

children, we know the maternity service in our native country very well and were able to compare it with Denmark's. We were ready to be surprised, but we were really excited by the kindness and service which surround young Danish mothers in the hospital. We were also invited to the recycling deposit where we received a lot of information concerning environment in Denmark. Visiting the Nursery College, the private elementary school, glass factory and flower garden impressed us greatly as well.

But the first and main thing which touched everyone was the real friendship, attention and care of our hostesses, the Danish Soroptimists. In their homes we felt as if we were in our own; we enjoyed the communication we had with their families and the warm parties they arranged for us. One evening Hanne Jensbo SI/E President-elect came to Naestved to welcome us. It was a rare and unique chance to know each other, and when we had to depart we all felt that we would miss our very close friends.

We especially wish to express our great love and gratitude to Lis Randrup-Thomsen. She is a real Godmother to us.

*From information by
Olga Markova, President
Nataliya Nechukhayeva, Secretary*

SWITZERLAND - Club Lugano

Project ASSECO-BUKAVU, to save Congolese children

During a trip to Rwanda in 1998, I met Emmanuel Nyamugira who was director of a school in Kigali until the genocide in 1996. He told me his story: after the tragic events that cast a shadow over the region of the great lakes, he and some of his friends began to take care of displaced and abandoned children. At that time there were two million refugees in the

Lake Kivu Region, they were able to give only 60 children a strict minimum of food and schooling. He inspired my confidence; we became friends and he opened his heart to me: with US\$1,000 a month he could do miracles and help many more children in distress.

I came back to Europe with the enthusiasm of finding a solution. Very soon all my friends agreed to deposit a small sum to me every month in order to guarantee the continuity of the effort. That is how the project ASSECO-BUKAVU (Association to Save Congolese Children) was born.

Survival has been assured since the month of May 1998, but each day the number of children grows. That is why, from the beginning, we started a chicken bank with re-distribution of chicks and a system of micro-credit which gives widows with children the possibility to have a small business and above all a bakery, which is working full time.

ASSECO is divided among three communities: the first in the hills of Bukavu at Kadutu; the second at Labotte, in the centre of the town; the third at Bwegera, on Lake Tanganyika. These three localities are in the territory of the Democratic Republic of Congo (ex Zaire) on the border with Burundi and Ruanda by the shores of Lake Kivu. At Kadutu and Bwegera the children receive schooling as well as two meals a day. There is also an infirmary and a dressmaking shop. The bakery is at the centre in Labotte and the children come here to eat and play after school. Of course, ASSECO pays all the school fees.

A type of institution such as an orphanage does not exist in the Association because in this region of Africa this is not done or done very little. We prefer the formula of adoptive families, a perfectly African system. To those families, most often widows, who take care of our children we give help with food,



medicine and clothes; everything works well this way.

Last year, thanks to the generous donations of Club Lugano, we were able to buy the land of the centre at Kadutu for the sum of US\$11,000. In fact, the rent continued to go up every month and there was the risk that we would be put out. Now we have built a wonderful building with a dining hall offered by the Women's Gourmet Club of Lugano.

Today ASSECO cares for 320 children and is full of projects. In the meantime its needs are growing and now US\$2,000 must be found every month! As soon as we have the money we plan to build reservoirs to collect rain water because now we have to walk one hour to find water. Health is still a serious problem: dysentery and malaria are raging to endemic proportions not to mention AIDS, against which we are helpless.

Certainly, if we consider all the work accomplished during these past few years, it is remarkable; but if we think of what could be done, it is nice to be able to dream. That is what I hope to be able to go on doing with a little bit of luck and a lot of optimism.

If you want to know more, I will be happy to hear from you.

*Katrine Keller, President Club Lugano
Via del sole 22, CH-6943 Vezia,
Switzerland
e-mail: ekk@compuserve.com*