

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE – August 2019

Check out our fun video: Link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxGvyG89-f>

I have been wondering what my theme can be for this term - maybe *PERSEVERANCE and the KGVI spirit of Never Give Up!*

I can't believe that in among all the chaos and disaster of Zimbabwe we still have success stories! Some years ago we had a little boy at KGVI who had been electrocuted by fallen electrical wires. Subsequently he lost most of his legs and both lower arms and hands. When he was at KGVI he used a wheelchair. He was not very academic so learnt how to run a tuck shop under the guidance of the therapy department. He left KGVI in 2016. This term he walked into KGVI on his own 'feet' – well actually shoes on his stumps. He invited us to come and see his bus. Mike is now the proud owner of a 50 seater bus, he employs several staff and he is married! We all poured out and the spontaneous cheering that broke out was wonderful. We were all so excited! What an achievement for this young man and without coming back to KGVI asking for help. I don't know how he did it but what a success story!!

Then there was Wesley who left KGVI two years ago. He showed an interest in gardening but not enough to come daily to KGVI to help in the garden. However he also turned up this term with his very own published short story! This of course further inspired Laura who has already written her life story. No amount of talking can persuade her that there is no money to be made by publishing your own book. At least her book will be displayed on the website of an organisation that visited KGVI and whose message is *Are you Tolerant!* Here is a link to their short YouTube on Laura. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZUy9PCgCqc>

For a real story of perseverance we have Precious who finally achieved her dream when she flew off to Eugene in Oregon for a disability women's conference. This is a four week annual meeting run by the Women's Institute on Leadership and Disability (WILD) which is the women's leadership training program of Mobility International USA (MIUSA). Precious survived the very long and arduous journey and then threw herself whole heartedly into every event on offer. This included wheelchair rugby, white-water rafting, swimming, gym and camping on top of a very full timetable of meetings. She also represented Rotary in Zimbabwe on a side meeting on inclusive education.

Other Success Stories

Charity in Form 4 was selected as Junior Minister of Lands in the national Junior Parliament. What a wonderful opportunity for this rather shy girl.

Luckmore in the garden is doing such a good job on his own section of garden that he was rewarded by a local hardware company who donated tools to encourage him. He is now supplying most of the greens needed in the kitchen.

Our **dancers and marimba band** were invited to Harare to perform for the Tolerance Campaign undertaken by TRACE Zimbabwe, TRACE standing for Transparency, Responsiveness, Accountability, and Citizen Engagement. This team had earlier brought down a well-known Zimbabwean musician to jam with our marimba band – they all really enjoyed putting together an impromptu new song

Celebrations!

The Management Support Team, in secret arranged a very special day to celebrate David and my 20 years as managers of KGVI. There is perseverance for you! It was a wonderful

day sharing with both staff and children and we even managed to divide up a very gooey cake among the very large KGVI family.

As usual we celebrated KGVI day in July, this year our 62nd birthday – more *never give up* spirit! Hawulethu, from our Social Services Department took charge this year and arranged that every department at KGVI display their work while everyone else went around in teams judging the best display. His idea was to bring different people together to interact and it worked very well. Despite the general depression hanging over us all everyone worked hard and some very impressive displays were put together. The senior school department won overall with the library coming in second. Our annual celebrations are continually being scaled down because of funding but we are still determined to celebrate in some form!

Policies

Following on from the conclusion of our Strategic Plan for KGVI, the next step was to work on the 28 policies we had identified as necessary. The two Managers along with the Management Support Team spent many hours working on these policies but still have a few left to tackle next term. Not only will these policies guide the future management of KGVI but putting them together has really helped to inform the MST about all the involvements of KGVI.

Zimbabwe Chaos Again!

And now for all the bad news. Despite all the success stories at KGVI the country itself has degenerated into chaos. I will totally understand if some of you choose to skip this bit, you are probably bored with the problems of Zimbabwe – we certainly are! Be prepared for lots of exclamation marks!

