

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE – April 2020

KGVI food production fund raising : www.totalgiving.co.uk/mypage/kgvi2020

(I know fund raising will be a problem going forward but please help us to raise money for our self-sufficiency projects. This is going to be so important for our survival!)

This is a difficult report to write. Do I start off with the bad news from Zimbabwe or write much as usual with the ups and downs of KGVI. I don't think any country in the world can ignore the devastation of the Covid 19 virus so I will start with how this has and will impact on Zimbabwe and therefore KGVI.

The Present Situation in Zimbabwe

It is as it always is in Zimbabwe - chaotic. We have no information as to the true rate of infection. We went into lock down on 30th March but this doesn't really work for Zimbabweans. If you have no money and no food and too often no water then staying at home becomes a very difficult choice. There has been a critical shortage of the staple mealie meal for some time and of course this was made worse by panic buying. Now if a shop happens to have some bags of mealie meal there is immediately a huge crowd of desperate people trying to buy it and not paying any heed to the warnings of social distancing!

We were slow to take the virus seriously and for a long time people believed it would not hit Zimbabwe. So information was slow to get out and to be taken seriously. There are so few supplies in hospitals or clinics and no protection whatsoever for health workers who have basically refused to come to work - and who can blame them when they have no form of personal protection and no resources either. We have two isolation hospitals in the country but they are very basic (a room, a bed and a bucket) and again have no medical resources whatsoever. One local doctor sent out a message telling Zimbabweans just stay at home and don't get the virus because there is no treatment available in Zimbabwe. Yesterday a message was sent out from our main funeral home announcing that they are no longer supplying buses for funerals and will not collect any bodies from homes or hospitals unless there is a clearance certificate to state that the person did not die from Covid 19 infection.

We have no idea of the true rate of infections or deaths. We receive photos of our police on the streets beating up vulnerable people they see out and about. The situation is dire. Sorry to have to tell you all this but this is the truth for Zimbabweans. Social media like WhatsApp informs people and we continue to support each other via this platform. Zimbabweans have always been able to make a plan through all the troubles that have been thrown at us, let's hope we can find a way through this one too.

At KGVI we had to send our children home two weeks early and most of them really didn't want to go. They knew what awaited them at home and how protected they are at KGVI. We made sure they were well informed about the dangers of the virus and that they were equipped with information to take home to their families and local communities. We discovered that our deaf children had little to no accurate information as no one considers how little they pick up from the sources we hearing people can rely on. We did our very best to make sure that our children know how to protect themselves but we worry about how they will get on and what their families will do for food and for medical attention. We don't even know when they will be able to come back.

Some Good News:

- **Two workshops** were held in Mawabeni, our **rural outreach** area. This is our chosen area to work closely with the community to increase disability awareness and to ensure inclusivity in the local school. The biggest impact the team had on the community was

Farai who not only drove the team to Mawabeni but was then wheeling himself everywhere filming and then there was Mongiwe, one of our deaf school leavers, who assisted with the preparing and serving of food. Seeing the ability of these two KGVI team members did more for advocacy than any words could.

- We were invited by the Swedish Embassy and the Legal Resources Foundation to take part in a **child rights** art competition and discussion group. Not only did we win awards for our art but **Laura and Blossom** impressed everyone with their participation in the discussion areas. The confidence of our students never fails to impress both us and anyone who works with them.
- **Tapiwa** in our Form 3 deaf class was one of the artists who won \$100 in the above mentioned art competition. He then committed to work in the art department for the rest of the term in order to add earnings to be able to buy himself a second hand laptop. This was his dream and he made it happen!
- **Samantha** in Form 3 was anxious to continue with the filming of the **KGVI Young Achievers** programme even though her mentor Marvelous was unable to come in this term. Right at the end of term she and Tapiwa (above) set about making a short documentary on our independent living programme. Sadly they did not have time to edit this with Farai before the term came to its abrupt end. I am sure you will all enjoy this documentary when we are all back at KGVI.
- Although we had to cancel our senior sports we were able to hold our **Infants sports day**. What an inspiring event with many new ideas and our enthusiastic infant's teachers arranging a flawless morning. The kids had a wonderful time running, walking, cartwheeling, filling water bottles, threading beads, carrying eggs and many more innovative events. No one could be failed to be moved by the sight of one of our little girls with no hands or feet being encouraged to throw a beanbag into a bucket. A truly inclusive event. Farai was in the process of editing a short film on this event to share with a school in the Netherlands that had raised money for KGVI with a sponsored walk organised by the son of one of our original volunteers – a real family event! We will send out links to the video when it is completed.

