from the priesthood, I married 3 years later and have 2 sons and 2 granddaughters and they all support my endeavors.

2. How did you get interested in international work? In ROHFC in particular?

After retiring, in 2004, I volunteered internationally in several places but my friends from Peru caught up with me and convinced me to come back to Chinchá Baja. I found that they still needed schools and community infrastructure. My friends from the past formed an organization called “Amigos de Siempre” (Friends Forever). In 2006 I met George Bunz who invited me to the Annual General Meeting of Rainbow of Hope for Children (ROHFC) and I joined the board. In developing projects, I identify a need, acquire support of the community, form an advisory committee, develop a proposal with a budget and present it to ROHFC for approval. The objective is to involve the communities and individuals to acquire non-technical skills for their own future projects and was done in coordination with members of Amigos de Siempre.

Then, there was the task of raising funds for the projects. We received grants from Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and from the Wild Rose Foundation of the Alberta Government. Rotary Clubs in Alberta and one in Ontario supported the projects. In Edmonton, we organized major fund-raising events. I was impressed with the reception and support of our Canadian people for the people of Peru.



Our first project in 2006 was to build a primary school in St. Rosa which they named after me. The second project was the renovation of the primary school in Chincha Baja including the construction of two additional classrooms and sanitary facilities for the children and teachers.



Tony Gubbels Public Education Complex



Primary School in St. Rosa



Musical Instruments for Bands

After the devastating earthquake on August 15, 2007 in the Chincha Baja area, we constructed the Tony Gubbels Public Education Complex for women. A local farmer, Tayo Masias, donated the land. The project has 6 technical programs and primary and secondary education for adults. Another project there included a library and a day care.

The majority of rural schools collapsed during the earthquake so we constructed 46 temporary classrooms. Additionally, we constructed 160 rooftops for temporary homes.

In 2017, after the flood that destroyed all the homes in three communities, we purchased building materials and organized groups of residents to work together to rebuild their homes. We constructed 67 fully enclosed buildings, and taught the family members how to build future rooms. Over the years we did many projects in this area of Peru. We introduced the building of 83 eco- toilets to replace make-shift outhouses with an ecological structure and sit-down toilet.

We helped 80 families to assemble and place a bottle light in the roofs of their windowless homes. This light produces the equivalent of a 60-watt bulb. We funded a “Play and Learn in a Tec Bus” classroom with 15 computers that moves from rural school to rural school on a regular schedule.

I brought many band instruments to schools in Chincha to replace obsolete instruments. Most of these instruments were donated by Kevin Junk who has a repair shop in Saskatoon.

We replaced obsolete equipment in the John F. Kennedy Industrial School in Chincha Ala, Peru. This equipment was outdated, inoperable and hazardous for the 2037 students. This project will provide more complete technical skills and training for the students.

We also funded the building of efficient Eco- Stoves in 21 communities, as the wood supply for cooking in the rural area is depleting.

We rebuilt the Senior Citizen Centre that was completely destroyed during the earthquake of 2007 with Canadian Rotary Club funding. We provided the building materials and the seniors built the center themselves. This center was equipped with exercise equipment, cooking utensils, computers, and tables and chairs to accommodate 50 people.



Example of 67 Replacement Homes



Senior Centre in Chincha Baja



School in Bantambaari

In 2019 I visited ROHFC projects in Ghana and began to work with them. At Bantambaari, Ghana, we built a kindergarten/ grade one school with a detached bathroom for 64 children and brought books for the children donated by Edmonton libraries. We included eaves troughs and a tank to provide water for drinking and other uses. This will end the need for children to walk long distances to get the day's supply of water.

I also became involved in a project in Jamaica. Mt. Moriah Primary & Infant School was built in 1942. It did not have a perimeter fence and this posed a health and safety hazard as numerous animals (cows, dogs, pigs, goats) roam the yard leaving a mess. The public also used it as a thoroughfare

3. What are the rewards you get from doing this? Tell us about one or two special instances that you've felt very good about a project or other work that you've done.



Drinking water from eavestroughs

I have had many rewards from being part of these projects. Unexpectedly the chief of Bantambaari invested me with a chief's garb and head gear with the official name, Chief Zii Naara Roona which translates as "enlightens". Having been a volunteer with ROHFC for the past 19 years it became my 3rd full time career. I enjoyed every moment meeting people, organizing projects, travelling to monitor projects in different countries and having the full support of ROHFC. I learned to speak, read and write Spanish fluently. Ismael Cardenas, manager of the projects for 19 years has been an especially loyal friend. Also, I appreciated the work of the part-time Canadian volunteers who worked with me in Peru, notably, Ida Rawluk (7 times) and Maureen Grimmer

(8 times). My greatest happiness was working with the dedicated people in the communities of Chinchá Baja who wish to improve themselves and their families.

