

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE – December 2019

Check out our end of year video and our rendition of Silent Night: [Links to follow](#)

You would think that with Zimbabwe falling down around us life would only be about survival. In fact we are still as busy as ever with so many other activities and a lot of them are successful activities. But sadly the key word for this term still has to be SURVIVAL. Leonard Cheshire supports our community based rehabilitation (CBR) programme and part of their funding this term was for a boy to have an operation on his spine at a mission hospital, which still has the capacity to carry out such a complex operation. On Friday we went to visit the family and to take a video of their story. It was a sobering experience. They live in the oldest of Bulawayo's western suburbs, in an area that should have been condemned years ago and yet thousands of people are forced to try and survive there. The family of 4 live in a tiny room upstairs. The little boy has to be carried down the stairs to get outside and the stair railing was loose. We were not even able to turn around in the room because of lack of space. The boy was obviously clean and well cared for despite the shared bathroom and lack of water. It is difficult to imagine how the family manage and how the boy was even able to heal in such an environment. Later we visited two families where the CBR programme had built cement paths so that the children in wheelchairs living there could be wheeled to the toilet out the back. Stoney yards had previously made this task impossible. Such a basic project and yet so important. The poverty and desperation wherever we went was depressing. There were even people selling coke size bottle of fuel at every corner – imagine how far that would take you and what might be mixed in with it!

Having written this I realise that we achieved so much more than survival despite all the odds. I think the best way to illustrate this is to write about our Bursary Club 'Thank You' Party. We have 29 children who receive assistance with their boarding fees. We always tell them that they have to do something to 'pay back' what they receive. This term we put them in charge of a thank you party we had arranged for any businesses or organisations in the Bulawayo community who had helped us over the year. The kids rose to the challenge immediately when we asked them what they would do to help. '*I will sing, I will write a poem, I will cook, I will be an usher*' – they all came up with something they could manage. I am still amazed at the confidence our children grow into during their time at KGVI. As child after child got up to either perform or give a speech I remembered them when they first came to KGVI. Little Blossom, who came from a broken home and whose parents spent all the time fighting over who would have to take responsibility for her. She was shy and retiring with such a quiet voice you couldn't hear her talk at all. There she stood, as chairperson of the Bursary Club, giving her inspiring speech in a loud confident voice. There was Abigail who went into a deep depression following a very painful operation to help straighten her legs. She had put together a PowerPoint presentation on the history of the Bursary Club. As she is leaving this year she also came and thanked us for helping her to walk straight! At one point I fell over Patrick in his wheelchair and when I asked him what he was doing he replied with great dignity that he was one of the ushers! Then up came our boys' choir to sing, imperfectly but with utter confidence and Thandeka who wrote and recited a poem despite the troubled background which incapacitated her when she first came to KGVI. She was also asked to give the closing prayer which sort of became a vote of thanks and had us all laughing. By nature of being in the Bursary Club all these children have difficult backgrounds but this event demonstrated our trust in them and they in turn showed us just how they have grown into confident, able young people.

We also gave our Interact Club added responsibilities when we put them in charge of a Christmas party for the younger boarders. They organised the food, booked jumping castles

and entertainment and what a wonderful time was had by everyone. We are very grateful for all those who helped with donations for our parties. Along with the staff party, we were all able to end the year on a very positive note.

Success Stories

HIV/AIDS quiz – KGVI won this national schools competition for the second year in a row, with three of the contestants being deaf.

Tatenda – was our top student this year and has been accepted into a brand new A level school which has been started in conjunction with the United States Academic Programme which prepares bright students for US colleges. It was through this programme that Goodwell, Energy, Honest and a previous Tatenda all went to the States.

Samantha Mhlanga– this young lady was becoming increasingly difficult until we found the right family members to take her for the August holidays. She came back a changed person, co-operative and confident. She has been working with Marvelous on our live Facebook where interviews are held with 'KGVI Achievers'. Samantha blew us away with her interviewing skills – just go and see, you would think she had been doing this all her life!

Work experience – amazingly enough we were able to find work experience placements for all our Form 4 deaf students. Two in a hotel, one in a bakery, two in hair salons, one in a nursery school and 6 boys to a workshop making stoves and emergency houses for cyclone victims. Four of the boys will be employed in this project next year which is amazing! We have had such positive reports from all the placements so obviously they did us proud, with their diligence and confidence. Taking on a deaf student often panics people but by the end of the two weeks our kids had taught those around them the rudiments of sign language. Excerpt from a letter from the students – *“thank you so much, you listened to us when we told you our dreams and you put your heads together and helped them come true..”*

Sad Stories

Waiting List - we have just sat down to look at the children wanting places for next year. This is the highest number we have ever had with 94 looking for school places and 23 for boarding. We were determined to take only disabled children only to find that nearly all the children on the list were disabled. How to fit 23 children into 12 places, which is all we have for boarding next year. We had to resort to looking at the children from the most difficult backgrounds but of course they all had their own version of sad and tragic stories of neglect, abandonment and abuse.

