

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

Emails: ihussey@kg6.co.zw, dkatandika@kg6.co.zw

If you haven't already visited check out the following:

KGVI web site: <http://kinggeorge6.googlepages.com/home>

Liyana web site: <http://liyana.kg6.googlepages.com/>

iThemba youtube ; <http://www.youtube.com/iTemba>

This term must have been our worst yet. Everyone is very depressed and we have struggled to keep staff motivated. We almost failed to find enough protein for the children and we certainly struggled to bring in enough money and to find the cash demanded by most companies. The cost of transport became too much for most staff and we were forced to agree to transport over 20 staff daily in our ancient green bus. Many day scholars stopped coming to school because we couldn't find enough cash to provide them with their daily bus fare. When I talk of cash, I mean actual notes. With the breakdown of our currency everyone now demands to be paid in cash, with the huge amounts needed it is literally impossible for the powers that be to print enough. The standard cost of most items became 1 trillion dollars which could require 200 or more notes. At the beginning of August we dropped 10 zeroes from our currency which has totally confused everyone. The old coins, not used since 2002, are once again valid currency but so are the old notes, so you could be charged either Z\$100 or Z\$1 trillion for your bottle of Coca Cola! We finally hit the quadrillions this week when we were quoted 1.2 quadrillion for our cleaning chemicals for the first month of next term! These will now be added to the long list of items we have to buy over the border. Yesterday we were quoted 1.2 trillion for some pills, today the cost has gone to 123 trillion - this is for real not a story! To give you an idea of cost escalations I have included a price comparison table below.

Apart from perishables we now buy all our food in Botswana. We were receiving basics like mealie meal and beans from World Vision. When the government stopped all organisations from distributing food we were really in trouble as we couldn't find enough protein. The little kapenta fish which we used to get are way too expensive, beans were not to be found anywhere and meat is now paid for with foreign currency (even in the rural areas a chicken is now sold for 50 Rand). We gave them eggs, soya chunks a little donated meat and loads of vegetables – a healthy diet perhaps but not very appealing. Despite all these problems it is sad to reflect on the fact that our children are probably some of the best fed in the country, far too many families have been reduced to one meal a day.

Since my last newsletter we have been through two elections, neither of which have made any difference to the situation in the country. Schools were closed for a week during the June elections but we kept most of the children here both for their safety but also because of the astronomical cost of transport to their homes. Samantha took the opportunity to run a Life Skills workshop for the seniors and the therapy staff occupied the juniors. At KGVI we remained sheltered from the worst effects of the March to June period. However most families had some story to tell. The worst was Buhle's Gogo who was beaten around the back and arms while the local girls were taken into the bush and raped by the thugs. You may remember this poor lady as the one who is taking care of all her grandchildren with no source of income at all. Buhle herself is HIV positive. Enough for anyone to have to deal with but she was just grateful that Buhle wasn't at home when this happened. We also had a refugee from the north east of the country who said she would never go home again and could we fit her daughter into the school. The situation with the teachers has not improved and we remain one of the few government schools with a full complement of teachers. They finally received their pay increment in July but this is now only enough to buy two bottles of Coca Cola and certainly not enough to cover daily transport costs. We help where we can but somehow it is never enough. Mid term we had a deaf teenager from another school down on his knees pleading to be taken into any class at KGVI just so that he can be in a school with teachers. A

very determined young man this one and he is now very much part of our deaf community. Meanwhile our classes bulge at the seams.

What we can not do much about is the general depression and despair felt by everyone. To try and cheer ourselves up we decided to hold an annual KGVI day, so this year we celebrated our 51st birthday! We had a good organising committee and for a while everyone was too busy to be depressed. It was good to have Maaïke and Marleen from JKZ join us for the occasion. We had sports events ranging from chess to tug-of-war to a very lively netball match between centre and school staff. Everyone was invited to display their work so we had independent living, classroom, therapy and art displays with the winning group being one of our nursery classes who sang and put on a very cute play. We then had a variety show with much dancing, singing and acting. One of the great things about KGVI is that everyone gets a chance so young Thembani sang a song in his very shaky voice but was thoroughly cheered by everyone. The grand finale was lunch for everyone! The KGVI family is now around 400 people with all the children and staff and then we had some rather hungry parents who turned up and weren't going anywhere until they had shared our lunch so there wasn't really enough to go around – but a bit like the story in the Bible, we managed to provide! Some of our school leavers also turned up and it was good to see troublesome young Portia looking very smart and confident and telling us about her hairdressing apprenticeship at home in Gweru. Then Samson arrived standing tall on his prosthetic leg and telling us of his quarter-final victory in an international wheelchair tennis championship in South Africa. Nyasha, another one of our school leavers, won the tournament and is now competing in Europe. Such good stories sustain us and make it all worthwhile.

