

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2006

It is hard to believe that in a few weeks the new school will be a year old. The spindly little trees are growing well and we had our first show of flowers from the new beds. Since November we have had almost continuous rain which has turned my daily trips into a 4x4 experience as we slithered and slipped our way through the villages. (to the absolute delight of the children...)

Correspondence has been a nightmare... We are still waiting for our landline and I could fill a few pages with the saga of the local Telkom Company. Excuses included, waiting for poles from Pretoria, and the latest, a hold up because of parts coming from Germany... Extremely frustrating as the little shop near us and the Secondary school behind us have telephones, so it seemed a simple matter to add our line. Apparently there is a waiting list of 2000 applicants so even when the technical problems have been solved, we can still expect a long wait... Heartfelt apologies to all who have received little, or worse, no mail for a while.

To date we have 29 children, 15 of which are sponsored by generous folk from the U.K. and U.S.A. Hopefully they all received their end of year reports and photographs. We took the plunge and started Grade 1 at the beginning of the year. Teacher Florence has 11 children in her Grade R and Grade 1 class, and the smaller children have lessons with our Peace Corps volunteer. We will have to try and get funding to build another classroom this year so we can progress to Grade 2. According to Educational boffins, if we can teach our children 'til Grade 3 they will have a good base, and continuing their studies at the local schools will not be so detrimental... As the classes get bigger we will obviously have to start thinking about another teacher. At the moment we are looking for sponsors for 7 children so if there are any kind folk out there that would like to make a difference in a vulnerable child's life, then please get in touch (details at bottom of page)

Our VSO student from India, Inder Preet Singh Dhillon, started at the beginning of March. Feroz Khan who should have started in Nov last year received a grant to further his studies so we had to wait for Inder. He has already made great strides in sorting out our financial controls (the reason our application for the National Lottery Fund was declined...) and general admin. problems. He will also be helping on funding proposals as we still rely heavily on donations. We also have a Peace Corps Volunteer, Naheed Ahmed from the States. who was helping out for 2 months on a temporary basis as she had problems at her original placing. As these problems were never resolved she is now with us for 2 years. This is a real bonus as the school only had to organize accommodation in the surrounding village, as their wages are paid by the respective organizations. Naheed has been working on a community library for children from the surrounding villages, and we are also hoping to start computer literacy classes for the older siblings. We have already received our first box of books from Biblioref, and an old computer that was donated from friends. We are on the scrounge for bookshelves, desks and any reference books eg atlases, dictionaries etc etc... Naheed is also working with the support group for PLWAS and the community garden. A few of the smaller NGO's in the community will also benefit as both of them will be helping with general admin and computer literacy. Yours truly is learning to delegate (a formidable task when I have been running a one – woman show for so long....)

A huge soccer stadium is being built next to the school in preparation for the world cup in 2010. We are trying to get funding to erect a small kiosk so we can supply the laborers with food, and later to sell cold drinks, chips etc to the crowds at the matches. The kiosk will be run by the support group and is another way we can work towards being self sustainable. Although we had nothing to do with the erection of the stadium, it has certainly enhanced our status in the community, as most people seem to think we initiated it....

Our 2nd clothing project has suffered as I cannot drive to Johannesburg in the school holidays to collect as my old Nissan is too unreliable. This year we have to focus our energies on acquiring another vehicle. As with the telephone story, I could write a book on the breakdowns, from major problems like brakes failing and overheating and having to be towed to the garage, to minor (but extremely irritating.) hiccups, like the windscreen wipers packing up in the middle of a downpour (not easy driving with your head sticking out

trying to wipe the windows with my sleeve) and a leaking canopy and windscreen which means covering the car with plastic sheeting every evening. It is extremely unpleasant to start my day by putting my feet into a few cms of water when I get in my car in the morning.... We have written to various car companies but so far no luck..

In June 2 young men from the community will be flown to Scotland for a project called "World without Walls" They will spend 2 weeks learning how to direct and shoot video footage, edit it and produce a video diary file. On their return they will install cam recorders at the school and begin a 2 year diary that will be shown in Scotland. A daunting thought for the camera shy....

In the States people have been working hard to get a website up and running. It is called Hope for Limpopo and we are busy with the final details.

Memorable moments:

Our first graduation ceremony when 4 of our learners wearing caps and gowns were praised and sung to, and wished well as they graduated to Grade 1. The singing, particularly our National anthem, made even the most hardened haul out the tissues...

A day spent fishing with some of the older children. Between ducking and diving the hooks as lines were enthusiastically cast, a watchful eye had to be on the look out for crocodiles. What great excitement as each fish was caught (15 in all and not one bigger than 4cms.....) and whipped to the shore amid clapping and chanting...

The jumping castle kindly donated for our Xmas party was a first for most of the children. Chaos reigned for a while as the older children bounced the younger ones off their feet and it was hard to separate the screams of joy and the indignant howls as some of them never managed to get to their feet and spent the time on their bottoms or heads.... until they were rescued and their pride restored with chips and sweets. Each child received a brand new present (a first for many as Xmas in these poverty stricken homes is often a day like any other)

Once again our letter seems full of wants and needs, but as we progress the needs in the community become more apparent. Thanks to all who have helped in some way to make "Vhutshilo" the force it has become.

Regards,

Sue Anne Cook
Principal