

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

Emails: ilhussey@ecoweb.co.zw & kg6@ecoweb.co.zw

It has been a good term, full of activity. We have a good committee busy planning our 50th anniversary celebrations in July. The children have been involved with athletics, some of them even making it into the inter-schools league. The little ones as always enjoyed their wheelchair races, their banana and sack races. The older children were somewhat restricted by not being able to use our normal sports track which has become lost in the bushes with no grounds staff to keep it clear. We also organised a public speaking competition to try and instil some confidence into some of the seniors. The speeches were excellent on such matters as education, domestic violence and music. Goodwell who always claimed he was too embarrassed to speak out was the winner! This competition and a trip to see a Shakespeare play put on by another school has given me the opportunity to get to know the non disabled children at the school. They are good kids and I feel that the integration into KGVI has really helped them. Despite the growing numbers, now over 250, the school has not changed its image. Its still a cheerful, positive school where you feel inspired to do your best for all the children.

The therapy department has been also been active with their training programmes, using volunteers but also now organising workshops with local professionals. With the help of Marleen and Maaike from the Netherlands the physio now has two body building classes which the children love. The seniors have been also been training at a local gym once a week and the growing muscles are impressive. Marleen used some of the funds she had collected to buy some gym equipment in Botswana for the physio. The younger boys get their exercise by playing football on their knees on the lawn outside the physio. The volunteers have also taken them on a couple of trips to the local swimming pool which they really enjoy. Marleen also paid for the Ntombizodwa orphans to go for a weekend camp at Masiye where they enjoyed many activities and discussions. During the final week of term the group got together to choose cards to thank their extended families for taking care of them. They also took the opportunity to share the problems they all have to face as orphans.

The band have had a few bookings most notable was their appearance at the 50th anniversary of one of Bulawayo's biggest clothing manufacturers. This was held at the local Bulawayo 'castle' and the band thoroughly impressed 200 of Bulawayo's top business people. A couple of days later in total contrast they played for the opening of a borehole at a rural school in the Matobo district. This day was made more exciting when the bus became stuck half way across a flooded river (we seem to be having late rains this year). Great fun was had by all except the band members who got out of the bus and later had to be carried in their wheelchairs across the flooded river – we have some great photos of this! The band started the term by attending a 3 day music workshop where we worked on confidence, planning and new songs. In the three days the randomly paired members came up with 6 new songs. Four of these have been further developed and are now very impressive numbers including one that we are trying to interest Unicef in as it deals with the rights of children. Prudence is a wonder to watch as she nods her head, hums, points with her chin until she has exactly the tune she wants for her latest song. The band continues to improve and I long to get them heard and appreciated further afield.

Following a fund raising effort organised through JKZ we are expecting some funds for repairs. On the strength of this we have started the work before prices increase even further. We have dealt with nearly all the damage done during the big November storm. All the roofs have been repaired and the ceilings either patched, painted or replaced. The library and the Purple Future Houses have had their roofs re-built and the library was then repainted and is back in use. We now need to look at floors. We had hoped to put up an entertainment and meeting area for the boarders, just a floor and roof with bench seating around the edges

instead of walls. Unfortunately the funding for this fell away as the possible donor preferred to buy wheelchairs.

So yes, it has been a good term. The children on the whole have been healthy and cheerful. They will go home well fed and tough and they will need to be. If you want only the good news I suggest you stop reading now!

The other side makes grim reading! We have really struggled this term; struggled to find food for the children and struggled to keep our spirits up. The social problems are terrible with very few solutions coming to mind. We took in two more desperate cases during the term bringing our numbers to 97! Sininisabo is 11 years old when he arrived at KGVI he hadn't eaten for 2 days. His parents are dead and his family pass him from one member to the next as no one can afford yet another mouth to feed. He is a charming boy who has not stopped smiling since he found himself at KGVI. He is already assuming leadership of his house and is doing well in school despite all the months he missed out. But where will he go once term has ended and will he get enough to eat. But this worry is about so many of our children. With the known desperate cases we will give some food to help their families, but there will be many a child who finds little to nothing when they get home. Ginogirl was our second arrival. She had been involved in a car accident more than a year ago, she has permanent damage to her spine and leg but her mother was killed in the same accident. She was in hospital for months and her father never came to visit her. He has now abandoned her and it was a sister who brought her to KGVI. Again she was like a flower responding to a sudden spurt of water. What a delightful little girl, full of confidence and fun. Sadly she had to go back to hospital for further work on her leg, underwent one operation which was messed up, so two days later she had to have another one (newsflash, she couldn't because the doctors were on strike again). We can't wait to get her out and back to the security she was enjoying at KGVI. Energy also had to spend some time in hospital when they found a fracture in his leg. We bought the traction kit, he was set up for about a week and then suddenly they turned him out saying there wasn't anything more they could do. Energy was happy to be released but there had not been time for any improvement on his leg. The hospital is doing its best, it was clean, the windows were open for fresh air but the decay and dilapidation is sad to see.

