



AIDS & STARCROSS

A brief history of our work at home and abroad during the AIDS pandemic



OUR STORY

Over the years, we have adopted and been caregivers and advocates for children with unique gifts and needs, most of whom were born HIV positive.

THINGS MOVE QUICKLY

In 1986 we had never heard of AIDS. By 1987 Starcross was frequently cited on national (and international) TV as a leader in the care of children with AIDS. How did that happen? We simply responded to the plight of infected babies being abandoned in hospitals by offering them a loving home.

We had no medical training but we did know how to take care of kids, having raised many foster children over the years. At the time medicine had nothing to offer. The local AIDS doctor encouraged us saying that these little children whose mothers were too sick to care for them, needed to be in regular homes, not hospitals. We joyfully welcomed six HIV positive babies into our family. We turned out to be among the first to do this. A media frenzy ensued.

THE BEGINNING

In 1981, the first cases of AIDS were reported. Soon, millions had been affected by the virus and it became a global pandemic. Before proper medicines were developed, many children were contracting the disease from their mothers and were left without much hope of surviving past their first few years of life. After seeing a news report on the living conditions some of these children were experiencing, we here at Starcross decided we could help.

We began taking in children affected by AIDS, caring for them, and giving them a loving home, as well as the medical care they needed. We expanded our efforts into Romania and Uganda after learning of huge numbers of children in need in those countries, as well.



"TINA'S LEGACY OF LOVE"

Press Democrat newspaper ran a story of one special child who profoundly changed our lives. "Tina DeRossi's Legacy of Love"

Christina "Tina" DeRossi died this week, after a too-short life that was filled with too much pain. Yet despite dying a month shy of her third birthday, despite suffering from AIDS, Tina was a very lucky little girl.

Tina died at home - the Starcross Community near Annapolis - surrounded by a loving family. Had Tina been born three years before she was, she would not have had such a home. At that point in the AIDS epidemic, few saw the point in trying to place children like Tina in an adoptive home. AIDS kills, and these children had AIDS. Who would want to adopt a child who was dying?

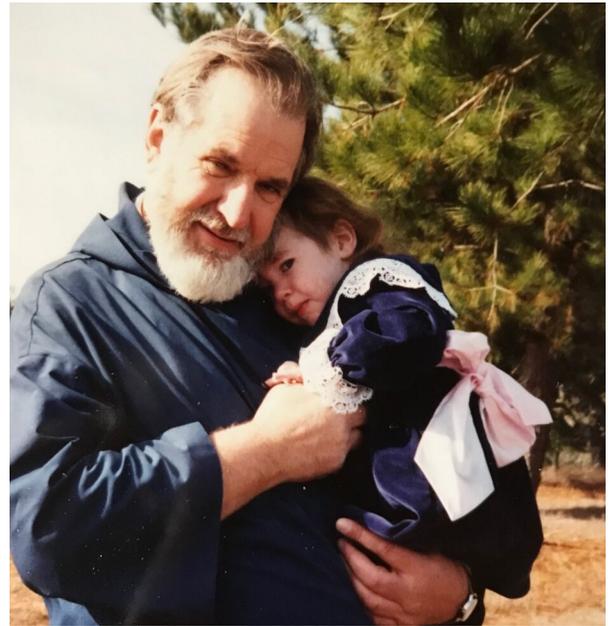
Children like Tina helped to change those attitudes. Tina showed that children live with AIDS, not just die from it. Like all children, they laugh and sing and romp and cuddle. They get sick, they can get terribly sick, but like all children they bounce back fast.

As knowledge of AIDS has grown, so has awareness. More women who have AIDS, as Tina's birthmother did, make provisions for their children's care. Just two days after she was born, Tina came home to Starcross with her adoptive mother, Sister Julie.

Children like Tina have changed the adoption bureaucracy. Despite the positive strides, too many children still die in institutions. Tina died in the old farmhouse that was her home.

Other children should be so lucky. Because of Tina they will be.

Copyright © 1991 The Press Democrat. All rights reserved.



