



PRESS ADVISORY

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Pacific Northwest non-profit Bahia Street works to end poverty in Brazil

SEATTLE, WA – Bahia Street, a girls education project in Salvador, Brazil, addresses the root causes of poverty to support girls as they go from illiteracy to university. Bahia Street's U.S. operations are based in Seattle, Washington, from which Bahia Street raises funds in support of the Bahia Street Center and organizes educational programs and volunteer experiences that promote knowledge about collaborative international development.

Bahia Street was founded in 1996 by Ms. Rita Conceição and Dr. Margaret Willson to help break the cycle of poverty in Brazil by providing quality educational opportunities for economically-impooverished young women and girls. It provides a well-rounded education to sixty girls, all of whom are African-Brazilian, as a supplement to their attendance at local public schools. Girls spend at least four hours a day with Bahia Street where they receive instruction in all basic subjects as well as in health and reproduction, art, and leadership skills. For many girls, the Bahia Street program represents the only place that they can eat a hot meal, take a shower, and receive positive encouragement from adult role models. "Within the chaotic lives of these girls, the Bahia Street program provides a safe and nurturing home where girls can gain the knowledge and skills they need to rise out of poverty and become engaged in the political and professional life of their communities," notes Dr. Willson.

The need for Bahia Street is rooted in Brazil's patriarchal colonialism that for 500 years has limited the potential of impoverished African-Brazilian women and girls. Black women in particular experience high rates of violence; they suffer from lack of educational opportunities, healthcare, employment, and proper housing. Enabling low income African-Brazilian girls to acquire knowledge, a sense of identity, and increased self esteem gives them access to the benefits of Brazilian society.

Bahia Street girls now study in a newly refurbished building in the heart of downtown Salvador, bought through donations of people living in the Pacific Northwest and being refurbished through the support of grants. Built in the early 1800's, the building needed to be completely rebuilt internally while keeping its historic façade. This new space for Bahia Street includes a library, technology room, kitchen and dining area, exercise area, several bathrooms and showers, and all of the classroom space needed by the program. The school is located downtown, not in the shantytowns, so that girls coming from different shantytowns have access to the school and to ensure that the girls are safe during the school day.

Because of the efforts of Ms. Conceição and Dr. Willson, Bahia Street has helped the girls it works with go from total illiteracy to receiving 80% or higher on high school exams. In a community where teen pregnancy is rampant, no girl has become pregnant in ten years. With the purchase and refurbishing of the Center, Bahia Street has a permanent home for years to come.

Bahia Street is the subject of Dr. Willson's book, *Dance Lest We All Fall Down*, published by Cold Tree Press in November 2007. Dr. Willson has recently been awarded the Jefferson Award and the Thomas C. Wales Award for Passionate Citizenship. Ms. Conceição will receive the prestigious World of Children Award in November 2008.