

# Making a difference in Zambia



**Voluntary work has always been an aspect of the student experience for some. At DCU an innovative group has set up an organisation called SALZ that will help with an early childhood educational programme in Zambia. Stephanie Gilmore tells more.**

Students and Lifestart Zambia (SALZ) is a unique organisation set up by six DCU students: Maria Mulhall, Tom Bourke, Rachel O'Brien, Stephanie Gilmore and John Dunne. At the heart of their mission is the Lifestart philosophy.

Founded in 1989 by Dolores McGuinness and Sean O'Connor, the Lifestart Foundation is an educational programme for children from birth until the age of five. Based on materials in the respected newsletter series, *The Growing Child*, the programme involves a month-by-month information package for parents on the development of their child. The material concentrates on the fundamentals of learning, such as art, dance, movement, music and story. Along with the 18 projects that are currently operating throughout the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, there are 30 projects in Macedonia and one in Mazabuka, Zambia.

"I had been involved with Lifestart for years before deciding to give something back to the Foundation," says student Maria Mulhall. "When the Mazabukan project opened in 2004, I decided to talk with the co-ordinator there to discuss ways in which I could help. Five other DCU students were also enthusiastic to get on board."

It was decided that five of the students would spend two weeks in Mazabuka in June 2006 and bring over new materials and integrate themselves with the workings of the project. Through a request from the co-ordinator, they will also film and produce a promotional DVD, which can be used to obtain funding from the Zambian government and organisations like UNICEF.

Collectively, their studies at DCU encompass Communications, Nursing, and Multimedia – some of which will be used to good effect.

"Our knowledge in the visual communications field will strongly help us with the practical objective of the trip – that of producing a promotional documentary for the project," Mulhall explains.

Where SALZ differs from other charitable initiatives, according to Mulhall, is that it will concentrate on encouraging the delivery of educational materials at an early age rather than building villages or growing food. For the SALZ team, this belief is the backbone of their endeavour.

"We are optimistic that this course of action is the most effective way in breaking the current cycle of poverty, death, AIDs and the other factors leading to what makes a third world country," Mulhall says.

Needless to say, the trip to Zambia will cost money and fundraising is a major focus of SALZ. The primary funds needed are around €15,000 to cover travel, accommodation, food, insurance, rental of cameras and materials needed to produce the DVD. However, funds will also go towards materials for the project such as books, audio material, art materials – all the things that implement the fundamental building bricks of learning.

To date, DCU staff and students have been very helpful with the campaign. On 6 March, a music festival held in the Old Bar in the Hub raised €1,100. Established acts such as Jaded Sun, Nina Hynes and The Radio played at the gig, along with DCU's Dummy Run and UK-chart topping duo Nizlopi of *JCB Song* fame. Details of upcoming events and of how to make a donation are found on the website [www.salz.ie](http://www.salz.ie).