

KGVI - Update Report July/August 2020

Oh dear, I wish I could make this a happier report! Writing monthly updates helps to keep you informed on how we are using the extra funds so many people have been kind enough to find for us.

On July 23rd we were plunged into another lockdown which even included a curfew. No one knows the real reason for the lockdown, could have been political or could have been related to our increasing rates of infection. Whichever this means that it is unlikely our children will be coming back to KGVI any time soon. Added to this is our ever increasing rate of infection with no medical services to help all those who are falling sick.

The new management team and I sat down to look at the way forward and even had to consider if we should close up for now. There are so many difficult decisions to be made and one of the things we had to consider was if it was right to keep KGVI open, paying staff, while there were no children at the Centre. We concluded that we needed to find more ways to interact with the children in order to justify our continuing. Sadly we may have to leave some staff at home as bringing them in regularly from home will only increase risks of infection. Those staff living at KGVI have to find ways to be fully operational and as much as possible to work to support our children.

So sadly, on 12th August we had to tell our houseparents and nursing staff that they should stay at home for now. The therapy staff are kept busy with our food distribution programme and when they are free they help in the garden. We also had to say goodbye to two of our older ladies who have reached retirement age. If the children were around we would keep them on a bit longer but in the present circumstances we had to let them go. MaNyathi has been a stalwart in our social welfare department and has been working at KGVI for 20 years while MaGumbo was one of our best houseparents helping the kids make the adjustment from the babies in Sunshine to full independence in our older houses. She has been at KGVI for 17 years. It is so sad to see staff so affected by the changes that have been forced on us. We had a very sad farewell gathering and couldn't even have a KGVI fun party.

The team who has been taking out food to the children decided that it was very important to continue with these deliveries and that they would be passed by the many police and army roadblocks all over town. They also have to look at ways to keep themselves and the families they visit from any spread of infection. Reports from this team indicate that the children are still managing but so missing school and stimulation. The food situation is not good and so many families tell the team that they had no idea where their next meal was coming from until they saw the KGVI bus arriving! Our list of needy children grows by the day and we can only hope that we will have enough for our growing numbers. Right now we are trying to keep 141 children supplied with monthly food packages!

Despite all the hardship, our children never fail to amaze us. The therapy staff always come with heart-warming, although also alarming stories from their visits (see children's stories below). For instance they were very impressed with Ricardo and his livestock project and one of our deaf students was found alone with only some younger siblings. He was busy keeping the house and yard spotlessly clean and tidy rather than just sitting doing nothing. A sadder story came from Precious who talked to one of our younger boys who said: *"I miss you SisPre, when can I come back to school"*.

It was this that got us talking about ways to interact with the children. We are currently investigating the possibility of sending out little messages and short basic informational videos via WhatsApp. We would also encourage the children to send messages back and to chat to some of

the staff on hand. To do this we would have to purchase data bundles to send to the children so we are looking into the best rates and the possibility of getting special rates for KGVI. It will take a lot of organisation and of course more funds, but it will at least let the children know they are not forgotten. However far too many of our children don't have access to smart phones so this will only reach the minority. The other possibility is to get teachers to prepare hard copy lessons which could be dropped off along with the food parcels. Just something to keep the children engaged and to let them know we have not forgotten them.

Samantha has been communicating with some of our older children to find out what their main challenges are. Ntombi and some others talked of the problem of getting water as Bulawayo still has many suburbs receiving water only from boreholes. Our children feel like burdens to their families as they can't really help with the collection of water. We couldn't really think of a solution to this particular problem! Feeling a burden within your own family is tough and something that we knew was going to happen when families are all locked down with no break.

Meanwhile back at KGVI we have just harvested our crop of sugar beans and are hoping to get 100kg which will really help feed the children when they finally get to come back. Before we decided to stop bringing them in our houseparent teams were busy popping beans, not exactly what they are employed for but at least it was productive and kept them busy. The new therapy staff found themselves collecting manure for the new Net house! No one has been able to operate as normal but everyone has tried to adapt.

