

Dear Family and Friends of Tracy's Heart,

As most of you know I am the Director of Tracy's Heart Rape Victim Recovery Program here. Since my arrival here I have been able to talk with key people and determine just where we feel God is leading and directing this program. Last week I spent four days in a seminar that was put on for rape victims and their care givers. It was organized by a group called ALARM from the city of Goma, DR Congo. The director, Marie Jean, and 2 other people from the organization came to our city of Bukavu. They were met here by a group of 6 women and 4 men from Dallas, Texas. The group of American women taught the seminar for the first 4 days. Then on Friday the director from ALARM took over and the Americans left. At first I was skeptical of just how much help a seminar would be to these victims of such extreme sexual violence. During a question and answer time the first day some of the women asked the same question. The 6 American women shared their stories and all had been victims of sexual abuse. However it seemed to pale in comparison to the things these women endured. I was not sure the Americans were catching on to that but on Tuesday they addressed the fact by simply stating that they were aware what they had endured would seem like nothing to the 120 women in the seminar. They did say however that there are many types of sexual abuse and some of the less violent types were virtually being ignored here in Congo. They were right and the women did open up and discuss other types of sexual abuse besides the mass rape and beatings that continue to go on. At the end of the seminar the women were really encouraged and felt they had at least been heard. They were given Bibles on the first day of the seminar taught by the Americans and Kikwmbes or material for making their native clothing, on the last day. They were happy beyond description. I was sitting in a chair a few rows from the front and as all the women were dancing and praising God they took turns bringing their material for me to see how beautiful it was. There were several different patterns and colors and all 120 received a beautiful piece. The joy was so wonderful to see. Four of our women in Tracy's Heart attended as well. I could see some changes in each of them as a result of the teaching and sharing. They were taught that you do not have to be able to forget in order to forgive. They each made the first step toward forgiving themselves, their abusers, and in many cases the husbands that rejected them afterward. They learned that forgiveness is a decision of the mind and a choice. It was great to see them take these first steps toward letting go of the burden they have been carrying. I was blessed to be there. Our women from TH were approached by several of the other women asking if we had any space for new people. Many of them wanted to become part of our program because we care for the women longer and better than any other group is doing at this time. I was very encouraged by this but also saddened because I could not help all 120 women I met last week. It is enough for now to help the 5 women and 21 children currently part of Tracy's Heart. With God's help and direction, and the support and prayers of all of you we are making a difference in the lives of these women and children.

Yesterday we had our first monthly meeting at Tracy's Heart. Elizabeth Baird, one of my assistants, taught the small children. I taught some of the older children and the women. Also Henri, the head of our churches medical work here in Congo, taught them a little about healthier ways to feed and care for their children. I was expecting 5 mamas and 26 children plus Elizabeth, Kasavubu, another assistant, Henri, and me. We ended up having only 3 of the women show up and 18 children. One of the mamas let us know that she and her children could not come because one of the children was sick. We have

not heard what happened with the other family. I am sure we will hear soon. I am guessing someone was sick in her family too. We had to delay the meeting for 2 days because I was sick. There is a lot of sickness around so we just go ahead as best we can. The meeting went very well. By the end of our time the mamas and the children were all opening up and talking. The three mamas that came were also at the seminar so they are beginning to build a pretty strong bond. This will work in their favor when they begin the micro business loan portion of the program and then when they all move out of the program to stand on their own with God's help and the help of each other. Thank you for all your prayers and support. You are a crucial part of the Tracy's Heart program. I pray you are all well and enjoying spring somewhat. Love, Brenda