

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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It has been a good term – I can't believe I am actually writing that! We have been so busy with the 50th anniversary celebrations we have almost been able to forget about the problems of life in Zimbabwe. There are so many positive things I can write about – amazing!

What a powerful message we gave to the people of Bulawayo. Our bright t-shirts with the message – *50 Years of Ability* on the front and *Never Give Up* on the back were seen en masse in the streets as we marched to the City Hall on 6 July. We were led by the marimba band in a truck then our well-trained and smartly-dressed drum majorettes followed by the children and staff. Thanks to the incredible organisation of the teachers in charge we left 10 minutes early and arrived at the City Hall a whole hour earlier than anticipated! We then had to persuade the Mayor to come out early to address us. The next day with the hard work of Kez and teachers we provided lunch to over 400 people with all the present pupils and staff, many past pupils and staff and some invited guests. We were very grateful to all the Bulawayo companies who made this possible with their donations of either food or cash. The two celebrations shows held at the Bulawayo theatre were great entertainment from beginning to end, a great chance to relax and forget Zim worries for a couple of hours. Liyana band were as good as ever, in fact better than ever, and with the help of a good sound system the beautiful voice of Prudence came over loud and clear. The band presented several new songs which they had written themselves, among them *Children are Special* about the rights of children; *Peace Order* about peace in the home; *Sharon*, a love song and *Never Give Up*, a song written by Tapiwa and Prudence especially for the show. Other entertainment included a group of deaf dancers performing a well-co-ordinated Jive and a signed song. A very moving rendition of *You Raise Me Up* was sung by Prudence who also designed the dance that accompanied it. The show opened with a short drama written by Marvelous about disability and KGVI. The success of the shows is even more remarkable considering that Prudence was sick, Marvelous had just heard that his brother in law had been killed in an accident and Tapiwa was in great pain. Two days after the show he was rushed home to Harare to see his specialist and we hope to get his condition treated once and for all. The courage of our children is a lesson to us all.

It was good to catch up with some of our school leavers, Nyasha who is now coaching wheelchair tennis and playing matches in South Africa, Nqobile who runs a printing business and Kudakwashe who is working as a scriptwriter for a popular local TV show. Kuda is very disabled with difficult speech but a determination to communicate. He came with his employers and a team from his workplace as they wanted to interview some KGVI people for a documentary they are making on Kuda – a real success story and a good lesson for all our present students.

The tennis programme has spread to KGVI where Nyasha is coaching 3 of our students and has excited them with the possibility of a trip to South Africa to compete with other teams. Writing about sport at KGVI has to include our football team. Our younger boys do their physio exercise by piling out of their wheelchairs and scrambling around on the lawn outside the physiotherapy. Here they play a very energetic game of football, each of them moving in whatever way gets them to the ball the fastest – knees or bottoms it all works! Maaiké, our present volunteer even arranged an exciting match with the boys to entertain everyone at the celebration lunch – Brazil vs Zimbabwe and of course Zimbabwe won! Our wheelchair basketball team have also played and won a couple of matches against Jairos Jiri.

We have also been busy with the filming of the music video for *Umntwana we Qhawe*, (Son of a Hero) which was the winning song at the Crossroads competition and has become the number Liyana is now associated with. Prudence chose the cast from among our senior students with Vusani cast as the *son of the hero*. She then wrote the script, worked out a dance and trained her team. We chose a lovely sight in the Matopos to film the band and then

travelled for 3 hours on atrocious dirt roads to complete the filming in Kezi as the script has a rural setting. After 3 hours dancing in the middle of a sandy river bed in the full sun the dancers were exhausted but somehow we went on and completed the filming with a triumphant wedding scene just as the sun was going down. We hope to get the dvd released in September and it will make an excellent fund raiser for KGVI so if anyone wants a copy let us know. The dvd also shows some background material on KGVI. In addition the Alliance Française paid to make a dvd of the entire 50th celebrations which will also be available soon.

Just before the end of term the band were invited to play at the Jairos Jiri farm where the Vice President was to accept JJs invitation to be their patron. The lady fell immediately in love with the band and came down to dance with them. The Minister of Information who was also there pledged to make a recording of the band and to help them publicise themselves. They then had very good coverage in the local media. The advantages and disadvantages of this speak for themselves!