We also have some hard working students still in school. Goodwell, Honest and Energy all worked day and night this term and opted to write their O levels mid year instead of at the end of the year. The usual June exams were disrupted by the second elections but finally with only a week's notice they started their exams in July. We are keeping our fingers crossed that the ministry of education will find teachers willing to undertake the marking for the pittance they will be paid and that in this event the boys will all pass. The remaining 5 O level students will stay during the coming holidays for extra lessons and will write in November.

We have also been busy with disability workshops run by therapy staff. These proved to be very popular and everyone was impressed with the insight most of the children have about their disabilities. All the children were grouped into their disability groups and then spent the day learning, discussing and understanding. The muscular dystrophy children were grouped with the osteogenesis imperfecta (brittle bones) and some interesting comparisons were made. Each child was asked what their dreams were and told that nothing is impossible. Thembani wanted to get fat and drive his own car. Sadly for the getting fat bit we can't really help as he has the wasting version of MD but for the other, there is Edmore in Harare who works for the Reserve Bank and imported his own disability car! We also held two AIDS workshops, one for students and one for staff. These were facilitated by Courage, another of our past pupils.

However what really kept us busy this term was the filming of the documentary about Liyana. The fact that we were able to bring three American film makers into the country just before the June elections was a miracle and required the services of several people in high places! Twice they were nearly deported but somehow everything sorted itself out and they were here for two months. During that time we were followed round by a very fancy camera recording our every action, word, and even thought! The band members were all interviewed several times and were incredibly frank about the problems they experienced growing up as disabled people in Zimbabwe. As Marvelous puts it – *'every disabled person has a story to tell'*. The film when it is finally released will definitely be a tear jerker. So far they have produced a 2 minute trailer which should appear on youtube soon and are working on a 20 minute trailer. They are coming back in October to film the band's rural homes and will then proceed with the editing which we are told will take 6 months! They have to bring something like 400 hours or more footage down to a 90 minute documentary! Prudence wrote 2 new songs for the film, one about KGVI and the other a superb accapello song called *iThemba* which will

definitely bring tears to your eyes. The film has her singing it on the top of a kopje (rocky hill) in the Matopos with the setting sun shining on her tears. The film is supposed to end with Liyana in America and in fact they have been told that this will happen in December or January. If it does happen I will let you all know where and when. We would love to be excited about this but for the moment we daren't be until we are more sure.

Also for the film we put on a show at the Amakhosi Theatre. Again this was during the June election period so we had to invite an audience of special education teachers and a couple of schools as well as all the KGVI seniors. Liyana played all their new songs and a great time was had by all. They then recorded a new 12 song cd called *Sugar Rhythms* which will be produced in USA. I will let you know when it is available. Liyana has come a long way since the first cd. To end the term they played at a rock concert featuring an up and coming South African rock group. We had been told that Liyana couldn't play rock so we could not be a part of this event so I challenged the band to come up with a rock song. Within a week we had '*Going Nowhere*', a topical song with a great beat. The words are amazing and include the words '*struggling for everything*' which tells you what the song is about!

The situation here only becomes more difficult and this is a very tough time for everyone. However reading through this letter I realize that despite everything we actually achieved a surprising amount. Without all our friends we would long ago have gone under. So in Zimbabwean terms we thank you all **one quadrillion times** for your so valuable support. Special thanks must go to the girls of JKZ who give up so much of their valuable time to fund raising for KGVI. You are all wonderful!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

August 2008

Cost Comparison Table

| Item | December 07 | March 08 | July 08 |
|-----------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| | Z\$ | Z\$ | Z\$ |
| Foreign currency (to 1 GBP) | 2 million | 65 million | 1.2 trillion |
| Fuel (5litres) | 7 million | 200 million | 1.5 trillion |
| Bus fares (1 journey) | 700,000 | 20 million | 100 billion |
| Bus fares to KGVI (1 week) | 14 million | 400 million | 2 trillion |
| Eggs – 1 dozen | 1.4 million | 48 million | 900 billion |
| Meat (1kg) | 15 million | 45 million | 150 billion |
| Mealie meal (10kg) | 10 million | 130 million | 500 billion |
| Teachers salary | 13 million | 5 billion | 2 trillion |
| KGVI weekly vegetables | 40 million | 1.3 billion | 3 trillion |