Our new projects are moving forward and thanks to an amazing donation from an organisation in the Netherlands, we are putting down a new borehole and pump for the net houses. Following our very poor rainy season and the lack of water from the City Council, we have been worried about water supplies but this should ensure that we will be able to keep going with our garden projects. So far we have had the site surveyed, gone through all the paperwork so loved by authority and drilling was completed in just one day. With the warmer weather we will be starting planting of tomatoes and other summer crops ready for either the children or for sale. We have to work towards being as sustainable as possible.

It makes us very sad that virtually the whole year has been wasted for our children. We are worried now for their safety and the safety of our staff and indeed for everyone in Zimbabwe. The support of so many people from all over the world keeps us going and gives us hope. Someone has just reminded me that the KGVI motto is **Never Give Up**, we all need to remember this.

Keep safe everyone!

New Programmes – we will try!

1. Video WhatsApp learning for deaf students
2. Hard copy lessons to be designed, printed and delivered to as many learners as we can manage
3. Health and disability info WhatsApp messages on care and hygiene eg how to care for pressure sores and how to do basic mobility exercises
4. Production of a promotional video to keep people informed and to use for fundraising
5. Seeing if we can set up small income generating projects for some of our learners

Setty

Setty is one of our secondary school students. She has muscular dystrophy and is permanently in a wheelchair. She lives in a very remote area in Matabeleland North. Right now she is staying at home and feeling very isolated. Recently she was able to have a quick phone chat with Samantha. She asked if we could help her set up some sort of income generating project as she felt she wasn't really academically gifted but wanted to do something for her family. This is something we can look into and for now are thinking about getting her started on raised-bed gardening as long as she has water in her very rural home. However this would require doing some research into her home area and finding the materials as well as possibly making a journey to her home to help her set up the system.



Setty's Poem

Caught up in the drama
Of a torn nation
Caught up in the web
Of a bigoted society
Caught up in my personal doubts
About my capabilities
I still overcome all
These wall around me.
My will power is more
Than the naked eye can see
I am proof that odds
Cannot impede my success!

Children's Stories (written by Tend)

Nhlanhla Malisheni is a young man of 17 and has cerebral palsy secondary to a chronic condition he has which he takes daily medication for. Nhlanhla's mother has passed on and he has had to stay in a children's home for some time but recently he had to move out because of his age. He currently stays with his father and five other siblings. Sadly his father has the same chronic condition and is not employed. This has left the family in dire need of our food deliveries.

He spends the day idling away the time because he has nothing to do. His education was cut short and he will really benefit from either education or vocational training so as to help him acquire a skill that can help him in fending for himself in the future. He uses a wheelchair whose tires have become so worn you can even see the rims inside. This means he is already at risk of injury and he has to put more effort in wheeling himself with already compromised health.



Nhlanhla and his family have also started receiving counselling on positive living from one of KGVI's counsellors after the need was identified.

Ricardo Chinyenyeni is a 17 year old boy wheelchair bound with severe Osteogenesis Imperfecta living with his siblings and mother. Like any other family his has not been spared during this pandemic. His mother was amazed as we drove up and she was quick to share that two days before our coming Ricardo had had a dream about our visit and how we had would bring him much needed aid. Ricardo has taken up some responsibility for his family in a bid to help lessen the burden on his mother. He started some small projects like pigeon and rabbit farming in the hope of getting some form of income and sustenance for his family. Unfortunately before he could make any money his stock was stolen. In a spirit of not giving up Ricardo has since purchased a dog which is well kept as he realised that he had to up his security for the safety of his future venture. The team reported that somehow he was managing to feed the dog which had grown very attached to Ricardo and sheltered under his wheelchair when they visited.