TINA CARING ASSOCIATION

Tina Caring Association (TCA) is a Ugandan nonprofit that was founded by three young graduates of Starcross Kin Worldwide's House of Hope in Kampala, Uganda.

Tina Caring provides AIDS education, HIV testing, and maternal health services to Ugandan villagers. Its purpose is to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV rates in the rural Iganga district of Uganda.

Read more on p.6

THOUGHTS FROM EMILY, ONE OF OUR EARLY HELPERS

22 years ago I was working on a Christmas tree farm and caring for children with HIV and AIDS. It was a busy and somewhat magical time of year. By day I made wreaths and prepared trees for shipping all over the US, I cooked meals, I dressed little giggling bodies, I pushed the swings, I kissed the boo boos, and we sang at the top of our lungs all day long. Late at night, after the house was quiet with sleep, the small cries from the chronic pain of AIDS and the weeping wounds of never-ending-shingles would tip toe down the hall and wake me. When it was my night to care for her, I would walk down the hall and pull a wide awake, sweet, two year old from her crib where she slept- right next to her mommy -and take her down to the quiet of the living room - 3am, 4am, 5am we would rock and I would sing her favorites, softly, so as not to wake the others. During those hours of singing Rainbow Connection over and over --my heart was changed. I left northern California with passion for supporting people living with HIV and AIDS. I made the decision to study pediatric and maternal HIV and became a pediatric nurse practitioner and a midwife. This is what I do. Those sweet soul filled hours in the drafty night air with a feverish child resting on my heart, changed the face of HIV for so many families- so many children- so many youth. Because of those days and nights in 1990 and 1991, I get the privilege of being a part of intimate, awe inspiring, heart wrenching, celebratory, and ever so precious moments in the lives of so many people living with HIV all over the world. I * am * so * blessed. Here's to you Tina, Michelle, Holly, Nicky, David, Veronica, Zach, Sean, Aaron, and too-too-too many others. You are remembered. You made a difference. The world is a better place because of you. World AIDS day - it's not over folks- the changes have been miraculous since 1990, but there is a long road ahead.

*Who said that every wish would be heard and answered, when
wished on the morning star?*

Somebody thought of that and someone believed it.

Look what it's done so far.

*What's so amazing that keeps us star gazing and what do we
think we might see?*

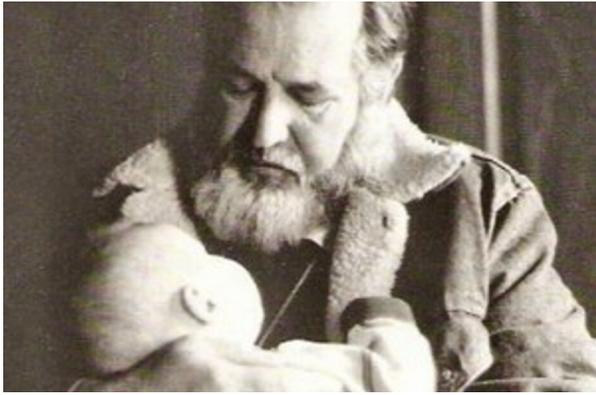
Someday we'll find it, the rainbow connection.

The lovers, the dreamers and me.



READ MORE

*If you would like to read further about the Starcross experience, Brother Toby wrote two memoirs during our time working with AIDS, **Morning Glory Babies** and **Childsong, Monksong**.*



UGANDA

In 1998 sub-Saharan Africa had the highest rate of HIV infection in the world. Without access to medications adults succumbed quickly. In some areas a whole generation would be wiped out leaving only elderly grandparents to care for many children.

Starcross Kin Worldwide ([Click Here to learn more](#)) set up sponsorships to provide basic necessities and school fees for destitute AIDS orphans in Uganda where most grandparents were peasant farmers living in poverty. Soon we established a "House of Hope" where the children could live after their grandparents died. Over 150 children have come through the program and been educated. These young adults are teachers, artists, mechanics, journalists, nurses, computer scientists, university lecturers, accountants, software engineers, tailors, cooks and even a sign-language interpreter. Two graduates have recently become doctors: Matthew Ssengendo (who came to House of Hope when he was 8 years old) and Ivan Kabanda (who came to House of Hope when he was 6 years old). We are very proud of them and all the House of Hope graduates.

