



Canadian grandmothers meet African grandmothers at the 2013 African Grandmothers Tribunal hosted by the Stephen Lewis Foundation that took place in 2013 in Vancouver. (Contributed)

Seniors Datebook Page 21

Grandmothers helping Grandmothers in Africa

In 2013 Susan Graham attended the African Grandmothers tribunal in Vancouver.

The Sept. 7 tribunal was hosted by the Stephen Lewis Foundation. Six grandmothers from across sub-Saharan Africa presented personal testimonies about the most pressing issues they face, such as property grabbing, loss of housing, sexual violence, and food and income insecurity. They spoke in front of four tribunal judges, including Theo Sowa, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Joy Phumaphi and Gloria Steinem, about the daily struggles they face as they support their communities that have been decimated by HIV and AIDS. The goal of the tribunal was to shine a public light on the issue and to chart a new path forward for advancing the

rights of the African grandmothers.

Graham was not only moved by the testimonies of the women, but also inspired by Lewis, who spoke at the event.

"I think my passion was born through knowing Stephen Lewis and hearing him speak in the early days of creating the Gogos," said Graham, a member of the Golden Ears Gogos.

"He is such a passionate person. When you hear him and see him in person, he just motivates people. He has such a passion himself for these people and what has happened to them and they absolutely adore him," she said.

The local Gogos group formed in 2011, to support

the Stephen Lewis Foundation's Grandmothers to Grandmothers campaign.

Grandmothers to Grandmothers was started in 2006 in response to the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Africa. More and more grandmothers were raising the children in their community as they became orphans from the disease. Money from the foundation is invested directly at the community level through grassroots organizations to give grandmothers and the children in their care the supports that they need, including food, educational supplies, uniforms and school fees, medical care, HIV counselling and testing, housing and bedding, support groups and home visits.

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The Golden Ears Gogos have nearly 50 members.

On Nov. 30, members will be holding their annual fundraising dinner. It will feature guest speaker Judy Johnson, a member of the Abbotsford Gogos club. She will be speaking about her personal experiences visiting Africa and getting to know some of the grandmothers they are helping.

"The money goes to community agencies that help the grandmothers. In other words, the money is divided through the Foundation to those 15 sub-Saharan countries in Africa to organizations that help the grandmothers," said Graham.

Continues on pg 20