

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

Emails: ilhussey@ecoweb.co.zw & kg6@ecoweb.co.zw

Once again we come to the end of a term full of highs and lows. Among other things it has been a term of illness starting off with the devastating news that Farai was too ill to go with the band to Sweden. Imagine being given this amazing chance, all the anticipation and then being told you cant go - two days before the band left! Brave Farai accepted his fate and somehow worked through his disappointment. It is wonderful to see him strong again and back with the band better even than before and full of *joie de vivre*. Then all the younger children passed chicken pox among themselves and ended up covered in scars and spots. Saddest of all was one of our teenage deaf boys who was diagnosed as HIV positive and plunged us all into the muddy depths of the world of ARVs. It seems to be a horrible development of AIDS that it has been lying in wait and is now attacking teenagers whose parents have long since died of the disease. Mrs Mguni was as stalwart as ever and took on the medical services. Anti retro-virals are not readily available in Zimbabwe and as delay followed delay we were looking at the possible necessity of buying them commercially which at Z\$40,000 for 2 weeks was going to be a problem (and certainly out of the reach of the average Zimbabwean). Finally she arranged the blood test and was told he might get on the list in May 2007 – a policy which more or less ensures that the potential recipient has died before they are due to receive the drugs. However she hung in and finally came away with the precious pills clutched in her hand. Now we wait and pray that it is not too late for the poor boy who has become a totally innocent victim and still cant understand how it has happened as he was taught, as were we all, that AIDS comes from unprotected sex!

A success story in the sick bay has been young Chipu. Those of you who follow these stories will remember how sick she was last term. This term she has rallied, has been strong and is once again the spokesperson and leader for her independent living house. Her pressure sores have responded well and we pray that she will receive better medical care through the holidays when she is away from the ever-watchful eye of Mrs Mguni. Unfortunately our houseparent/social worker broke her ankle at the beginning of term and after 3 sets of plaster is still not healed. Her holiday duties of visiting vulnerable children will be undertaken by Ushe, second in charge in the houses.

Vulnerable children will always be with us, their plight ever more desperate as the Zimbabwean economy continues to dissolve. This term deaf Buhle came back in a very poor state and so a visit to her home was arranged. It is a sad story as the auntie who took care of Buhle after her mother died had also just died along with an uncle. This left the grandmother, having buried all her own children, caring for 5 grandchildren, the eldest being 12 and the youngest a baby! The devastated family has no regular income and relies on kindly neighbours for food. Buhle is now one of the children who we help during the holidays, thanks to Moments of Joy for their support of this programme. This term we ended up with six children on extra food to try and build up their health. Two of these children will be given some extra rations to take home for the holidays.

How do we continue to help these desperate families and keep KGVVI going at the same time? At a recent Management meeting it was decided that our only option is to charge a realistic boarding fee. So based on this term's expenditure we have set our next term's fees at Z\$212,000 (remember we have now dropped 3 zeroes from our currency, so in reality this is 212 million dollars)! Even this amount is not the true cost, because, as far as one can ever budget in a country with a runaway inflation rate, we will be spending something like 340,000 on each child next term. However, back to the families, how can they even begin to find an amount like this? If they have family out of the country there is some chance otherwise it is impossible and we are left trying to find bursaries for most of the children, particularly of course our ever growing group of orphans. Most people paying for bursaries want to support a child who is doing well, who could make something of themselves in the future. Where does this leave our very disabled children? Questions which have no easy answer. The

school drop out rate for non-disabled children is sadly on the increase with children being taken out of school as young as 10 to join the family in a search for income in such desperate pursuits as gold panning. If parents are no longer sending able bodied children to school how much more vulnerable is the disabled child.

It is impossible to keep up with increases. In October we were told we had to up staff salaries by 135%. Even with this I don't know how staff manage to survive, possibly by having to ask for constant loans for anything that isn't basics, things like school fees, medical expenses, bus fares home! In my last report I said we were spending 2.8 billion per month, this has now risen to well over 4 billion, although we now call it 4 million! To try and put this into real currency is a problem in itself. Zimbabwe has maintained the fixed US dollar exchange rate which means that officially our monthly costs are an unbelievable US\$18,719. However at the unofficial rate they come right down to US\$1,671! It is an impossible situation to understand or even to try and explain. To put it into practical terms at the beginning of term a chicken cost Z\$3,000 now it costs over Z\$10,000, there will be very few families enjoying this luxury come Christmas. One piece of bath soap has gone from Z\$350 to Z\$1,700, 500ml of milk from 85 to 450 and cooking oil from 680 to 1,750. I could go on with these impossible figures. So many of these items were once produced in the country and are now imported with their regular increases related only to blackmarket prices! Perhaps this is why sadly one of our houseparents was tempted to steal from the children and has had to be dismissed. It seems unbelievable that anyone could steal from children who have so little in their lives but this had been going on for some time until finally the children found the courage to report the issue which was then swiftly dealt with. We are very proud of our youth committee who are making sure that the children have a voice.