Overnight the use of foreign currency was banned in favour of the Zim dollar (formerly Bond note or RTGS dollar!!). The reckoning is it was a reaction to civil servants, but particularly the army, demanding their salaries in USD. This way they didn't have to respond to this as everyone will now be in the same boat – a sinking one! We have been down this road before. One of the main problems with this whole scheme is that there are not enough Zim dollars in the country and often one's meagre allowance (from your own bank account!) is paid with a bag of coins!

An added problem is that over the term prices of everything have increased so much that you need piles of these wretched bond notes to be able to purchase anything. Bread, which is always a good indicator, increased from \$1 a loaf to \$7 or 8 (this is bond). Now it is generally unavailable anyway because the importers cannot get hold of sufficient flour. Fuel also regularly increased overnight and over the term went from \$3 to nearly 10. But it's all relative anyway as fuel is not available and all garages have endless queues of hopeful motorists waiting for the next fuel delivery.

In addition to this we have electricity cuts for over 11 hours a day for most days of the week. For the whole term we also had 3-day water cuts, including a period of over a week when the city council were doing repairs and there was no water at all! To keep a school of 460 children supplied with water was taxing to say the least and in fact we often had to send the day scholars home at lunch time. We have now had to come up with further measures to keep ourselves self-sufficient – more solar power, solar pumps and booster pumps to pump our own borehole water around the school and hostel. All at great expense but all necessary if we are to keep going.

To give you a real implication of this I will tell you about our salary payments. In April we had resorted to paying our staff 80% in USD and 20% in bond notes. They all duly opened their NOSTRO accounts and for 2 months it worked although we did struggle to find enough bond notes to pay that part of their salaries. Now in June, we managed to pay them the USD component before the madness descended on us but when we came to work out the RTGS component – disaster! The cost of Medical Aid and funeral policies has increased so much that some of our staff actually have a negative salary while others are getting maybe 3 or 4 bond notes only!!!! Not that we could find the bond notes (now Zim dollar) to pay them anyway. Finally some of the bigger NGOs must have complained to the government because we were allowed to pay in USD if the money came into the bank as USD. Now the bank exchange rate has increased to the same level as the black-market so staff can at least exchange their USD at the bank, but still have to wait for the bond notes to trickle out. However your bond note doesn't take you very far. Presently today – and it could change by tomorrow, most people can only afford the absolute basics.

Soooo – we are once again trying to come up with some way to help our staff survive, not to mention keeping the children fed. Once again we are looking at shopping in Botswana in order to afford the basic staples. One of the things we will need to buy in Botswana, if we can find them, is adult diapers for our Spina Bifida children. These have risen in price to \$240 for a packet of 10 which means in one day one child's diapers will cost \$72!!! One of the further implications of the latest proclamation is that shops will now empty as they don't have the USD to replace stock – another road we have travelled before!! The sad reality is that no sooner do we (and other Zimbabweans) come up with a plan than things change and we are left stranded and desperate again!

Add to this the constant calls from the opposition to 'stayaway' or march in protest. This results in further chaos culminating in the recent debacle when the police and army stepped into the centre of all major towns and threatened anyone who was set to hold a protest march. Not for us the huge crowds of Hong Kong or Sudan; the situation in Zimbabwe has not yet deteriorated to the level where people are prepared to put their lives on the line!

At KGVI we try to cushion and help our staff but for most people in Zimbabwe life is terrible, untenable! How will our parents manage to bring their children back to school when transport from Harare to Bulawayo has increased six-fold and the meagre amount we ask for in fees and groceries is beyond the means of most. The hardship faced by our families is non-ending and heart-breaking and always it's the children who suffer the most!

Oh dear, I need to stop this and remember the theme of the newsletter – *never give up!* We still haven't given up but we are all so tired of the woes of Zimbabwe, which could all be avoided. We are so very grateful for all those who stepped up to help with emergency funding and who are helping put in place our self-sufficiency plans. It is important to note that when the children come back to KGVI their lives will be easier; they will be given regular food, their health needs will be taken care of and they will find acceptance. Thank you to those who are willing to 'persevere' along side us.

