

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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(Yes we finally have our long awaited internet café set up, just as our last volunteer leaves!)

The situation is impossible and yet we all somehow survive. The term has been short and confused with the closing date finally being announced a week before the actual day! This meant a very short term a very long holiday and a long term starting in May. Teachers had been on strike for most of the term anyway so very little work was achieved. We were fortunate in that all of our teachers decided to come into work and most of them achieved at least some work – this is what incentives achieve! Without all the little extras we were able to slip the teachers I doubt if they would have come to work with their transport costs way exceeding their salaries. Teachers were not awarded a proper increase mid term and were then promised a huge increment right at the end of term; they all came back to work only to find no increases in their current pay cheques! So what will happen next term...! We covered gaps in the teaching with our own school leavers. Tawanda and Vusani taught senior art, Prudence taught junior art, Marvelous gave drama lessons, Tapiwa helped in the office and they all helped with music and marimba lessons. Problems for staff are always present requiring time off so we are lucky that our staff are always prepared to step in and help. At one time we had no staff in the physiotherapy and Sanne, our last remaining volunteer, found herself taking various therapy sessions as well as her counselling and assessments. It is really sad that we have no volunteers lined up for next term but we do understand that people are reluctant to come to a country that gets such bad press.

This term our numbers grew once again and we ended up with 101 boarders and many more pleading for places. Somehow we squeezed everyone in although some of the little ones had to share beds until we could find some extra beds. These days in Zimbabwe you don't just walk into a shop and buy a bed – they are no longer made or imported. Finally after weeks of trying we managed to find some second hand ones. Sunshine House has filled up with deaf children and we now have 8 charming little deaf girls underfoot all the time. We struggled to keep a balance of disabilities in the houses as there do suddenly seem to be so many young deaf children looking for places. The school also is bulging at the seams with 274 children enrolled and our small classrooms having to fit in classes of up to 16 or more children. Many of the newcomers are not physically disabled but we are calling them socially disabled. MaNyathi has a growing list of children she has to assist and visit at home. These are children who never had a chance, like the 14 year old who cannot read or write or those obviously not getting enough to eat but worst of all those with AIDS through no fault of their own. Yet another one of our boarders was tested positive this term but both she and her mother had already suspected it and she came to my room and announced that she had accepted her status and as she can no longer eat sweet things would I please get her lots of milk! Four staff and four students attended a week long course on peer education for HIV/AIDS but both our staff and children are all too familiar with the whole tragic subject.

We were lucky to be given some money to send two groups of orphans on a trip to Hwange and Vic Falls. The first 18 children went for 4 days at the end of term and thoroughly enjoyed themselves despite no electricity for the duration and our verrrry slow bus. One of the new girls, Blessing, flung her arms around me when they got back just to say thankyou. A hug I had to mentally pass on to Maaike in the Netherlands. We also managed a 2 day trip to Antelope Park in Gweru for Sanne's group of 8 deaf girls. Sanne has been holding counselling sessions with these teenage girls all term so they had a final bonding session among the lions and elephants of Antelope Park. Following on from the AIDS test that Sanne and one of the girls went for we decided to invite the Matabeleland Aids Council to conduct a session on the stigma attached to being HIV positive. MAC then offered to come to KGVI and carry out voluntary testing and counselling with our staff. Most of the teachers, some of

the Centre staff and a number of the older students were tested over two days and great relief felt by many at the end of it!

Our workshops didn't finish there as the prefects spent a day at Masiye Camp along with two visitors from the Netherlands. Jan and Linda had won a competition run by their company in the Netherlands with the assistance of Moments of Joy. First prize was a trip to Zimbabwe and KGVI. They spent three very busy days at KGVI finishing up with the prefects trip where they were not the only ones who didn't feel up to abseiling down a sheer kopje (rock)! Finally our heads of department went on a one week leadership course with the Zimbabwe Institute of Management. It was good for these members of staff to hear from another source how important they are and that they should help take responsibility for KGVI. Once again the important message was keep communicating!

This term our other push on communicating was our sign language manual. Samantha and Sindile were the inspiration for this idea while Tawanda and Vusani were the artists, assisted by some of the senior deaf students who were demonstrating the most common signs. The end result is a manual of 600 most common used signs which we will bind (somehow!!) and make available to families, teachers, doctors, other schools and also public institutions like for instance the Matabeleland Aids Council. Next term we will also hold a workshop for families to introduce them to the manual and hopefully a video as well.

