

# GRACE Founder, Natasha Martin, Goes Beyond Microfinance and Reviews Grant Proposals to Help Grassroots Community-Based NGOs in Africa Address HIV/AIDS Epidemic

HALF MOON BAY, Calif. – Sept. 19 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – Natasha Martin, founder of Grassroots Alliance for Community Education, G.R.A.C.E. ([www.graceusa.org](http://www.graceusa.org)) explains “where the money goes” for grant and microfinance projects to a group of philanthropists in Northern California. These donors learn the complexities in deciding which three Kenyan grassroots community-based NGO (non-governmental organization) projects should be the recipient of a five thousand dollar grant. Participants gain a greater appreciation for the tough decision-making process that G.R.A.C.E.’s Kenyan office undergoes to help its partners mitigate the HIV/AIDS crisis in their communities.



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*Photo Caption: G.R.A.C.E. disseminates techniques that help prevent mother-to-child-transmission of HIV.*

### **Beyond microfinance and grants for HIV/AIDS prevention, education and care**

“The review goes beyond seeing where the money goes in a community,” emphasizes Dr. Mary Anne Jones, a clinical psychologist who worked alongside Ms. Martin at the Bay Area Perinatal AIDS Clinic at UCSF. “Becoming more intimately involved and being able to give this level of attention with respect to support, encouragement, and analysis to grassroots community workers is invaluable.”

In addition to Dr. Jones, many eager participants quickly signed up for the grant proposal review. Some had traveled to visit G.R.A.C.E. partners in Africa, others had worked with HIV/AIDS agencies or community-based organizations, and the rest volunteered and/or donated to support G.R.A.C.E. USA’s counterpart (G.R.A.C.E. Africa) since 2001.

### **Donor funding group asks Kenyan grant proposal writers tough questions**

Prior to the gathering, participants were asked to carefully evaluate three detailed proposals submitted by community-based organizations in Kenya. Then in a group setting, they discuss the merits, strengths, and uncertainties for each proposal with respect to certain criteria: good community buy-in, strong partnership with other groups, and that the needs of the most vulnerable young people in the community were addressed. Finally, they select the grant recipient based on the overall benefits and long-term sustainability of the project.

“A wisely donated dollar is good. A donated dollar that educates or involves another person is even better,” emphasizes Tammy Moody, a volunteer for several non-profit organizations and program director for the Firelight Foundation from 2000-2002. Her experience with HIV/AIDS organizations and facilitation skills made her pivotal to leading the exercise. She explains that the grant review process affords donors not only a stake in the funding decision but sheds light on the complexities of funding at the grassroots level.

### **Insights into G.R.A.C.E.’s work with HIV/AIDS grassroots organizations in Africa**

As the process draws to a close, participants vote for the proposal that they believe would be most effective and produce the greatest benefit for the communities. Although the selection process can be difficult, participants are left with a profound appreciation for the unique challenges that confront many of these grassroots community-based organizations.

“It’s astonishing to learn that these well-constructed and meritorious proposals were written by youth volunteers with no formal education,” according to Harley Christensen, director at ICT, an agency engaged in training teachers worldwide. “The process leaves you with a mountain of respect for these organizations that submitted these proposals.”

A board director at G.R.A.C.E. and regular traveler to Kenya, Charles Nelson, reflects, “I came away with not only a better understanding of G.R.A.C.E.’s mission but a greater appreciation both for what it does and how it goes about it.”

## **G.R.A.C.E. visits amplify benefits of grants for HIV/AIDS prevention, orphan care**

“Many of these grassroots organizations are in isolated areas devastated by HIV/AIDS. In their despair, they’ll wonder, ‘Does anyone really care?’” Ms. Martin quietly explains. “But when we go out and visit their villages, their eyes light up with hope and determination. With or without microfinance and grants, G.R.A.C.E.’s presence revitalizes them to carry on their mission.”

### **About G.R.A.C.E. USA**

The Grassroots Alliance for Community Education ([www.graceusa.org](http://www.graceusa.org)) is a 501(c)(3), non-profit entity (G.R.A.C.E. USA), headquartered in the USA, and an international NGO (G.R.A.C.E. Africa), registered in Kenya. G.R.A.C.E. works with communities in Kenya, Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique to mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS. G.R.A.C.E.’s core belief is that in areas of poor resources, community-based leaders and health care workers are the most effective and powerful agents of rapid social change.

G.R.A.C.E. has cooperated with and received grants from organizations such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of AIDS Research, The Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation, the Hurlbut-Johnson Charitable Trusts and the World Bank Sahaya Project.

Natasha Martin, a Bay Area Jefferson Award recipient, is co-founder of Global Strategies For HIV Prevention, board member of the Hesperian Foundation, and founding advisory board of the Firelight Foundation. She has been involved in pediatric AIDS research since the beginning of the epidemic.

News issued by: G.R.A.C.E. USA

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Original Story ID: (3242) :: 2007-09-0919-003

Original Keywords: GRACE USA, Natasha Martin, Grassroots Alliance for Community Education, grant and microfinance projects, NGOs in Africa, grants for HIV AIDS prevention, Bay Area Perinatal AIDS Clinic at UCSF, nonprofit organization and international NGO, G.R.A.C.E. G.R.A.C.E. USA