

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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Life just is not fair! This has to be the overriding message from this term. We lost our dear friend Tinaye and what a hole she has left in the KGVI family. I leave it to Sonia to express it best – ...*My world seems to have suddenly gone cold and void. The light that had illuminated it has suddenly turned into a star and taken its place amongst the rest above. Dear friend, sister I hope you will always shine for me and all those whose lives you brightened.* Tinaye fought so hard and with unbelievable courage but in the end she had to give up. She touched so many people's lives and the tributes at the service we held for her brought us all to tears. Sonia and Tinaye have been inseparable since they started school together 12 years ago. Telling Sonia that Tinaye had died was heartbreaking and how to answer her question – *why does God take all the people I love?* Yet Sonia like her dearest friend has immeasurable courage and part of her poem about Tinaye also contains these words – *I will try with God's permission to do all that we planned doing together. I'll work on your behalf and mine. As long as I have the strength to carry on I'll fight to see our dreams come true.* I will not dwell on the fact that at Tinaye's funeral there suddenly appeared a very extensive family. This makes me so bitter and for this letter I only want you all to know how special she was and how much we miss her.

The term has also brought news of so many of our children in trouble. You may remember Ellen who was not collected last holiday. Finally after much effort we managed to get a message through to her family. A young brother arrived, obviously totally overwhelmed with all he was having to deal with. As we suspected their mother had died leaving this young man in charge of the family. We agreed to give him a regular bus fare so that he can at least collect Ellen. We tried to arrange for him to attend a teenage heads of household camp at Masiye but he had to hurry back to look after his baby sister! Then there is Ocean who is a day scholar who was not coming to school. When we investigated we found out that his mother is desperately ill and his 10 year old brother is also staying out of school while he looks after Ocean and a baby sister! Another family we will try to help but it is frustrating to have to acknowledge that we do not have the resources or capacity to help everyone who needs it. (Since I started writing this report we have heard of a day scholar brother and sister whose mother has just died leaving them as our newest orphans.)

These days anyone who is employed has to support a very extended family. There has hardly been one staff member who has not had to pay vast sums for a family funeral this term. This adds just one more burden to people who are already stressed out with their personal lives and don't have the easiest of jobs either! We offer counselling to our staff as well as our children and just recently we arranged a session on conflict resolution for the houseparents. Meanwhile our 4 counsellors are kept busy listening to children with problems sometimes imagined but far too often real.

All this in an atmosphere of ongoing economic crisis. Prices continue to rise literally by the day. Just to give you some idea of how this works. We recently had yet another break in and theft from one of our houses out of the premises. We reinforced burglar bars but really do need to put up some form of security for the whole property. We asked for a quote for a wall on 2 sides and were given a figure of 20 million(GBP2000). Three weeks later I needed confirmation of the quote on fax and was told the figure had gone up to 65 million!!! On top of all this we have now had to set up a special medical fund to pay for any medical attention the children may need. We can no longer take a sick child to the hospital and get free treatment. These days if you want anything done you have to pay for a specialist and take your own drugs and food to the hospital! Through all this, and thanks very much to your support, we have managed to keep the children well fed. We have also been able to buy all the extra health giving foods needed by those children in the sickbay. We have even learned not to break down every time we are given the latest increases in the cost of meat or mealie meal or whatever.

But what of next term? We are currently running the Centre at around 50 million dollars a month. Even in real money that is a great deal (USD 8,000)! There are now many things which are actually

cheaper to buy in Europe than in Zimbabwe! Over the last few days as the term draws to a close there has been a steady stream of family members to say they will not be able to manage to pay fees next term. The miracle is that they are still prepared to try and send their children to school and haven't simply given up under all the strain. Most of these children have potential and we cannot condemn them to sitting (or lying) at home for the rest of their lives. For as long as we can manage we have to try and find funds to keep the Centre running and to help desperate families.

Thankfully the term has brought its good things too. Pharis, Prudence and Fibion occupied themselves writing and practising their songs for the play to be put on by the Hora Theatre in Zurich. We were all amazed at their ability to come up with such apt songs with so little effort. The trio left for Switzerland at the end of October and seem to be having a wonderful time. We have just received a copy of a newspaper in Switzerland reporting on their first fund raising concert. They themselves comment on the cold, the food and the fact that you can leave things lying around and they will still be there the next day! They were thrilled to have three of our former volunteers from Holland join them for the concert. We have been so lucky with our volunteers and amazingly they are still coming. This term we had two OT students from Norway and Fabienne, a physio from Switzerland and Mirjam from Holland who has filled KGVI with songs from all over the world. Next term we are expecting three more volunteers through JKZ in the Netherlands. We all so enjoy these visitors who bring a breath of fresh air and enthusiasm to Zimbabwe.

Sadly the departure to Switzerland was not all good news. While Pharis and Fibion were enjoying having their families to say goodbye to them at the airport and were being kitted out in a new set of clothes, Prudence was suffering because she had no one. Not only did her family not come to say goodbye she couldn't even find them. Her mother had left their house in Bulawayo without telling Prudence where she was going and her father had left his job again without letting Prudence know where he would be. For a girl like Prudence a journey like the one she was embarking on is a very big step and to go without being able to talk to your family was very disturbing.