Starcross Kin Worldwide is now a Ugandan non-profit corporation run by graduates of the House of Hope.

ROMANIA

In December 1989 the communist regime was violently overthrown in Romania. Immediately came out unbelievable stories of over 120,000 abandoned children left to die of starvation and neglect in sub-human conditions. Most of them had AIDS because of the practice of reusing needles for injections. ABC News asked Brother Toby to come with them. Four segments on PrimeTime Live filming Brother Toby's activities averaged 17 million viewers each. This helped turn a spotlight on the situation.

Starcross opened "Casa Speranta" (House of Hope) in Constanta, Romania in Jan. 1991. American volunteers cared for the children in family-style homes. The Romanian doctor reported that despite having no HIV/AIDS drugs at the time, the children thrived. All that changed was the way the children were cared for. They were allowed to live like normal children in a family rather than as sick orphans in a hospital. Dr. Matusa said, "Living near these children made me realize that AIDS is not synonymous with death. These children did not have to live without hope." Before long a Montessori preschool was set up at Casa Speranta.

Casa Speranta is now a Romanian nonprofit corporation with Romanian staff.





PRESS

The San Francisco filmmaker Bob Elfstrom followed our lives for two years. The film, **“Christmas at Starcross”** was first shown by Boston PBS station WGBH in 1989. It is distributed by Villon Media. A copy can be ordered from us.

If you would like to purchase the DVD, please call us at 1-800-960-1500 or email: community@starcross.org.



TINA CARING ASSOCIATION

Tina Caring Association (TCA) is a Ugandan nonprofit that was founded by three young graduates of Starcross Kin Worldwide's House of Hope in Kampala, Uganda. The TCA team includes Milly Nakazzi, nurse and midwife, Alex Lwanyaaga, social worker and counselor, and Kasule Kizito, financial and administrative manager. Tina Caring provides AIDS education, HIV testing, and maternal health services to Ugandan villagers. Its purpose is to reduce mother-to-child transmission of HIV rates in the rural Iganga district of Uganda. Kasule, Milly, and Alex at the TCA office

The Iganga district is isolated, and people in that region have extremely limited access to transportation or medical clinics. Milly and Alex take their motorbike out to the remote villages in this area and begin by meeting the villagers and educating them on HIV/AIDS-prevention and medication. Then, a few days later, TCA administers rapid testing, which gives villagers results within twenty minutes. If anyone tests positive for AIDS, TCA accompanies them clinics and ensures they begin antiretroviral medications as soon as possible.



SEEING THE IMPACT

"During my September 2012 visit to Uganda, I sat in on many education sessions conducted by TCA. Although I could not understand the local dialect, I could follow Milly's gestures and demonstrations with a baby doll and attached placenta. I was rather amused by one elderly woman's awkward attempts to unroll a sample condom. Afterward, I commented to our social worker, Alex, who had led the AIDS prevention discussion, that it was a shame to waste their supplies on someone who would not likely need it. He gently corrected me: 'No, it is extremely important for the old people to be educated and comfortable talking about these things, because they are the ones who will teach the children.' A few days later, the same old woman showed up at our testing site with her 5-year-old granddaughter. She explained that the child was often sick, and that they had never considered AIDS before because they had never heard of it. The test was positive. Now, that little girl is on medications and doing well. A child's life was saved for sure."

TCA has reached out to thousands of villagers and tested hundreds for HIV/AIDS. HIV-positive mothers have been educated in safe delivery and safe breastfeeding of their children. Milly works with HIV-positive mothers through their pregnancies and often delivers the babies herself.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Thanks to Tina Caring Association, many children have been born free of AIDS and many others have been provided the medication they require. We are so very proud of these House of Hope graduates who are working hard to make a difference in their community.