

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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End of term again and amazingly enough we have not been left with any children. Thanks to MaNyathi, our houseparent/social worker, Ellen, our abandoned deaf girl was re-united with her brother and what a sad tale that is. Her 24 year old brother is now left caring for a wife and child, a deaf sister, a retarded brother and an old auntie with her grandchild. He has no regular job and what little resources were left to him when his mother died were taken over by his uncle. The same uncle who stole the money he had managed to save up from a temporary job to send to Ellen. Anyway despite all these burdens he is obviously willing to keep on caring for Ellen so she was left there with her return bus fare. A similar horror story is that of Gerald one of our little deaf boys who actually tried to hide when he heard his uncle had come to fetch him. It is frightening to imagine what horrors Gerald was running from but discussions with other family members will hopefully result in someone else taking on Gerald. As one of our children recently commented – *if your parents go, you're in trouble!* So what about Amanda, very disabled but always been taken care of by her young single mother. We have just heard that her mother has died, whoever will take on the care of this very difficult young girl. Poor Amanda! Another unpleasant surprise at the end of term was when I asked Samson why he was going on a rural bus instead of to his house in town. He had not previously told us that his family's home was destroyed during the recent 'clean-up' campaign!

I know this is a depressing start to the newsletter but quite honestly there is nothing much else to report from Zimbabwe. Our final week of the term brought us two other KGVI family deaths with our driver Moyo dying of stomach cancer and Precious's mother dying following an operation. Moyo had built a lot of good will for KGVI over the years and we all sadly miss him.

It has been a very long and difficult term with the dangers of our financial position becoming ever more obvious. In the April letter I reported that we were spending around 90 million a month, unbelievably this has now risen to over 200 million a month! This is a frightening sum and one that we cannot possibly hope to sustain despite the generosity of so many of our friends. It can only get worse – we have just bought the next term's cleaning materials for over 50 million dollars! There is nothing extravagant here, they are industrial products like washing powder, toilet cleaner – but they are items we cannot cut down on. Not only do we face these huge increases but the shortages continue and multiply. There is still no fuel – it is difficult to understand how a country can run out of fuel but there has been no regular supply since March and any available is being brought in and sold on the blackmarket, even being carried in 5 litre containers by enterprising ladies at the border! Flour is no longer available and as we make our own bread this poses a huge problem. Also almost impossible to find is coal, margarine, cooking oil and sugar with mealie meal rapidly running out. Margarine was dropped from our shopping list way back but the other items are needed and the children long for sugar. We grow our own green vegetables but have to buy extras like butternut, cabbage and tomatoes at over half a million a week! Fruit is a luxury we have long since given up on so we do have to keep providing a range of vegetables.

We have reached the sad conclusion that if we are to survive we will have to reduce our numbers. We have had to tell parents that we can no longer take any children who cannot pay boarding fees. Only 28 out of 90 of our children are paid for by their

families, the others have always been supported in some way. Parents were given last term to contact social welfare but the harsh reality is that it is unlikely they will get the help they need. Many of our students' fees used to be covered by bursaries but now even these have fallen away as supporters cannot keep up with our rampant inflation and ridiculous foreign exchange rates. Even Jairos Jiri, the stalwarts of disability in Zimbabwe, who support 10 of our brightest seniors, have not paid anything for this year. It will be a very difficult start to the new term but the sad truth is that we can no longer support 90 children with the staff they need to care for them. We will continue to support our orphans (16) and our school leavers but for the rest the families will have to somehow/somewhere find the funds. We are appealing to the Ministry of Health to help us with the payment of more salaries but are not optimistic about their response. Its every man for himself in this country.

What can I tell you that is positive? We had a visit from Hilda from Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe and she fell in love with KGVVI children all over again. We are expecting 3 more volunteers from Netherlands next term, so it cant be all bad news. We had a small party at the end of term and just watching the children enjoying themselves and yet still taking the time to help those who cant feed themselves, showed that this is a still a good place to be whether you are a student or a staff member. There is young David who continues to organise us all, there is Tapiwa whose sharp wits and repartee get him into constant trouble but also keep us laughing, then there are the little girls who come for their cuddles and the seniors who come for chats. One lunchtime when I was sitting in the sun outside my office feeling depressed I was joined by Hlengiwe - *do your remember when I first came here and I used to cry and I was so frightened of everything*, she says. As I looked at the confident outspoken little girl sitting in her wheelchair beside me, I did. When she first came to us she had no English and had never before seen a white face! Now she has just won an award for organising the other little ones in a weekly rubbish collection around the grounds.

The most exciting thing this term has been the development of our band. They have become the talk of the town and following 9 very successful shows at schools, hotels and a fete we were having to turn away requests. Everytime I thought that Pharis would fail to get this particular audience on their feet, up they got to clap, dance and sing along. No one could resist the energy of young Energy on the lead marimba or Goodwell on the drums, tapping his foot so hard he was in danger of wearing out his artificial foot! Much to the total delight of the band members they even made a little money for themselves both from donations but also on two occasions they were hired out. What pride, especially for some of the girls who had never had money of their own. The band and other students also participated in a musical evening at the art gallery arranged by our volunteer piano teacher. I have to say that once again it was the lively piano thumping of our students which kept the majority of the audience from dropping asleep following the more classical numbers.

Pharis and Prudence have been the stalwarts behind the band and they will miss the lively presentations of Pharis. Prudence will have to develop her own courage even further to take on the lead position for the band. Yes, after much desperate fund raising Pharis is off to Liverpool in September. Many thanks to all those who have helped. He is somewhat nervous and I don't think it will be easy for him but we trust that he will soon have the sombre Brits dancing and singing along. We are also hoping that he and Prudence at least will also be in Switzerland again next August.

On the school front we organised a weekly career guidance programme and the form 4s visited the polytech, a teacher training college and Mzilikazi arts centre as well as listening to various guest speakers who managed to convince them of the importance of working hard particularly with English and Maths. Exams brought some nasty shocks for some of the children but it was encouraging to see so many boarders in the top half of their classes. Obviously the nightly homework sessions are helping.

In the therapy department we were lucky to keep Jesse for another term and she was joined by an Australian who suddenly appeared and volunteered to help in one of the classrooms. When we heard she was a chef we quickly presented her with the challenge of making bulgar wheat more appealing to the children. Bulgar wheat is a hard cracked wheat which is given to us by World Vision as part of an urban food relief programme. Kess rose to the challenge and worked with each of the houses producing such delights as hamburgers, salads, stews and buns. Impressed by her success our cook took on the challenge and now incorporates bulgar wheat in some very tasty and nutritious buns, thus stretching out our precious flour. We all enjoy having volunteers – fresh faces, new ideas and lots of time and affection for the children.

We move towards the new term with fear and trepidation. We will do our very best to keep going but it will not be easy and we will have to make still further savings wherever we can. Sadly some of the children will not return but this is the harsh reality of Zimbabwe and we are only one of most organisations facing the same battles and dilemmas. I can only sincerely say it again, without you we wouldn't even be contemplating a future. Thank you so much for your help both financially but also in your supportive and sympathetic emails and messages.

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