

KGVI Centre

Feb/March 2021 Newsletter



Something cheerful to start this newsletter! Christine in her bonnet for the Easter Parade. As the boarders were not allowed to go home over Easter we arranged some fun things to keep them occupied.

So wonderful to see our children back after a year at home. So good to see that they survived and apart from losing weight don't seem too traumatised. I asked one girl how it had been over the past year and she gave me the standard answer – *it was fine*, then she paused and looked at me and said *actually it was not fine!* Still we have to be grateful that her extended family kept her safe over the year and that she is now returned to our care.

But now the problems begin and we feel so helpless that we can never solve all of them. A tour round the classrooms revealed no sanitiser, no exercise books, empty desks of children who can't afford bus fares and despairing teachers who don't know where to start. There are only a handful of children who have had any meaningful learning over this past year, most of them have regressed to their 2019 level. Our ministry has decreed that they cannot repeat the lost year so the teachers have to try and cover two years in one. Will they ever catch up? One teacher says no, they are lost for ever. Even now they are faced with what is termed hybrid teaching. The Ministry has ordered two days at school and three at home one week and then reversing the next week in order to avoid congestion. Although this might work in some countries in Zimbabwe it means that the days the children are not at school they will be at home unsupervised and untaught – no internet, no computers, no data. At least for the borders we can catch up on rehabilitation, supervise lessons and organise life skills on their off days.

On the whole the children seem happy to be back at school and I was greeted in the computer lab by a happy class of deaf learners, all thumbs up and smiles. The teachers seem to be coming in to work but many are unmotivated and who can blame them when they are the lowest paid of all civil servants and instead of being valued for their vital services are constantly disparaged by the government. In the meantime the children sit in the classrooms with their masks on or more likely under their noses. I was skeptical about reports claiming psychological affects on children wearing

masks but as I looked at all those faces covered up with masks and almost depersonalised I did wonder if there is something in those reports!

Our next problem facing children and parents is that of transport to school. There were too many empty desks in the classrooms and on the whole these belong to our children with disabilities. Yes many guardians cant afford the bus fares but there is an added problem here. The government has outlawed all but the parastatal bus company. Despite the new buses that have been brought into the country this company cannot cope with the demand. The queues for buses are frightening, the access on to these buses is not wheelchair friendly and some buses try to charge extra for a wheelchair. To add to all this these buses have limited routes which leave our children walking or pushing wheelchairs both to get across town but also to get to KGVl once they are dropped at either end of the very long George Avenue. End result our children in wheelchairs cannot get to school. The school bus has died and even if it could be resurrected our children are way too scattered over the western suburbs of Bulawayo to make pick-ups feasible.

I am so sorry this newsletter is so depressing. I even put off writing it for a few days in the hopes that I wouldn't have to sound so negative but I guess it didn't work! Given time we will find ways to solve many of these issues, Zimbabweans are very good at making plans but it is not going to be easy.

In the hostel the team have spent many hours measuring out spaces and marking the floor where carefully distanced beds should stand. We even had the deputy minister of Education come in to make sure we were complying. We had tried to adjust our boarding numbers from 87 down to 66 but I think we have already crept up to over 70. There are so many desperate children out there. We even had one of our sponsors offer to give us building materials to add another room to our boarding so we could take in more children!

What's happening about vaccinations? Again chaos reigns! Zimbabwe has been donated vaccines from China and we are told that many frontline workers have been vaccinated. Now they want to start on teachers and a schedule was sent around but on the first day when KGVl tried to find out what to do they were told it was postponed until after Easter! In the meantime social media is flooded with fears about vaccinations in general and the Chinese ones in particular which will prevent many people from taking the vaccinations.

Sadly we will have to continue feeding some of the children, probably around 40. There are still some of our day scholars in very bad situations and there are still our outreach clients who do not come to school. We are very concerned about the condition of some of these children and worry that without our intervention many would become ill and certainly suffer from malnutrition. This is why we are so grateful for all the support we have received for this programme. A wonderful surprise for the children as they came back is the supply of goodies for the term which is a present from a wonderful lady in England who wanted to share her birthday with them! Imagine their excitement!

Thank goodness it's not all doom and gloom. It has been good to have all the Centre staff back and to find them all raring to go. We have had to move people around to different departments and all have readily fitted into their new positions. The Management Support Team are doing an incredible job taking care of KGVl in these most difficult of all times. Precious and Hawulethu have become involved in a new programme where they are advocating for the improvement of access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) knowledge, skills and services amongst adolescents with disabilities in the Matabeleland region. Samantha is competently leading the hostel team, Rabson is taking care of

our logistics and trying to sort out our security after three break-ins over the lockdown periods. Loma and Innocent are guiding the team, trouble shooting, trying to ensure that staff get paid and that our children are cared for.

We cannot thank you all enough for sticking by us and helping where you can. Over the lockdown periods you helped us to keep our children fed and now many are helping with bursaries and other essentials. I am sorry there is not much good news to bring you but we will get there in the end – we have to!

March 2021

PHOTOS:

Visit by Ministry officials to check boarding facilities



Tuck for the Term – thanks to Auntie Brenda!





More Photos below:...

Food assistance for Michael, one of our children from the Outreach programme



Easter Parade winners and invited judges

