

## You will never feel as tall as when you kneel to help a child

By Kerie Newell, Editorial Services with Despina Youdouris, Child Care Quality Branch.

In 2003, Despina Youdouris went to South Africa. A safari, of course, was an absolute must for her trip but she also asked a friend in Johannesburg to organise some volunteer work at an AIDS orphanage.

This trip changed the course of Despina's life and those who came in contact with her. Within three hours of arriving, Despina was at Cotlands, a sanctuary for children who are abused, neglected or abandoned because they are infected with, or affected by, HIV/AIDS. Cotlands was the first facility in South Africa to provide the children with Anti-Retro Viral therapy prior to the Government rollout and is a world leader in providing paediatric, palliative care to children who are at the final stages of their lives. It runs a number of home-based care programs in townships where the HIV and unemployment rates are rife.

What Despina saw at Cotlands moved her very deeply. Many of the children she saw were gorgeous, happy and healthy children, just like those in any child care centre in Australia.

The need to support these children led Despina to form Ozcots, with the aim of raising awareness of HIV issues and funds for Cotlands.

Within four and a half months, Ozcots had raised \$70 000 and had about 10 major organisations sponsoring and supporting it.

When Ozcots was first formed, Despina gave up full-time work to organise fund-raising activities. Between November 2004 and January 2005, South African Airways sponsored her travel to South Africa while she worked at Cotlands.

While the initial burst of enthusiasm for Ozcots remains, reality set in and Despina now works full-time for DEEWR.

Continuing its great work, OzCots runs leadership programs to develop future leaders in compassion and action. To date, three programs have been held with 18 participants and more than \$80 000 raised.

Ozcots has given Despina the opportunity to speak at receptions and fundraisers and meet interesting people in South Africa and at home. Mr Philip Green, Australian High Commissioner, hosted a reception for Fremantle and Carlton AFL teams when in South Africa. The Australian High Commissioner donated \$11 250 and Fremantle Dockers raised close to \$8500 for Cotlands.

In Canberra, an Ozcots' fundraiser was held at the Residence of the Embassy of Greece. His Excellency, Mr George Zois, Ambassador for Greece, and His Excellency, Mr Filippos Kritiotti, High Commissioner of Cyprus, jointly hosted this event, which raised nearly \$10 000.

All funds are now dedicated to a special education program, providing special assistance to Cotlands' children, aged 9 to 13 years, whose development is delayed due to the HIV virus and Anti-Retro Viral medication.

Ozcots remains close to Despina's heart. She hopes to ensure these children continue to have opportunities that allow them to have a normal childhood.

All donations to Ozcots over \$2 are tax deductible and 95 per cent of all funds raised go directly to Cotlands.

For more information please see [ozcots.org.au](http://ozcots.org.au) and [cotlands.org](http://cotlands.org) or email Despina at [ozcots@tpg.com.au](mailto:ozcots@tpg.com.au).



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