

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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We have just held a farewell party for our Dutch volunteer, Femke who has been such an asset to KGVI over the past six months. Following a particularly bleak week this event has confirmed once again why we are here. The warm affection which our children are always so willing to share was demonstrated in the Dutch songs, the children's speeches, the crooked drawings done by the little ones and the long queue to hug Femke goodbye. Our friends in the Netherlands (Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe) are still inspiring volunteers to come and spend a little time with us and to keep us positive with their fresh faces and their enthusiasm.

Once again I have to report a very difficult term although when I asked Precious and Samantha what they thought were the worst problems this term they came back with '*communication*'. Indeed we do seem to have spent a good part of the term in meetings to try and sort out friction and misunderstandings. I am sure this is all symptomatic of a country in crisis – it is difficult to leave all our worries and frustrations at home and therefore patience with colleagues and children is sometimes difficult to maintain. We always aim to build the confidence of our children so it is inevitable that this growing confidence comes in conflict with those in authority. Although meetings to solve immediate problems are the order of the day we have also tried to fit in workshops to discuss team building and working together.

Unfortunately this term has also brought some disturbing teenage problems and we have had to have some serious discussions with our older girls. As a disabled girl the attentions of any able-bodied boy are much sought after and no matter how much the girls know about AIDS and pregnancy, this knowledge is thrust aside by '*raging hormones*' as David Katandika puts it! Sadly yet another girl will have to leave the houses and return home for the additional guidance of her family. We continue to hold discussions with the girls who all nod wisely – until the next opportunity comes along!

On the positive side, most of our 2003 school leavers seem to be doing well. Sonia and Tinaye are loving Girls College and all the excitements and challenges this has brought them. As we had anticipated they quickly made friends and are well looked after, even to one of their classmates loaning them dresses and taking them to the Valentine Ball. Bekezela is also doing his A levels at a school down the road whilst benefiting from the extra care at KGVI. Fibion achieved far better O level results than anyone had expected, including a 1 for Art, but still not the 5 subjects he required to go for teacher training. In the meantime he has opted to do an arts course at the Mzilikazi Arts and Crafts Centre. His skill at still-life drawing grows by the day and we were able to commission some of these as gifts to friends of KGVI. Meanwhile we are still struggling to find a college where Pharis can develop his entertainment skills. During the term he impressed a visiting MP from England who we will encourage to remember us and him!

The children continue to face daunting personal problems not always related to their disabilities. Sonia who had been so devastated when her father died some years back was hit once again when her mother too died earlier in the term. Now more than ever it is important for her to get a good enough education so she can find employment and be '*independent*'. Sadly, and unfairly, so many of our brighter students, will always need someone to assist them, which basically means earning a salary for two! Another sad case forced us to squeeze yet another child into our boarding houses. The teachers had been worried about David for some time as he was walking several kilometres to school and only eating when he got home in the evening. His teacher started to bring food for him but when his mother died and there was no one to care for him we decided to bring him into Gangsters. Each day while we waited for final arrangements he asked his teacher if he could please come in '*today*'!

These children are orphans but sometimes those with families suffer just as badly. Last August I wrote about Prudence who does not feel welcome with either her mother or her father and stepmother. She will be leaving school at the end of the year and now has to worry not just about the immediate holiday but about her whole future. Femke and I talked about Prudence but we cannot think of any ways to give her more independence so she will not have to rely on her thoroughly unreliable family. We could probably find funds to give her an electric wheelchair but that doesn't solve the problem of how to get in and out of it; she can move one arm and make it useful by holding her sleeve in her teeth but this only has limited use – mind you I was staggered earlier this week to watch her playing the piano in this manner! Once she is on the floor she can shuffle with great difficulty but none of these will give her the freedom to manage her own needs and life. God gave her a wonderful voice but she must sometimes wonder if this gift has any value when her body is so useless! Prudence, though not an orphan, might very well be the child for whom we have to set up the permanent residence which is always threatening!

Time to be positive. It is fun to see the development of our youngest boarders in the Sunshine House. They have really benefited from our weekend entertainment programme and were totally excited by a recent trip to the airport. They were also runners up in our Independent Living Competition which required each of the houses to clean a table and prepare and serve a cup of tea and some sandwiches. Their enthusiasm and excitement would have won them the competition on its own! These little ones have been well trained in the benefits of saying *thankyou* and each time they see me they will always try and think of something to say thank you for. Hlengiwe came rushing up to me the other day and said *Mrs Hussey, thank you for*(a long pause while she tried to think of something)... *the visitors*, had to suffice in the end!

The new year has brought some respite from commodity shortages – you can now buy whatever you need - so long as you have enough money! Even petrol and diesel have been available but at a price. Looking at the last 3 months of 2003 and comparing them with the first 3 of this year, our fuel bill has doubled! This is not helped by the fact that we have so many day scholars in need of transport that we now have two loads morning and afternoon. The new foreign currency auction which was supposed to control inflation seems to have had no effect whatsoever and prices continue to rise - literally by the day. This has put a tremendous strain on our financial position and it is frightening to find that we are now spending upwards of 25 to 30 million a month to run KGVI! This has also affected our plans to build a music room. Beit Trust had given us GBP 10,000 which should have been sufficient but the latest quote for one classroom-sized, basic room is an unbelievable 161 million Zim dollars (GBP 23,000)! The Trust has told us they will try and raise a further sum but by that time the costs will have risen again!

To end the term on a good note we held a mini fete and our annual Mr & Ms KGVI modelling competition, a favourite event with the children. Ivy told me I should enter and when I pointed out I wasn't dressed for modelling she told me that *all I had to do was be confident and smile* – well, after all isn't that what we are trying to teach the children! The fete was to raise funds for textbooks for the school and was well supported with donations from local Bulawayo companies surprising considering the problems they are all facing.

In the meantime I have just had a report that termites have spent the whole term secretly munching through all the woodwork in our deaf classrooms so it seems that even they are conspiring against our progress! On a recent fund raising tour I was asked why we bother. My reply was - *for the children, if we don't help them no one else will*. If we can do our bit to bring up responsible, thinking, caring citizens for a future Zimbabwe, we will have achieved something important. So far we have been left alone to get on with our work. While we can do that and while we have friends like you who enable us to manage financially we will continue! For the time being all we can do is keep going and face each problem as it confronts us, whilst looking forward to the time when we can once again dream and make plans for the future.

