

## **KING GEORGE VI CENTRE**

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Please check link for thankyou dvd

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFLgk01C5hc>

Well, we survived another year despite all the problems that Zimbabwe continues to throw at us. This term we have had to become self sufficient. Electricity cuts continue so we have had to keep our generator going, despite two costly breakdowns. But the water problem was the real killer; 2 water cuts per week which effectively means we only get 2 days a week with full water supply! Bulawayo's water supply dams are empty and no solution can be found because as usual its all tied up with politics! One disastrous afternoon we were faced with a power cut and a water cut and then the generator broke down, imagine 340 children and 100 adults and no water! At this stage we knew we had to look after ourselves. Once again thanks to good friends we were able to fit an old borehole and put up 2 emergency supply tanks. Now we have water, even if at a low pressure all the time. The water situation will not be helped by no rain and the unbearable heat, yesterday we measured over 50° in the full sun!

### **Exams**

What a term, full of exams and the kids have worked so hard. The Form 4s finished just a couple of weeks ago having written both O levels and HEXCO, which is the more vocational national examination system which they stand a much better chance of passing. We at least managed to get their exam time extended and they were finally told, 'write until you finish'. You would be surprised at what a difference this reduction of time pressure made. The deaf girls were amazing with their practical exams, cooking delicious food, making intricately stitched cushion covers and setting up beautiful individual salons where some lucky teachers sat and relaxed while the girls gave them pedicures. The Grade 7s finished earlier in October and have just got back from 2 days on a local safari farm – they loved it, one comment being, 'we have just been to Canaan'!

### **Vocational Programme**

We are very proud of what we have achieved in this programme this year. The deaf girls made some beautiful bags, mats and cushion covers which were entered in a national craft fare – we came away with 1<sup>st</sup> prize! At a recent Christmas fare they sold \$400 worth of bags and cushion covers. This term we set Amanda and Mufaro up with a small baking project making buns for the boarders daily needs. They have learnt to make good looking and tasty buns and at the end of the first month made a small salary for themselves. We hope to expand on this next year. I wish I could say

we had been as successful with the boys but sadly they had no carpentry teacher and to date we still haven't found one for them. In the meantime they have worked with the girls and it is always good when we see one of our kids who seemed to have no direction find something he is good at and then he blossoms. Leroy found a love of cooking, you should have seen his carved tomato rose on his exam plate.

### **School Leavers Success Stories**

Did you all see **Nyasha** under the Zimbabwean flag at the Paralympics? Sadly he didn't get beyond the 2<sup>nd</sup> round as he was matched against the world's top seed. However Nyasha was thrilled to have the opportunity to play against his hero!

**Sindile** is working hard in Galway learning about disability law.

**Soneni** was chosen as the 2012 JCI Zimbabwe 10 Outstanding Young Persons of Zimbabwe Award winner for Contribution to Children, World Peace and Human Rights for her radio programme on disability.

**Tatenda** passed his local A level exams and will be sitting his SATs in December. Fingers crossed he follows in the footsteps of the Liyana trio, but first he has to get SAT scores.

**Marvelous** got married with a full blown wedding held here at KGVI.

Despite all these wonderful achievements I am not sure that **Luckmore's** isn't the most impressive. He was abandoned by his brothers after his parents died. He bothered us until we took him on in the garden, despite his severe disability. Now, without any help from any of us, he approached the rural local authorities, got himself a piece of land, persuaded the local community to help him build a one roomed house and then held a party to officially 'open' his house and thank the community for helping him! Fantastic, just think what he has done for disability awareness in this rural area. This is what independence is all about!

### **Embassy Donations**

This year we have been fortunate to be accepted for funding from 2 Embassies. As part of their Paralympic legacy project the British Embassy donated a tennis court as well as paying for a wheelchair tennis tournament. The British Ambassador attended both events and was impressed with our work. The tennis court has just been completed and looks amazing – just like a professional court! Its great for our wheelchair tennis players to have their own court as they will be able to get much more practise in, now all they need is some international matches and Rio here we come!

Meanwhile the Japanese Embassy accepted our proposal for 5 new classrooms and a toilet block. We had a special 'signing ceremony' when the Ambassador came down and we had a special table with our countries flags, I felt like I was at the United Nations! The guest of honour for this occasion was the very new Mrs Tsvangirai, the Prime Minister's wife. She was charming and won everyone's hearts, interacting with the children, playing marimba and being

photographed with the deaf girls. She later invited the 3 children she met in the OT department up to Harare where they were all given ipads! What excitement as they went by luxury coach and stayed in the Holiday Inn and ate at the Prime Minister's residence!

