



DOING THEIR BIT: Officials Mark Fraser, left, and Paul Singer are greeted by pupils at a remote bush school during the Governor-General's visit to Africa in 2009.

Grassroots charity helps educate African children

Two Government House officials hope they can change the world.

They plan to do this equipped with lots of books and a plan to help African AIDS orphans through the power of education.

Government House's deputy official secretary, Mark Fraser, and operations manager, Paul Singer, started a grassroots Canberra charity after a 2009 visit to a Lusaka school with Governor-General Quentin Bryce.

Their charity, MAMA (Make A Mark Australia) has funded a resource centre for the Sishemo Education Trust Primary School, built partly thanks to Canberra donors. So far, about

\$165,000 has been raised for MAMA through fund-raising in Canberra and nationally.

Fraser and Singer will leave to open the centre at Lukasa, the capital of Zambia, on Monday. The new resource centre will be opened on Wednesday.

It's a simple 50sqm building made by local contractors. It will house 1000 books and five computers. The 150 children of the school, either HIV/AIDS orphans or otherwise vulnerable, have watched the building under construction with some excitement.

"There are only three classrooms at the school; most kids are educated under a tent," Fraser said. "Now one of

the kids wants to be a librarian having never set foot in a library before and one of the kids wants to be a computer engineer, having never seen a computer."

The two men were inspired to set up MAMA because they found the plight of the children so harrowing. Most live in a low-income settlement, a shanty town sans electricity and running water. Some children must run their own households as the people who would otherwise care for them are dead.

By all accounts, the children are seizing their opportunity at the school run by volunteers.

All of those who sat for their national

exams last year managed to pass despite certain limitations. Fraser and Singer felt compelled to help both out of admiration for the children and out of a desire to bring about change.

They will spend a few days at the school working with the children. They'll come bearing gifts; 150 library bags donated by the National Convention Centre in Canberra.

The men stressed all donations go to the project; they meet all administrative and overhead costs personally and are paying their own way to Africa.

There are plans to extend the program to other countries such as Afghanistan.