His mother sells second hand clothes which predisposes her and her family to the Covid virus. This is the main source of livelihood for the family and as this business has not been doing very well the family is barely surviving. It is touching to see a disabled child take up the responsibility to care for his family. Ricardo is very innovative, his wheelchair has become well-worn but instead of being discouraged he has endeavoured to fix it himself, inserting hose pipe cuttings for tubing.



Mary and Eunice Mpofu

Mary, Eunice and Florence are three sisters born with a severe form of Osteogenesis Imperfecta and are all wheelchair bound. Mary and Eunice are learners at KGVI whereas Florence was too old to be enrolled into school. The girls stay with their mother on rented premises where the owner is also a woman with an acquired disability. Life has been hard on the ordinary able bodied Zimbabwean due to the failing economy and COVID more so for a person with a disability. The girls and their mother have been surviving from a small stall at home selling basic snacks and vegetables and a garden they tend which is near their place of residence. The returns haven't been enough to cover the basic needs of the family. The family has had some form of nourishment though it hasn't been enough. The girls received a food hamper and were very appreciative of the gesture.

Eunice with her mother



PHOTOS:

New borehole being drilled



Hands-free Washing Station (designed and made at Dabane Trust for KGVI)



MaGumbo and MaNyathi we will miss you and your hard work for KGVI



Our sugar beans but still no children to eat them!



Update on situation in Zimbabwe – 17 August 2020 (warning – this is depressing!)

Our rates of infection are growing alarmingly and many organisations are closing up because of effected staff or lack of business. This is made even scarier by the fact that there are no medical services operating in Zimbabwe. Our nurses are either on strike or in quarantine or worse. Some doctors are persevering but with no assistance, no equipment and no drugs it's a losing battle. The hospital in Bulawayo selected for COVID infections is basically not operating. One of our teachers reports that a friend of hers was dropped off at the hospital only to call family the next day to come and fetch them as there were no medical staff around at all. In Harare the main hospital is being manned by volunteers – what special people these must be! A really sad side effect of this is the lack of medical care for normal medical conditions and for pregnant mothers. The struggles and still births in our hospitals is a pitiful story which has even made international news. Seven still births in one night is something no country should have to report.

The only good thing to come out of our latest shut down was the enforcement of mask wearing. This is probably the only thing that is keeping Zimbabweans alive. People are tired of the lock down which has been in operation now for over four months and it is only police and army crackdowns which keep people at home. Infection rates are therefore spread by careless and bored people who just want their lives to return to normal.

The Ministry of Education is still pushing for schools to re-open and has issued a long list of all the things schools need to do to be prepared. They are all essential, however all the recommendations will cost money that the Ministry doesn't have and their pleas for schools to find the money needed is just pathetic. How do you socially distance when you could have over 50 children in one class and no spare classrooms. Most important of all how do you get teachers and students to school without using public transport which is now so over-crowded that there is no hope whatsoever of any distancing at all.

Economically things only get worse. Prices continue to rise but if you have USD you can still buy whatever you need. For those earning ZWD or for the unemployed there is nothing. Civil servants were told they would be receiving monthly allowances of USD75 but they never actually get their hands on real money so this has not alleviated their plight. Teachers are only managing to survive through small home projects, they certainly can't manage on their pitiful wages.

The Bulawayo water crisis has also deteriorated and from having 2 nights a week with water we have now been told the City Council is scrapping timetabled cuts and we will be given water only if and when they can manage. Which means it's not even possible to collect and store water anymore. Some of our KGVI kids have stated water shortage as the biggest of their problems and this is one we don't know how to solve. Water is an essential commodity to help combat this wretched virus!

I am not even going to write about our political situation as we have actually been in the international news. It is too depressing just trying to fill you in on the economic disasters and the COVID virus without dragging you down the Zimbabwean politics road. Enough to say - follow the international news reports on Zimbabwe and prepare to be as depressed and discouraged as we are. Sorry, if you have managed to read as far as this!