

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

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

Liyana's music dvd is now available with a short documentary on KGVI. This will be useful for fund raising so if anyone would like a copy please send your physical address and your copy can be posted from the UK.

How to even start writing about such a confused term? It is difficult to tell anyone just how impossible the situation is. Most Zimbabweans don't need much to live on - mealie meal, meat, milk, bread, cooking oil, vegetables and toiletries are the basic requirements. If I tell you that the only one of these available in the shops is the vegetables you begin to understand the problem. People are leaving in floods and those who remain are totally depressed. To add to these woes most urban areas now have no regular water supplies and constant electrical cuts. The water situation in Bulawayo is critical as our dams are empty. There have been several outbreaks of horrible diarrhoea including at KGVI where at one time we had all the children and most of the staff affected. The really tragic part of this is that one of our students, Chipo, who had been taken home by her foster family, actually died, partly due to the fact that the local hospital wouldn't take her in saying they had no doctors and no drip kits!

Believe it or not there are still some positive things to write about, at least at KGVI! So much of our energy has to go in finding ways to survive but somehow there has still been plenty of other things keeping us busy. It's been a term for workshops and counselling. Samantha and some of the older girls attended a course in the holidays on how to offer life skills training to young people. They put this into practise with our 12 to 14 year olds and held an excellent week long workshop where everything and anything was discussed. They followed this up with a 3 day trip to Masiye Camp where they were also able to enjoy canoeing, abseiling and zipwiring. They also enjoyed a visit with a class of similar aged children from one of the private schools. They shared food, friendship and experiences when the other school was taught sign language and how to manage in wheelchairs.

This term also brought a bulgar wheat cooking competition organised by World Vision. Fifteen organisations came to KGVI and had to cook bulgar wheat in an interesting and nourishing way. All the other organisations brought their kitchen staff so KGVI was the only one where students were participating. Of course Samson, Hilary, Brenda and MaDube walked away with the first prize and all remembered Kez with great affection, she was the one who showed us so many ways of using this rather boring starch.

Our present volunteers, Wendy and Sanne have been welcome additions to the staff with Wendy in the physio department and Sanne undertaking some intensive counselling. Wendy has delighted the girls with exercises to pop music and has even braved the hydrotherapy pool with many children, including our over-eager younger deaf children. We always so much enjoy visitors either long term or short term. Gwyn and his team came from Wales and joined the school for an assembly as well as bringing many goodies and some money to help Samson with his artificial leg.

Counselling has also been ongoing with the deaf girls. Sanne has a keen group of teenage girls discussing the things that bother teenage girls all over the world but first she had to learn sign language! The Form 3s and 4s have been involved in a weekly careers guidance course which has seen them make various visits and we have also had some people here to carry out mock interviews and to talk about various options at the local technical college and the university. Eight of our school leavers have applied for courses at the technical college including art & design, hotel catering, architecture and secretarial. All these young people have such high hopes, let's hope that Zimbabwe doesn't let them down. We are establishing

close links with the tech which includes our senior deaf girls doing an affiliated hair dressing course with them. The KGVI teachers who started all this even bamboozled us into starting our own hair salon in a tiny room off our hydrotherapy pool.

Then there was our inter-schools art competition and exhibition which followed our 50th anniversary theme 'Never Give Up'. Everyone was busy painting and we were really pleased to have some entries from the Netherlands and the USA. The winner was a boy from a rural school who perfectly depicted one of our water queues. Prudence won first prize in the open class with a mixed media painting of a child in a wheelchair being pulled up a hill! Our Liyana music video was launched at the same time. This was shown for the first time at an arts festival in Bristol in October. Our filming careers did not end there as we were asked to make an educational HIV AIDS film under the Unicef and NASCOH (National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped) Orphaned & Vulnerable Children's programme. Marvelous wrote the script, Prudence wrote an excellent song called *Sugar Rhythms*. Tapiwa played the main role with some of the other children and even some staff. A very moving film with a powerful message which will be released by the end of November. These guys now have so much talent and so much confidence!