Despite the disruptions we even managed to hold our sports days. With all the rain the sports field had disappeared in a field of grass and without any groundstaff it was impossible to get it cleared in time so the senior sports took place in the car park and down the paths of George Avenue. The issue of groundstaff is another one of our endless problems. The ministry of education is only allowed to employ those youths who have undergone state training and as these young people all have O levels they are not interested in manual work. Over the last year we have had 6 of these young people sent to us only to disappear after varying lengths of time. The net result is that there is no one to do the work in the grounds. The centre staff once again came to the rescue and David Ncube cut most of the grass single handed. Centre staff also volunteered to work on Thursday mornings to try and keep the weeds in the vegetable garden under control. We have had good support from staff over this term which is amazing when you consider the problems they face and the fact that we can never pay them enough to be comfortable, not when the inflation rate is so out of control.

The band have been busy spreading the name of Liyana and KGVI far and wide. They were taken to Harare by Nestlé for their annual awards ceremony. It was good for the band to be involved with a professional organisation in Harare as they were treated royally and even put up in a hotel. As I write Liyana is holding a 3 day song writing workshop which has already produced at least 2 very catchy songs. In January an American journalist came and spent time with first Prudence and then the band. Hours of footage were filmed and taken back to America for editing. The preliminary results can be seen on:

<http://www.youtube.com/iTemba>.

Please remember the more people who visit this site the better for the band. The filming will continue in May when the rest of the band and KGVI itself will be targeted. The trailer has already created much interest and we have high hopes that something big will come from the whole exercise. In the meantime there is not much here to keep spirits up and the Liyana members keep experiencing disappointments. Last week Prudence, Marvelous and Tapiwa went to Harare to enter the African Idols competition. They were totally ostracised and when they finally went for the interviews Prudence was told that she had a fantastic voice, good enough to get through but just when she was getting excited they came up with ... *but, look at you, you cant perform so we cant let you go on!* We are about to write protest letters to the Idols franchise and to the South African press. The kids were devastated and their interview held after the selections with an independent journalist is already on its way to the States to join the iThemba material! How much humiliation must these talented young people face!

Economically we are all facing desperate times, whether it be as individuals or as organisations. Most of our bills are now in billions of dollars, how can we work with such ridiculous figures. Our total expenditure for February was Z\$64 billion, it is crazy and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight. Just this week we paid Z\$ 25 million for a cabbage, *I cabbage!!* Most worker's salaries are well under a billion, which means you can either buy half a tank of fuel or 70 kg of mealie meal and nothing else with your month's salary. I have decided to record price increases in a table for quick comparison.

Finance Comparison Table

Item	December		March	
	Z\$	GBP	Z\$	GBP
Foreign currency	2 million	1	65 million	1
Fuel (5litres)	7 million		200 million	
Bus fares (1 journey)	700,000		20 million	
Eggs – 1 dozen	1.4 million		48 million	
Meat (1kg)	15 million		45 million	
Mealie meal (10kg)	10 million		130 million	
KGVI weekly veges/eggs	40 million		1.3 billion	
Teachers salary	13 million	6.50	5 billion (this has been promised not yet given!!)	77.00

And economics is not our only problem. We still have electricity cuts almost daily. At least with the purchase of a generator we are able to get the children fed and lights in at least some of the houses at night. At least water is no longer cut but it is filthy(as I write this we have just had a massive 24 hour water cut)! If you see a plastic bottle filled with Bulawayo water you would think it was lemonade! This increases our problems with diarrhoea outbreaks although thank goodness nowhere near as bad as last year. Most people are surviving because they have relatives out of the country who send remittances. If you don't have this luxury then life is dire. This newsletter comes within days of the elections so I cannot avoid mentioning them. It feels like the whole country is holding its breath, waiting. However sadly we do not have great hopes and fear that the outcome has already been decided. Which means more of the same except is more of the same actually possible?

Thanks to you, our special friends we are still just managing to give our children a balanced diet, although we never manage fruit as it is simply not available. Sadly this term we had just managed to get all the children looking healthy again when the term closed. Again we will have to help several families with food for the holidays. Our help comes in so many ways - funding, goods like the sackfulls that come from Germany or the parcels from Netherlands, volunteers and words of encouragement. Thank you for all of it. You give us the strength and the ability to keep on, you really do!

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