Before the trio left we put on a show both to bid them farewell but also to officially open our new music room. The music room wasn't quite finished but it was sufficiently ready for us to plan for the show to be held on the veranda. We put together a very good show and spent a whole day preparing the music room with chairs outside as *it never rains in Zimbabwe in October!* Half an hour before the show started it began to rain! This is where I am always full of admiration for the way the KGVI team reacts in a crisis. Everyone helped move the chairs and equipment back to the hall, some staff rushed around collecting candles (when the electricity went out), the performers never faltered with the necessary alterations in the programme and Pharis who was the master of ceremonies improvised and directed a show with very few obvious glitches. In fact afterwards the large audience stated that the performance by candlelight was magic. Perversely the electricity came on again just as the show came to an end! There were so many good performers but one of the highlights was five of our deaf girls performing an Indian style dance, complete with borrowed saris. The dance had been devised and taught by Pharis and our art teacher and was performed with the utmost grace despite the unfamiliar saris. Pharis had found some Indian music but on the night, with no electricity, we dragged Fibion in to pick out a suitable beat on a drum. No one even knew of the alteration! Pharis, Prudence and Fibion ended the show with some stirring songs, which had everyone on their feet dancing. We can't help wonder if Pharis has managed to get his Swiss audiences on their feet as well!

A further activity of Pharis and Prudence was the making of an audio recording with members of the Bahai church. This tape and CD are now on sale and are proving to be very popular. Prudence wrote several of the songs and the two of them perform in most of the numbers. One of the songs was used for a promotional video with our deaf students dancing to Pharis' singing.

Also keeping us all busy has been Samantha's involvement with Unicef and Save the Children Norway on the programme for Prevention of Child Abuse Day and International Children's Day. This was a public relations coup for the Centre as Sam was a very key figure and we provided most of the logistical support. Several of our seniors were on the organising committee and Ivy was persuaded to enter the Junior Ms Zimbabwe beauty show. She looked amazing in a very traditional costume made from not much more than sacking and beads. She took some persuading, as it is not easy entering

such a competition when you are the only one in a wheelchair but with the promise of the use of Precious's electric wheelchair she finally agreed. Many felt that she would have won but for the fact that Unicef wanted an able bodied person to carry out their youth advocacy programme for next year.

This has been an exam term so as well as all the other activities we have tried to keep the children busy with their studies. We were pleased to see so many boarders chosen for the trip to Victoria Falls, which was to be a reward and motivation for those students who had worked hardest during the term. The children voted on the centre and school staff who they thought were most deserving and as a result 14 seniors with 6 members of staff had four days at the Falls. We are very grateful to Moments of Joy who made the trip possible and also to all the new friends we made at the various establishments, which gave free or reduced deals. It is heart-warming to know that there are still so many people prepared to help out even in Zimbabwe. I have just received a phone call from the gang in the Falls reporting on the trip and asking if they can please stay there until the end of term instead of coming back tomorrow!

With all the involvements of the seniors we must not overlook the little ones who also have their achievements. With encouragement from the therapy staff and each other we had a whole group of children who decided they were going to walk. Suddenly one afternoon there they all were, Prince, Hlengiwe, Ephraim and Victorious staggering down to the hostel with various aids but proudly on their own. We are very pleased that we have managed to keep Buhle in one piece this term and hopefully she will finally be able to spend the holidays at home. She is the little girl whose bones break so easily and who has spent the last two holidays in hospital.

A new development in our babies house, Sunshine Unit, has been to put them on an equal footing with the other houses. They now have their own food, which they then ask the kitchen to cook for them. This way the house parents can better monitor the diet of the little ones who need just that little bit extra. Next term there will be very little movement of children as our present policy of giving more support to school leavers means that we don't have the movement of children out of the top end of the school. Next term we only have 6 leaving and 13 who have been given places, not to mention all those we have had to turn down!

School leavers always present us with such terrible choices. How can we find something for them to do in a country where only 2 out of 10 people can hope to be employed? Last holiday I gave our form 4s a questionnaire asking about their hopes and plans. Sadly most of them see no prospects in Zimbabwe. In answer to the question how are you going to try and achieve your goals Prudence answered *..the first thing is to believe in myself!* The question what would you chose if you could have anything you wanted brought a unanimous response – *an electric wheelchair*. Once I would have thought of our kids yearning for electric wheelchairs as rather extravagant dreams. I had underestimated the importance of being able to move even a short distance without having to ask someone to do it for you. Still these commodities, whether you see them as extravagant or vital are out of our reach. There are no easy answers to these problems and we just have to keep thinking and planning and hoping!

This term's success story comes from Edmore who left KGVI 4 years ago. He was recently interviewed on a ZTV programme called *Breaking New Ground*. Edmore has cerebral palsy and his speech is not easy to understand. In his own words he walks and talks as if under the influence of alcohol! He is now in his 3rd year of a Business Management degree and is doing his attachment with the Reserve Bank where he is very highly thought off! On top of all this is he planning to publish a book of poetry.

To conclude, if you are anywhere near Switzerland in January and would enjoy a couple of days break go to the Hora Theatre in Zurich and there you will find a little bit of KGVI. While you sit there and enjoy yourself you can smile a smile of satisfaction and know that none of it would have been possible without the support you have given us. Whether it be for a specific project, or running costs or sponsorship it has all been vital to our survival and from all at KGVI our heartfelt thanks!