

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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Well we have survived another term but the problems continue to expand. This was our winter term and it has been cold since the beginning of May. This meant large electricity bills and digging out all the old blankets we could find to keep the kids warm. Amazingly enough we did not have our usual flood of winter infections and our health team got a gold star from our volunteer doctor for taking such good care of the children. I guess an adequate diet must be partly responsible as elsewhere in the country people are dying in terrible numbers. So many staff lost family members this past term and of course the children continue to lose their precious parents. Now we have a new phenomenon to contend with as parents leave the country to try and find work, abandoning their children to any family member they can persuade to take on the job. Our 'social worker' visited one of our day scholars to find a 19 year old 'maid' in charge of 7 children, including a baby, a toddler and our wheelchair bound child. Not surprisingly the house and the children were filthy and it was obvious that care was minimal. We have since contacted the parents in the hope that they will make better arrangements. This list of families who need to be visited on a regular basis just gets longer.

Being an orphan in Zimbabwe today is a disaster, being a disabled orphan leaves a child with no hope. Luckmore is spending this year as an apprentice in our gardens. Despite his wobbly arms and legs he works hard and has impressed everyone with his dedication. We insisted that he go home this holiday as we are still convinced that if possible every child should maintain their family links. Luckmore was devastated as he knew he would go from being an appreciated member of the garden crew to a hated, resented burden, constantly verbally abused by his sister in law. What do we do at the end of the year when his apprenticeship comes to an end? His brother does not care and will not take advantage of Luckmore's gardening skills but we at KGVI cannot keep every orphan who is ill treated by their family. The list of these children gets longer, we cannot manage to employ them all, but then their future is bleak...

Believe it or not, there is a positive side to our stories about orphans. Our *Ntombizodwa* group continues to grow in strength. They are a group of 12 orphaned girls who meet once a week for discussions and counselling. They decided that they wanted to try and raise money to support any one of their members who was struggling. They are now making greeting cards from old cards and by selling them make a small income. This term the money they raised was used to buy some fruit and drink for Chipo, one of their members who was admitted to hospital. A small achievement you might say but the support they are determined to give each other is an inspiration. As a reward they went for a trip to visit the orphanage in the Matobo area where Chipo comes from. Nothing wonderful - just some new friends, some rocks, a dam, some baboons, and a packed lunch, but for them it was *'the best day ever'*. Watching them being loaded onto the bus was tragic in itself as these determined young girls are probably our most disabled and three-quarters of them are in wheelchairs!

Last newsletter I reported on how well Chipo was doing and how her pressure sores were healing. Just before the holiday Sister Mguni taught the housemother at the orphanage how to treat the wound but sadly Chipo returned to us with the biggest pressure sore I have ever seen, right down to the bone. Despite all our efforts she became too ill to go to school and we had to send her to hospital. Here she sunk into a deep depression and her orphanage weighed the depression against the medical care and decided to take her home. None of the doctors want to take on her case because basically they don't know what to do. When the KGVI team visited her at the orphanage she seemed more cheerful and they were able to check on her treatment but the future does not look good for Chipo.

Preferment, the little girl who was spending each holiday in one room with her father and uncle now goes to her grandmother in the rural areas. Secure in the knowledge that there are funds to bring her back to school she is happy. I wish I could have taken a photo of her face

when she was told she was going home to 'Gogo'. This is yet another project for which we thank our supporters – funds to support families taking care of our orphans. Amazingly enough all our children were collected in time this holiday but not without some trauma. The boys travelling in wheelchairs to Harare were turned away from 3 buses before they were finally allowed on to a bus. This happens all too often and to add to the humiliation the drivers are often verbally abusive. Precious is writing a letter of complaint but we are not confident that it will bring results. Far too many of our children receive this sort of abuse once they leave the security of KGV; and not just from bus drivers and the like but too often from their own families!

We do as usual have some good news to help us through the bad! We now have our new bus on the road! It only took us a year (!) and it came in duty free, which is a minor miracle in itself. How amazing to drive a KGV vehicle which isn't falling apart – many many thanks to the hard working team of JKZ. This same team has recruited 4 more volunteers for us for next term, two in physio, one in OT and one teacher. This term we had to say goodbye to Rianne who had been teaching one of the infant classes and to Willeke in physio. Before leaving Rianne very kindly arranged for us to have some new school desks and chairs which were much needed with our numbers rising to over 230.