4. What are some of the biggest challenges you've had? Do you see upcoming concerns for organizations like ROHFC?

The last few years have had more challenges. Due to numerous changes in government regulations, it is becoming more taxing to prepare agreements, disburse funds and monitor reporting procedures between international partners and our organization. There are fewer government and organizational grants available for international projects. It is difficult to prioritize the many valuable project requests for support, due to lack of sufficient donations. The drop-in donations are significant, in spite, of my annual report to supporters describing the project developments. This is understandable as many of my supporters are getting older, as I am.





The Rainbow of Hope for Children Society (ROHFC) attempts to maintain operational costs as low as possible. All ROHFC Board members are unpaid volunteers who donate their time and expertise towards these projects. There is no paid staff.

Program Description	Funding Goals 2025	Program Description	Funding Goals 2025
Nwodua Library, Ghana	\$20,000	PAMBE Health, Nutrition, and Sanitation, Ghana	\$7,600
Tabora School for the Deaf & Mute, Computers for Classrooms	\$40,000	Kinyambu & Area- Future Projects Kenya	\$15,000
Matumaini Classrooms for Albino Children Safety, Tanzania	\$20,000	Aeta Indigenous Communities Agriculture and Economic Assistance, Philippines	\$10,000
Bongbini Kindergarten Classrooms	\$15,000	Ussongo Maternity Ward, Tanzania	\$25,000
Grota da Alegria Education, Brazil	\$12,000	CIS Scholarships, El Salvador	\$15,000
Ambrosina Young Women's Education, Brazil	\$20,000	Paso Puente Dignified Housing, El Salvador	\$8,000
Eye Health Care, Reducing Avoidable Blindness, Indonesia	\$15,000	Mandeville Housing and School of Technology, Jamaica	\$10,000
Emergency & Disaster Relief Fund	\$15,000		

How to Donate

We thank you for offering a gift to any one of these projects and we are pleased to acknowledge your donation with an income tax deductible receipt. If you wish to donate to a specific project please include the information on the cheque memo and the e-transfer message box. If you are paying by credit card you will need to email us with the name of the project you wish to support.

- **By cheque:** Please make cheques payable to the full name of the organization: Rainbow of Hope for Children Society.
Mail to: Rainbow of Hope for Children Society
P.O. Box 2883
Wainwright, AB T9W 1S7
- **By credit card:** be sure to include the 3-digit security code on the back of your card. That number is required by the credit card companies
- **By e-transfer:** We use auto deposit, no password required. Make your e-transfer to ROHFC Accounting – rohfc2018@outlook.com. Be sure to include the specific project you wish to support in the message box so we can direct your donations. ****Please include your name and mailing and/or email address in the message box so that we can send you a donation receipt**
- **By Canada Helps:** Go to <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/rainbow-of-hope-for-children-society/> and select the specific project you wish to support
- **Donations of securities:** have a significant tax advantage. To donate shares please contact your broker to discuss
- **Donation of insurance policies:** You can donate insurance policies that you will not need in future. This has significant benefits. Contact your Financial Planner to discuss

Questions? —Contact Cheryl, 780-968-3952

RAINBOW OF HOPE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE SUPPORT OF ALL OUR DONORS, and

- The Wainwright Rotary Club, the Knights of Columbus, the Edmonton Community Foundation, the Holy Family Columbus Club, and the Al Gerwing Charitable Foundation.
- George and Louise Bunz, Wainwright, AB, who prepared the NEXUS Mail-out.
- PSM Law - Peter Van Winssen Wainwright Office. for donating the cost of the NEXUS mail-out.

OFFICERS <i>President:</i> Charles Matt, Saskatoon, SK <i>Vice President:</i> Peter Van Winssen, Wainwright, AB, <i>Secretary:</i> Connie Gerwing, Prince Albert, SK <i>Treasurer:</i> Cheryl Budzinski, Spruce Grove, AB	BOARD OF DIRECTORS George Bunz, Wainwright, AB Joe Gubbels, Edmonton, AB Patrick Hessel, Spruce Grove, AB Margaret Bennett, Vermillion, AB Alice Iddi-Gubbels, Gatineau, PQ Vera Hay, Wainwright, AB Marlyn Phillips, Prince Albert, SK Leah Solheim, Saskatoon, SK	NEXUS: Produced and edited by Connie Gerwing and Leah Solheim in Saskatchewan and Rainbow of Hope's Head Office in Wainwright, Alberta, Canada. The expressed views of the authors are not necessarily the views of the NGO.
--	--	---