There is little point in my trying to make sense of the craziness that is Zimbabwe in this report. I will just state the facts as they affect KGVI and our children. In any case it is almost impossible to understand the economics of Zimbabwe. In my last letter I said that the pound was worth Z\$25,000. In the middle of this term it reached as high as Z\$400,000 and then sank again to its present rate of Z\$280,000. What this meant in real terms is that prices changed by the day, sometimes even twice a day. Fuel was on sale at service stations but the price increased literally every day and that is what controlled the currency rate. However if you had the money you could buy most things you needed. With the recent price controls introduced the shelves are empty and so many basic food commodities like meat and bread are just not available as no one can afford to replace or manufacture goods at below cost price. At KGVI our needs are simple and a quick shopping trip before the shelves emptied got us things like tea, soap and toilet paper for next term. Precious then miraculously arranged an import permit for us and we brought in flour, rice, soya mince and cooking oil. Where we will struggle is with protein. Meat has disappeared from the shelves as the price for a beast is way below replacement costs and in addition all private abattoirs have had their licences cancelled. The tiny dried fish (kapenta) we used to get for the kids seem to have escaped price controls and is far too expensive and beans and eggs have basically disappeared as everyone tries to buy these two last sources of affordable protein. At least we have the holiday to try and solve this latest headache. Precious continues to make her contacts and has done a fantastic job of keeping the kids fed over this past term. So we are in the strange position of having reduced prices on some goods, no replacement of goods and yet some items remain at horrendously high rates and with the foreign exchange rates dropping there is less ready money available. The school has just very hopefully dropped two bills on my desk – stationery at 200 million and cleaning materials at 51million. Which asks the question how are other schools managing? I guess they are not as we recently had a teacher join KGVI who had never taught in a school where the children had desks! The school fees for schools like KGVI are still pegged at a per head rate of Z\$2,500 (1p) for junior schools and Z\$6,000 for senior schools! Incidentally I was very touched recently when our 5 little deaf girls from Sunshine House came into my room and gave me some paper money they had made and told me it was to help buy food!

Schools are struggling in so many ways and with so many leaving we are lucky to have a full complement of teachers and teachers who are still prepared to put in that extra bit as was proved by all the work done by our Celebration Committee. However half way through the term the school staff requested to work a half day as things like transport costs, lack of water and electricity and food created extra problems and could mean a family eating as late as ten o'clock at night.. This meant the kids had no afternoon activities so we asked for volunteers and the 12 teachers who did so now receive a monthly 'incentive' from the Centre. We still have some good staff and at the end of term consultation this was proved by much improvement in the children's results. It seems that our constant nagging has got through and nearly all the boarders had excellent reports. The O level students and Grade 7s will be

spending some of the holidays doing extra lessons again with 'volunteer' teachers. KGVI has been lucky not to be affected by too many electricity cuts but the water is now turned off nearly every afternoon. We have had to counteract this by paying to have our borehole water connected to the hostel and school. Zimbabweans are nothing if not resourceful but it does all cost money!

Only one child was left at the end of term and had to be delivered home. We do worry what many of our children will find when they get home. There is scarcity of so many things and with a poor harvest no mealie meal even for our rural families. Three families will be given food parcels for the holidays and Ma Nyathi, our self trained social worker has been very busy visiting families with problems and even adding some of our desperate school leavers to her list of visits. This holiday she will be keeping an eye on 11 vulnerable children. She has been helped this term by Olinah a student on attachment from the School of Social Work in Harare. We continue to give lunch to some of the day scholars and pay bus fares for 20 children whose parents could by no means afford the millions required each month. Actually at the moment there is very little transport anyway as fuel has been reduced to Z\$60,000 (GBP 0.21) per litre which means that it is no longer available – we await the arrival of cheap fuel from Libya! This term was supposed to see the start of our Unicef supported programme in support of orphans and vulnerable children. We had 40 boarders listed for support under this programme and it was also to have paid MaNyathi's salary. The funds are being distributed by an umbrella organisation for the disabled and as excuse follows excuse we are seriously concerned that the money may have 'got lost'! It is an important programme which would help us provide both material and social support to our more desperate children, so we are still praying that the money will be 'found'!

The term did sadly bring some serious medical problems. Tapiwa is still awaiting a final solution to his ongoing bouts of pain. Ginogirl one of our newcomers needs surgery to straighten her legs so that she can try to learn to walk again and Samson is still awaiting his amputation so he can be fitted with a prosthesis. No doctors and only emergency operations being carried out has put paid to any hopes for these two. We now have to see if we can work something by going the private route or even looking at South Africa. Meanwhile Brilliant's asthmatic attacks are getting worse and he has twice had to be rushed to hospital literally at death's door. When you have so many children with so many problems to care for someone is bound to lose out along the way. Brilliant became very depressed and we realised that because he had suffered these attacks for so long we had all just come to take them for granted and were not giving him the support he needed. Mrs Mguni has been very good at keeping him away from anything perceived as a threat to the extent that he has been excluded from everything and had become to think that life just wasn't worth fighting for. He also presents us with a problem for the future. Brilliant is an orphan whose family don't know how to cope with the asthma attacks, already other members of his family have died from these. If we send him away when he finishes school either this year or next he will surely die but can we keep him at KGVI for ever, doing what? A very real dilemma.

To finish on a positive note, KGVI is about survival, it is about ability, it is about friendship, it is about never giving up. When we were filming our music video out in the Matopos, Farai insisted on being carried down to the bottom of the kopje (rock face). He then faces a very difficult climb back up via a different route. He says, *Mrs Hussey I have to climb that rock* and off he goes. Immediately 2 of the deaf boys are there, they never help him but they are behind him ready if he should slip. He safely reached the top very pleased with himself. Our slogan for our celebrations was *Never Give Up*. We haven't and we don't intend to but we do need friends behind us just in case we also should slip. Thank you for being those friends!

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