### **Sad Stories**

There are always sad stories to tell with our children. At KGVI we had a girl in Form 3 who is an orphan staying with cousins. They use her as an unpaid servant but then the wife decided to send her home to the rural areas, no more education. She was desperate and we offered to help even though she is not disabled but as soon as the family heard KGVI was involved they decided they wanted her to stay. So at least she gets to stay at school but it is not a happy life for her. Another girl, this time deaf had been rejected by her family and left to stay with friends. They too decided to throw her out so she borrowed money from a friend to get to school and appeal to us. She is 18, no sign language and very little education. She is now in the hostel earning her keep by helping with the little ones in Sunshine. But how can she be starting her education at age 18!

Which brings me to the worst of all scenarios. We have been invited to join a judicial programme for disabled people run by the Leonard Cheshire foundation. This requires us to have staff ready to go the courts at any time to interpret for deaf people caught up in the law courts. We have been called on 3 times and each time found that the deaf victims did not even understand sign language! The worst of all was 2 deaf sisters, one 12 years and one 14. Both had been sexually abused by a relative with the older one now being pregnant. They had both been through 7 years of primary education and yet they had no sign language and were not even able to write their names. Our teacher managed to get the facts through rudimentary signs and acting. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> occasion she found a man who again had no sign language so the police just wrote that he was guilty on his form; its easier to call him guilty then to try and communicate with him!

### **Deaf Education Programme**

All this above proves the importance of our Deaf Education and Sign Language programme. This programme funded by OSISA has just come to an end and had a formal evaluation which gave us a glowing report. We are very pleased with what we have achieved over the year but it is clear that we have only made the first small step to solving this problem. Every organisation we have worked with is desperate for more; more sign language for trainee teachers and parents, more knowledge on hearing problems for clinic staff, more communication! Even the workshop with the Ministry of Education went well as they were all listening to us and were shocked with our research statistics. In all the 12 deaf resource classes in Bulawayo schools not a single child has passed their national primary exams in the 6 years since their inception! If we are able to find funding to take the next steps we will try to get sign

language accepted as a subject and try to find a way to help the teachers in the deaf resource classes to learn sign language. Part of this programme was also the production of an on-line, interactive dictionary made almost entirely by KGVI staff. Here is the link. [www.zimsign.org](http://www.zimsign.org)

### **Competitions**

This term has seen KGVI children at the forefront of several inter school competitions, ie competing with 'normal' schools. This is so good for public relations and to show the **ability** of our children. Marvelous put together a drama for an HIV/AIDS awareness competition. He and his 10 actors won 1<sup>st</sup> prize. KGVI diversity meant he had disabled, deaf and non-disabled, primary and secondary students involved.

Tapiwa's junior choir came 5<sup>th</sup> in their competition and were invited to sing at Petra Senior School's variety evening. Tapiwa also worked really hard with the New Generation marimba band and they achieved 1<sup>st</sup> place in their competition. This band plays marimba really well its just sad that they don't have a singer.

We also had a dance competition where individual children had to dance 3 different dances in 1 minute. Some of them came up with very imaginative dancing, especially Vernon who jumped out of his wheelchair and danced around holding on to a stool!

### **Culture**

This term we had a volunteer speech therapist from Belgium. With Mieke we organised a cultural exchange week where a school in Belgium sent information to us and we sent back from Zimbabwe. Some of our parents have been building a traditional hut and yard for the school so we were able to take some photos of traditional story telling outside our hut. Its good to have some support from our parents in this cultural aspect of our education.

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Once again the future looks difficult. Too many parents did not pay fees this past term, even the reduced amount we charge. With another drought year looming our families will find it even more difficult to come up with any fees at all. Some of our parents sell a beast to pay for their child to come to KGVI, some weave and sell baskets and pay bit by bit. Most of them try and all of them understand the benefits but the Zimbabwe economy does not improve for the man in the street or the one in the bush! Some of our older children now work for their own fees – Thulisile through her art and sewing, Sininisabo through his art and Moreblessing by helping in Sunshine House.

Thank you so much to all those who have helped over this year, we are so very grateful. We are trying so hard to be self sustaining but until our government gives more support we will continue to be dependent on our kind and loving sponsors. I

know you are sick and tired of hearing this, but this is our reality. KGVI is making a real name for itself, I just hope we can continue in our work and give our children not just an academic education but more importantly in Zimbabwe today, an education for life. For every child supported there is a dream in progress.

From us all at KGVI- thankyou, thankyou, thankyou! Have a good Christmas and we hope for a better new year for everyone, both near and far. As Sininisabo said in his thank you letter on leaving KGVI – *'I wish you could get some great reward for your extraordinary support'*.

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