The senior vocational class all had two weeks work experience. Among others, David learned how to service engines at Dabane Trust, Teclar was a cheerful secretary for the school, Ellen assisted in a hair salon while two day scholars worked at Femina Garments. This term the school also organised a consultation day for parents. Everyone was required to dress traditionally and there was a variety of very interesting traditional food on sale. It gave the centre houseparents a chance to find out which of their children need more motivation. The hardest workers are still Goodwell and Honest who spend every spare time studying or reading and have not fallen in their marks despite their involvement in the band. Unfortunately our experimental hearing-impaired O level class are really struggling with the workload. For instance three of the girls, Cleopatra, Mary and Thatcher do wonderful practical needlework but come down in the theory as they struggle with the written word, their main form of communication being sign language. The school, as with all Zimbabwean schools, is plagued with a shortage of qualified and dedicated teachers. As a result there are too many changes of teachers and too many who don't really care. It was also a difficult term for the school as Percy Hadebe, the head was on sick leave for much of the time. Somehow we have to find a way to keep motivating not just the children but the teachers as well!

We continued our programme of team building exercises, this time involving the therapy department. A very exciting day was spent at Masiye where everyone, even the oldest ladies, could be seen zip wiring over the dam, abseiling down a sheer rock face or helping each other over the same 3 metre wall the houseparents struggled with. Once again I was impressed with the team work and support revealed during these activities. The heads of department are well on their way to earning their special reward trip at the end of the year. They now take so much responsibility for the everyday problems that crop up, that David and I hardly need to be here at all!

Inflation continues to be our biggest headache. Unbelievably prices continue to rise by the day. Our average monthly expenditure for the 1st term was 1.6 billion Zim dollars but by the end of this term it was running at 2.8 billion! We estimated that it cost us over Z\$100 million to keep one child at the centre during the 2nd term. Our boarding fees were set at Z\$5 million! This difference is just too great to maintain so for the 3rd term we have had to set our fees at 30 million. Of course this is still much too little but how many of our parents will be able to manage even this. To put this figure into real money – if you use the official exchange rate it is US\$ 560 while if you use our thriving black market rate it is US\$ 250. This only goes to show how crazy our economy now is. We are told that the average family needs over 60 million dollars per month to survive – there must be less than 15% of the population receiving more than this figure. Now to even more confuse the picture we were told overnight that we should take 3 zeroes off our currency and that new notes were to be released. It is of course a

good idea to try and do away with some of those zeroes but the confusion, dishonesty and chaos while this is implemented is unbelievable. Not to mention the fact that everyone has simply put their prices up because without the millions involved the prices just don't sound high enough! Now we have discovered that there are no new small notes printed so a person could receive one single note for 3 months wages!

Shortages continue to keep us busy as well, especially Precious whose job is to make sure we don't run out of anything. Flour has become impossible to find again which jeopardises our attempts to continue making our own nutritious bread. We even looked at importing from Botswana but were told that for anything over 20 kg (!) we would need an import licence from the Ministry of Agriculture, a clearance certificate from the Vet Department and a bill of entry from Customs – its mind blowing just thinking about trying to achieve all that. Then the coal ran out again. At the Hwange Colliery we probably have enough coal to solve the country's power shortage for the next 250 years but the colliery is running old equipment that keeps breaking down not to mention that they cant afford the diesel to run the machinery and so it goes on! Through friends pulling various strings we finally managed to get enough coal to see us through next term but we had to pay 127 million for this privilege! Mentioning shortages has to include electricity cuts. KGVI is actually quite fortunate as they are in the same area as an army centre and do not get regular power cuts. For most of the country the electricity is switched off for unspecified lengths of time 6 out of 7 days a week.

At least news about the band is good. This term they have been booked for several public shows and thus have earned a bit of extra money for themselves. Then of course they are off to Sweden, Netherlands and Belgium on 8 September, returning on 16 October. I don't think they will really believe it until they see the aeroplane in front of them. They have been busy this term rehearsing their new songs and recording a cd of 11 original songs which will be sold after the concerts. Prudence wrote most of the songs herself with the help of Marvelous for the Shona tracks. Their latest number is the old anthem *Nkosi Sikelele Afrika*, which they sing in three parts, starting off with Prudence singing heartbreakingly on her own, followed by Tapiwa with some reggae and finally Marvelous with some rap – very interesting! I am sure they will impress their European audiences with their talent, professionalism and enthusiasm. We are hoping to meet up with lots of old friends at the concert in Netherlands on 7 October and will then spend the day with JKZ on the Sunday. While in Netherlands the band will be checked out for a possible invitation to attend the Festival Mundial next June. This would enable us to organise a UK tour at the same time. As you see, we continue to dream and plan!

Once again on behalf of everyone at KGVI I want to thank you all so very much for supporting us over this past term. It is not good to think of our children without KGVI in their lives. Thank you for making it all possible!