Anita –this little girl was taken into boarding when her twin brother persuaded us that she needed to come into boarding to keep safe. Sadly her family then removed her and took her home where she became ill and was ignored and neglected by the whole family. After pushing for her to be taken for medical care we managed to persuade her family to bring her back to boarding next year.

Saying goodbye to old faithful 'friends' – there have been three pieces of equipment that have stood by KGVI since the beginning (62 years ago)- our faithful old Rayburn stove, an industrial washing machine and our cold room. This term we had to switch off the cold room as with electricity costs rising by 320% we literally couldn't keep the meters fed. We now have a couple of modern deep freezes running on solar instead. Then our washing machine gave up the fight, just too old. The houseparents rallied around and washed the end of term blankets in a similar way to grape harvesting! We now have to look for a replacement but it has to be industrial or it won't cope with the washing from 87 active children. We are looking at, at least USD 5,000 for a washing machine from South Africa which will be able to last for another 60 years!!

Workshops & Training

Our therapy team have been busy holding four workshops this term with our Outreach parents on such issues as abuse, grief and the benefits of regular attendance.

Our DSTOs (Departmental Staff Training Officers) were asked to arrange some form of training for each of the departments this term, with the houseparents attending a workshop on disabilities, the nurses on counselling, the admin team on PR and the maintenance team on communication. The therapy team and the catering team will have their workshops next term as they were simply too busy with other people's workshops! We are determined to step up the staff training and capacity building. We also had a series of workshops for students on adolescence and HIV/AIDS with a very vibrant group of peer educators. Even now as we are trying to close for the holidays, Precious is running a workshop on empowering disabled women, sponsored by the team she was with in the US.

Sustainability

This has become essential as conditions continue in a downward spiral in Zimbabwe. We now have power cuts for up to 16 hours per day for 5 to 6 days per week. Yes - you read that right! Water cuts were 48 hours per week but have just been extended to 96 hours! Without the help of our friends and supporters we would not have been able to keep going through such dire conditions. As it is we are now almost totally reliant on solar power for power, lighting and pumping water. So even when the water and electricity are off at the same time we can use solar pumps to move water around both hostel and school. One thing they can't take away from us is the sunshine!

We have also had to look at growing more of our own food. Since insisting on running his 'own' garden, Luckmore has done a magnificent job and with the addition of new drip lines has a good variety of kitchen staples. Then we were approached by a local company that wanted us to showcase a shadehouse for them and were prepared to donate everything needed. As a result we now have a huge shade house with drip lines and tank growing an amazing crop of tomatoes. Of course they have all ripened just as the kids are going home for the holidays but don't forget the solar powered freezers which will now be filled with next term's tomatoes!

Surviving Zimbabwe

So many people ask us how we manage to survive and keep going and sometimes we wonder too. I guess it is a combination of our never give up attitude and the assistance of so many good friends. If you want to end on a positive note don't read on, but if you want to try and understand the impossible... keep reading!

Nothing in our poor benighted country has improved but only deteriorated. There are still long queues for fuel and money is still in very short supply. I understand that 80% of the sales in the country are carried out by phone/cash systems and if these go down people simply are unable to buy anything! Prices rise every week and how people manage is a mystery. We have just heard that medical aid costs have risen by a further 200% which means that most staff at KGVI will be looking at down-grading their cover or taking home virtually nothing. Electricity costs went up by 320% and are set to go up a further 200% in January – that's when we actually have any electricity! The majority of our doctors are on permanent strike and most teachers say they can only afford to get to work for 2 days per week. There were 25 rural schools in the southern part of the country who recorded a 0% pass rate at Grade 7 – the final national exams at primary level. The worst part of all this is that Zimbabwe once led the continent in health care and education!

We are fortunate that at KGVI our teachers all come to work but even some of our teachers find it difficult to be dedicated when they don't have enough money for bus fares and to feed their own families. We have been forced to put up our boarding fees although what the increase will buy in January will be negligible. The sad fact is that what we were charging this term was ONLY just enough to buy 5kg of beef or 22 cabbages!! Sorry this is such a litany of woes and we are all so sick of the needless destruction of our country.

But survive we must, because without KGVI, life will be even more difficult for our children and their families. So once again we say thank you, a very heartfelt thank you, to everyone who has supported us over this year and who will hang in with us next year. Together we are giving hope and survival skills to some very special children. We wish you a blessed Christmas and better times for us all next year.