Poverty and neglect is stalking every one of our children. Our social work team went to visit Buhle's home again. She is the child whose grandmother has lost all of her own children and has to care for several very young grandchildren. There was no one at home and no sign that a fire had been lit that morning, which means that no one in the family had eaten. The neighbours said the family were out looking for food, which crudely means they go round the neighbourhood begging for scraps. Buhle should be going home in a few days time when she will be put in charge of the babies while Gogo goes scrounging. Buhle herself is not well and needs a good diet and regular medical attention if she is to survive. How can we send her home and yet our policy has always been to keep the involvement with the family or we would end up as a full time orphanage. Yet none of us can help asking ourselves if we had kept David Ncube for the holidays would he be alive today. We will send Buhle's family some food and keep visiting and there will be many other families who will need the same. This term we have a social work student on attachment and she has joined Ma Nyathi on their visits. Just this past week they visited the family of some of our non disabled day scholars. Three of the family are at school but two older girls dropped out over a year ago in order to look after the younger children. The mother has a chronic heart condition which requires regular medication amounting to over Z\$900,000 per month. The father is employed as a messenger earning around Z\$100,000 per month if he is lucky! Can this be our problem... how can it not be. Earlier in the term we found an 11 year old bringing one of our disabled children to school. Both her parents were dead and she had been taken in by her aunt to care for her own children. We managed to persuade the aunt to allow this girl to come into school if we found the fees and then in the afternoon she will resume her duties as child minder. Where does it end? One of our past students turned up asking for help, she had been out of

school for 9 years had been 'married' and had a child. The father had then taken her child and kicked her out. We couldn't help her so we referred her to social welfare who pay something like \$8,000 per month to desperate cases, this will buy 2 and half loaves of bread!

It is impossible to understand how anyone continues to feed themselves in this country. When I say that the price of fuel goes up everyday that is a fact not an exaggeration. The blackmarket rate for the US dollar and the cost of fuel go up hand in hand. For I pound, today, you will get Z\$ 25,000 or to put it in a more shocking way, Z\$1 is now worth £0.0004! If we leave the zeros in and truly they should be there it becomes £0.0000004! Already in the first three months of this year we have spent more on food than we did the whole of last year. We try and keep giving our children a balanced diet but daily this becomes more and more expensive. It's the basics like meat, eggs, mealie meal and milk that go up so regularly and that affect every family in Zimbabwe. Flour and sugar are now unobtainable. For this term we have been using sugar we wisely bought in December. But what of next term, both sugar and flour are restricted products so you cant just nip over the border and buy them in Botswana. This agricultural season has been a disaster so there is already a shortage of our staple mealie meal. Thank goodness for World Vision who give us mealie meal, beans and cooking oil.

Precious does her best to keep up with supplies but this term she herself has been unwell as has Samantha. This has left us struggling in the office and reliant on Tapiwa who is doing an office apprenticeship as well as completing his O levels. Staff morale has amazingly been good, despite low wages, high costs and the depression that pervades all life in Zimbabwe. Our staff work hard and complain little and we do our part by trying to keep paying them a living wage. KGVI is still a happy place to be, but it is an oasis in a vast desert! We recently received a letter from the Ministry of Social Welfare where we have to send our audited accounts. They said they noted that we were running at a loss and had been doing so for some years and recommended that we try and do something about this!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Sadly we don't even seem to have dreams to live on at the moment. All the doors we have knocked on remain tightly closed against us. I would love to get the band overseas again and to get them some recognition, I wanted to get them together with some celebrity for our celebrations, we wanted to get a video on to local TV or to work with Unicef, we wanted to record a cd of our best songs. We had hoped to set up a nice meeting place and fun centre in the hostel; wouldn't it be great for Marvelous to work with the Orpheus Centre in UK; a chance for Pharis to work with a local radio station; some special health care for some of our children with chronic problems or if Prudence could earn just a bit more foreign currency she could build a tiny house on the plot of land she managed to buy after Sweden. Yes these are dreams and none of them are essential but they would have given us hope and encouragement; just imagine the lift to our spirits! Sadly the energy to keep on trying is being rapidly eroded.

For those of you who were brave enough to read this newsletter to the end, I am sorry to have depressed you. Thank you for your continuing support which is so vital for our survival. Please don't give up on us, don't get bored with our struggle. You are helping a small group of people not just survive but enjoy surviving. Those of you who send regular messages of sympathy and support can only imagine how these encourage us, thank you. I only wish that you could all come and help us celebrate in July. Our statement for the celebration is '*50 years of Ability*'. Lets hope our ability will continue to keep us strong. Thank you to you all!

PS Thanks to Barry in Pittsburgh the KGVI website has been re launched on Google along with a new one for Liyana.