In fact our Form 4s have so much confidence that they have asked to take over the annual prize giving concert. We are not to do anything while they take over the planning, auditions, rehearsals, everything. While Farai and Tapiwa put music onto our donated laptop and tell us to trust them, we wait with some trepidation but on the whole confidence. These are good kids and we will miss them. It is good also to see how the non disabled children have so easily become part of the KGVI family and we think have become more caring people for the time they have spent here but they do present us with another one of those dilemmas – can we afford to help socially desperate children or should we only concentrate on those with disabilities? MaNyathi has been so busy this term checking up on one desperate child after another. We now have 3 families with 3 disabled children in the family and of course they all want to come to KGVI. As more and more schools and institutions give up we get more families at our door asking for places and every family has a desperate story to tell like the 12 year old girl abandoned to the care of her sister and being sexually abused by her grandfather or the deaf boy who steals from everyone, including KGVI, but who nobody wants!

With thanks to JKZ we have been able to undertake so many long outstanding repairs to roofs, ceilings and floors. After two break-ins during the holidays we also had to put up burglar bars in all the school windows – a real sign of the times. Now that water is only available 2 or 3 times a week we also had to spend some of these funds on converting our system to take borehole water. Now we not only supply our vegetable garden and the hostel and school but also many people in the surrounding suburbs who would otherwise have nothing – pray the borehole can keep delivering! We were also allocated the funds from Beit Trust to build a new school hall but this just did not come about as after the notorious price fixing building companies, along with so many others, just gave up. It also somehow didn't seem quite right to be building something as non essential as a school hall when there are so many other desperate problems.

The economic situation is even more chaotic. Sorry if I bore you with this but in order to understand our situation you need to have some idea of what is happening. In my last letter I said that one pound was worth Z\$280,000, it has been steadily rising and is now worth over Z\$2million! But the problem is that prices have now moved so high that we are often paying more for goods than you do overseas, whilst still getting pitiful Zim salaries. Fuel which follows the blackmarket rate for the US\$ is now 7 million for 5 litres. One of our students coming from the other side of town now needs Z\$14,000,000 (US\$14) for just one week's journeys. The price restrictions did nothing other than remove goods from the shops. Well they never came back so we still have empty shelves and whenever anything does become available the prices are now beyond understanding. Still in our search for protein we try eggs now at 1.4 million per dozen, dried beans at 75 million a bag, kapenta (the dried fish) at 225

million a bag. So we look again at meat – still not available in the shops and we are told over 2 million a kg and in Harare selling at US\$5 per kg – and that's for hard US currency! We tried to import some flour but it was seized at the border and now has to go to be tested for genetic modification contamination before they will release it to us and so it goes on!!!!!!

The situation for our teachers is desperate. They started the term earning an average salary of 3 million (US\$6.50) per month, half way through the term they were given an increase to around 13 million (US\$13)! It is criminal to pay such important people such a pathetic wage. They are some of the lowest paid workers in Zimbabwe. We are now having to find ways to increase their monthly take home money in order to encourage them to stay at KGVI! We are one of the few schools that has a full complement of teachers this term! We even had some students from a nearby government school coming to KGVI to study because they had no teachers! Just managing to source some mealie meal and cooking oil for them has helped to encourage our teachers to stay! The hospitals are still in dire straits with the doctors and nurses being paid little more than the teachers. There are so few nurses in our local hospital that it is basically staffed by army nurses. Samson and Ginogirl recently spent some time there following their operations. As soon as we agreed to pay many millions to the doctor to go the private route their operations were arranged the very next day.

On the positive side I can report that the magic of KGVI is still there and we are still here but we have to keep reminding each other of our motto – *Never Give Up*. I can never tire of thanking you for not becoming bored of us and our problems. Thank you so very much to everyone who cared and helped through the year. You keep us going not just with financial support but with your caring – a very sincere thank you from us all at KGVI.

November 2007