

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

Rehabilitation & Learning Centre for Physically Disabled & Hearing Impaired Children

Incorporating **Amandla Residential Village**

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It is going to be very difficult to find positive things to say in this report. Every time we think the situation cannot get worse, it does! This term we have had desperate searches for the usual commodities but just to keep us on our toes we have come across new shortages, like coal (for our kitchen stove), despite the fact that Hwange Colliery was one of the biggest coal mines in the region. Fuel has become impossible to either find or to pay for. It is no longer on sale at the garages, you have to buy at black market prices - behind the garages. As a result our fuel bills from January to October have gone up by an unbelievable 745%! This, at a time when we are having to transport children and now staff as well on a daily basis. Just to continue with figures – our overall expenditure has increased by 463% from the beginning of the year. I naively used to think that 100% was as high as you could get until having to deal with inflation in Zimbabwe! On the positive side Precious is doing an amazing job at keeping us supplied with everything and is making contacts all over the country to help us out – we recently brought some soya mince all the way from Mutare to help supplement our meat needs – over the year meat has increased by 571%, which puts it way out of the picture for most Zimbabweans.

To continue with the transport problems, we have had to find total bus fares for a number of our day scholars and outpatients. There were so many children unable to get to KGVVI that the therapy departments were not fully occupied. We now support 12 day scholars and 8 outpatients with weekly fares to get them into town and they then come to KGVVI on our already overcrowded bus. During the term we also made a decision to help both centre and school staff with transport in our small bus. If we didn't help staff out in this way it would not be worth their while to come to work at all – monthly bus fares now amount to far more than most staff earn! A further expense has been support of the school. As government pays for less and less and expenses increase by the day, the school has been unable to buy any of their fuel, stationery and cleaning needs. Thanks to a recent donation we have been able to buy their cleaning materials and stationery requirements for next term. Never have school and centre had to work so closely.

Maybe its time for some positive news. Pharis and Prudence took part in two Island Hospice concerts, one of which was a simultaneous worldwide event. They sang two Ndebele songs and then led the finale with all the performers, on each occasion. Two great events much enjoyed by the Bulawayo public but also by many of our children who squeezed themselves into our bus in order to attend. Following this event we decided that we needed to arrange more outings for the children – despite the fuel crisis, life must go on – somehow! Having so many boarders meant that we had to make 4 separate trips but eventually each house got to visit our local wildlife orphanage. What enjoyment, especially when the lions were fed!

Further on the arts side, we made a recording of our marimba band which will be on sale on audio tape in December. We have also made great strides with our visual artists this term. It is always so encouraging when a child finds his strength, one of our most retiring and depressed students has found he has a talent for drawing and wire working. With a keen, dedicated teacher our artists have produced some beautiful drawings and batik work. It has been good for us all to find a teacher with enthusiasm when so many of them have given up. Far too many of our trained teachers are leaving the profession and either going into private business or leaving the country where they do not use their teaching skills at all.

It is also encouraging that with very few exceptions the centre staff have all worked really hard this year despite all the personal and financial problems they face on a daily basis. We started the term by arranging a 3 day leadership workshop for our Unit Leaders. The 8 people involved had

a very useful time and have since shared their ideas and experience with all the other staff. They came away with a list of 10 commandments for staff relations, the most relevant for our situation at present being - *do everything with enthusiasm; it's contagious!*

The children continue to keep us going. In fact the other day we had some visitors who after meeting the children asked if these were just the happy ones and if we had the others somewhere else – we were able to assure them that they had met *all* our children! However, the disasters come thick and fast for the children. Just this term we have had two children orphaned and another has lost touch with her father, her one remaining parent, as he has remarried and can't be bothered with his disabled child. Poor Urmilla is devastated but at least she has a granny who is willing to take care of her during the holidays. Preferment lost her mother during the term and as she is very disabled we are afraid that no one will be willing to take over her care, so what is her future? A possible project which we may have to look at next year could be the establishment of a permanent house/home for our ever-increasing number of orphans.

In the meantime we have had to squeeze yet another child into boarding. Sibonile is 13 and has never been to school because of constant hospitalisation. Her parents were not able to get her to school and after a long time in hospital we were asked if she could come to KGVI. She has been put into the 3rd grade of school and has fitted in as if she had always been here – a little girl desperate for stimulation. Our waiting list for boarding places for next term exceeds 40 children, and that is not including all the day scholars whose parents are anxious to get them into boarding because of the cost of transport. One parent after another, each with their own desperate story, comes and appeals to us but we have places for 13 and even that is straining all our resources to the utmost. As more disabled children enter primary schools there are more wanting to move onto secondary education and our little school is the only one in the entire country!

As if all these problems are not enough we have had a really big one dropped on us. The health department of the Bulawayo City Council has decided to condemn our wonderful, carefully designed wastewater disposal system. For the first time for 15 years we have an efficient, clean and useful system, with the added advantage of using the water (deep under the ground) for watering our newly established orchard. The system has been much admired by the council's engineering department but one man in the health dept decided to target KGVI and we have been told that in 30 days we must revert to the system which broke down 15 years ago! This is likely to cost us millions and will never be as satisfactory as the new system as it requires pumping our wastewater a long distance to join the city sewers – which incidentally cannot cope with the sewage they already have and are frequently bursting and leaking sewage into the streets... We have appealed to the council and are getting various disabled organisations to lobby for us, but it is a headache we just do not need at the moment, especially as the council is quoting legislation from 1947 – colonial legislation, of course!

To end on a positive note, we have just held our Dutch week to match Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe in the Netherlands, who were running a Zimbabwe course for children over there. What a wonderful way for children to learn about another country. Our Dutch volunteer, Femke, worked with all the houses and each group came up with something different – cooking, games, songs, poems, research and even painted faces. The children took on the learning of Dutch in their stride and we were all most impressed with the boys who did a three way interpretation – English, Sign Language and Dutch. We had three Dutch judges who had a difficult time but finally fell for Prudence and her house singing *Tulips from Amsterdam* – in Dutch, of course.

Finally a huge thank you to you all. You have all been so generous and I have to keep saying it – we could not carry on without you. You have helped us to survive, not just financially but also by your messages of encouragement and support – this is very important to us in our beleaguered country.