Not even the weather has been kind to us this term. A couple of weeks ago we had a ten minute hailstorm which caused so much damage. The next morning we found leaking roofs, fallen and sodden ceiling boards, broken gutters, the library in ruins, Paradise House floor flooded and all the tiles loosened, swamped carpets, fallen trees and a ruined garden. We now have to find the resources for 5 major projects amounting to some Z\$25 million – and that's new currency without the zeroes!

After all that it's definitely time for some good news. It has been a term packed with different activities. It started off with a group of 30 students going up to Harare to take part in the Danhiko Games. Our teams did well in netball, football and wheelchair basketball. Despite the poor organisation of these events the children always enjoy travelling, meeting and competing with other students. Our senior students also undertook body building courses with our current volunteer physios, Marleen and Willeke. For the first time the seniors actually enjoyed their physio which even included a weekly visit to a local gym to work with bars and weights. While the seniors were lifting weights the juniors were out of their wheelchairs and scrambling in and around obstacle courses. In the meantime we had Krien assisting in the OT department and Sabine had her class of active infants who delighted us all in the final prize giving with their poem on sharing candlelight. The argument that broke out half way through the poem between the little boy who didn't want to sit down and extinguish his light when his companion was pulling on his sleeve gave the audience much enjoyment.

The final week of term brought us the Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe committee who were celebrating their fifth anniversary. It was wonderful to see Cor, Esther, Hilda, Eunike and Femke again and great to meet Ton and Caroline who had never been to KGVI before. It was a crazy week but full of fun for everyone. Among other things we managed to squeeze in a cooking competition between all the houses with the JKZ members undertaking the hard task of judging all the delicious bulgar wheat recipes. We also had a show at the Academy of Music with the experienced Liyana band, fresh back from Europe. The visit concluded with the annual school prize giving. Again Liyana entertained and had the entire hall on their feet dancing and singing along. After all their shows the band agreed that the home crowd is always the most enthusiastic. It was wonderful to be able to share so much and good for the children and staff to meet or re-meet our special friends from the Netherlands.

The final week has also brought the long awaited reward for our heads of departments. At the leadership workshop held at the beginning of the year they were offered the carrot of a reward trip to the Victoria Falls. They have all worked really hard this year, bringing staff together as a team, taking initiative and solving problems. We are fortunate to be able to give them their reward. This year has certainly shown us the benefits of acknowledging and building staff commitment.

Finally of course, there is *Liyana*. The following is an extract from a report I wrote for the local Bulawayo email magazine. "Sitting at the very back of a theatre in an industrial town in the far north of Sweden are two Zimbabweans. As the show begins we watch the audience anxiously for their reactions. As the music starts our feet automatically start tapping, our heads nodding but the audience are still – how can they not respond to that beat? We have been told that Swedes are not spontaneous and are not able to show their feelings – perhaps it is all that snow! But wait, is that a head nodding over there and surely we can feel other feet than ours tapping the floor. Song follows song getting livelier as the programme progresses. Whispers are heard as Energy pounds on his marimba, his sticks moving so fast they become only a blur; laughter as Goodwell reaches deep deep down to produce the bass note for one of the songs; awed silence as Prudence's voice fills the theatre and her Ndebele clicks echo in Swedish ears. What is this, are there people moving in their seats, has Tapiwa got them waving their hands in the air? Finally the ice melts and we relax as 400 Swedes stand on their feet and dance to the rhythms of Zimbabwe! The band is called back for an encore and the *Guantanamera* remix gets everyone down in front of the stage gyrating, dancing, clapping, shouting.. enjoying! What were we doing there? We travelled with *Liyana*, the King George VI band whom many of you will have seen at some of our shows in Bulawayo. The tour of Sweden, Netherlands and Belgium was the prize that *Liyana* won at the international Music Crossroads competition held in Maputo earlier this year. The tour was a wonderful experience both for the band and for the audiences of the 30 odd shows, sometimes 3 in one day! There were many aches and pains and problems but no band member missed a single show!" Everyone who has since heard the band says how they have improved even more and grown as a team. Our impressions of Sweden – how can people let all those apples lie rotting on the ground when only the very wealthy can afford to buy apples here in Zimbabwe! We have some lovely photos of the band members eating apples straight off the trees at our first stop. If anyone would like to see some photos please let me know.

Once again our thanks go to everyone who continues to support us. It is always good to have you visit and we can then rely on the children to inspire you. For those who cannot visit you can only hear from me how much your support means to us all! Have a wonderful Christmas and lets hope that 2007 brings a better year for us all. With many, many thanks from KGVI!