Two Reports

Part of the exam given to the Management Support Team required them to write a short report on something that happened this term. Here are two of these reports:

A Good Teacher by Samantha –: The current Grade 4 class was considered to be a difficult and non performing class. This has been a problem for the past few years and there was little idea of whether the problem lay with the teachers or with the children. Efforts were made to seriously investigate what could be happening and to map out a possible solution. All the children underwent psychological assessments and it was seen that the children were performing at average or normal level but come to classroom no results were being achieved. Finally this year the class was given to a teacher who has children at heart and has a real passion for teaching. Mrs Gavhera goes out of her way and makes sure she gets results. She devotes her time and resources to make sure the child is able to learn and become independent in terms of writing. It became clear that no one was being patient enough with the children. Most of the children in that class have severe disabilities such as cerebral palsy, which affects their speech making it hard for them to be understood. Three months after the start of the first term and Mrs Gavhera has worked tirelessly and closely with these children. She has managed to sit Aquilla properly and he is now able to read and socialise with his peers. It was discovered that one of the reasons for his poor performance was that he was tired from being wheeled every day to and from school. In addition to this he was not properly fed which made him malnourished and weak. Mrs Gavhera gave the mother some food after discovering this and within 3 weeks there was a great improvement

with the child's performance and participation in class. As for the rest of the class all that was required was passion and patience towards the children. Within the first 3 months already results are being seen and the previous perception of the class turned out to be wrong. All it takes is a kind heart, patience and passion towards children with disabilities in order to achieve results.

KGVI Production Department by Loma: When the economy is not performing well there is a reason for every organisation to look at plans of survival. As King George VI we have not been spared; the cost of living has gone up affecting the children in our care who deserve to have a balanced meals all the time. As a result we came up with the idea of having a production department which will help King George to be self-sufficient. To beef up our efforts a net-house and tomato seedlings were donated in the later part of last year by a local company. It was a new venture which we willingly embraced. We are happy to report that we have already had a good harvest of tomatoes. To date we have harvested about 250 x 20kg crates of excellent quality tomatoes. We have been able to feed both day scholars and boarders. We have also preserved some by freezing and we are now looking at solar drying. We still had an excess which we are selling to the community and staff as well. With the sales we are assured of getting all the inputs for the next crop which will be peas. The money has also been used to buy chemicals needed for the tomatoes. The net house did however add onto the workload of the current staff and we had to employ a qualified gardener to work specifically in the net house. The salary of the gardener is paid from the sales. This has been a good project which indicated that we can be self-sufficient. This has enabled us to network with other organisations like farmers who have come from faraway places to see the tomatoes that have become so popular in the community. The success of this project prompted us to look at other ways we could produce our own food and we are now fund raising to set up small livestock projects as well as further expand the garden. We understand that following the Covid 19 crisis overseas aid will be limited and so we have to try and be as self-sufficient as we can.

Management of KGVI

At the end of term we just managed to hold a farewell party for David Katandika before the lock down. It was a happy/sad occasion as David and I have been running KGVI for over 20 years now. Everyone had something to share about his time at KGVI, mainly on how supportive he was when anyone was in trouble. We all have memories of shoving into his office and pouring out our woes only for him to put things into perspective and send you out to get on with your work. He was a good mentor and friend and we will all miss his naughty sense of humour which often lightened our loads on a tough day. His makeshift sign forbidding women or those in wheelchairs from entering his office would all too often end in as many of the 'offenders' as possible marching into his office to challenge his latest directive!

The Management Support Team which will ultimately be taking over the running of KGVI have been undergoing a thorough training for the past two years. Recently they were set a comprehensive exam covering all the areas they have been learning about. Forty questions, many requiring complex answers took most of the team all day to answer but ultimately all 8 of the team passed with flying colours. The final question was - ***Do you think there is a future for KGVI? Give good reasons for your answer.*** I thought you might be interested in a couple of those answers:

"I think there is a future for King George VI because as we have said in the Strategic plan we want to be 80% self-sufficient by 2023, we are on track as seen in the net house where we had a good crop of tomatoes. A Production Department has been set up where we already have hens and are building up for further small livestock and more production in the gardens.

As we continue reviewing our fees realistically eg boarding, therapy and sign language King George will be enabled to keep on running.”

“There has been proper succession planning and I think the Management Support Team has been trained and can take the baton on. It all starts with passion and having the same vision and dream that we want to achieve this same goal. The MST is founded of people with those values and our aim is to keep KGVI operating. The MST should maintain if not do better to keep improving the standards and quality of KGVI. Yes we have our own weakness which I am sure will not pull down the organisation but should be turned into stepping stones for KGVI to excel more. The team hold very valuable strengths and we will utilize each other’s strengths whether in problem solving or just in the day to day running of the organisation.

What this present crisis has shown us, even more than usual is how important our work is, how without KGVI these children would be neglected and ignored. It is our job and our mission to empower and inform our children so that in times of crisis they have some resources of their own to sustain them and their families. This must be our mission and we hope that you will be able to continue to help us achieve this. Thank you to all those who have worried about us and we in turn worry about you and send out our love and support and prayers!

