



Children of Fire

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Newsletter
April – August 2006

In this issue – 12-Hospitals Outreach; Parties; Classical music weeks...and much more



Tumisang from Joe Slovo enjoys the little round-about at Dorah Mokoena's 12th Birthday party, 12 April 2006

Burn unit improves at Leratong

It's always good to know that your advice is appreciated, especially if it is to the tune of R219.000. Here's how it all began. Our founding child Dorah celebrated her 12th birthday in April this year. The *Saturday Star* asked permission to join in the celebrations and to write about her life to date. That story was widely read and led to the Dis-Chem Foundation contacting Children of Fire, looking for suggestions of ways to spend money

to help burned children. They wanted to link a project with prime time television and were keen to focus on individual children, so we costed some options. We also pointed out that there are no "quick fixes" for burned children. That they usually have a series of complicated, costly, painful procedures and hand-in-hand with this goes education, counselling, occupational therapy and more. Their stories don't always make for "good

television” because it takes so long to achieve results. And while we might be overjoyed where a child with a crooked finger can bend and use it again, the general public would rather that we waved a magical surgical wand and did something more dramatic, making disfigured children look cute again. It is rarely that simple. So while looking at what money could achieve for individual children, we also costed programmes like paraffin stove crushing and replacement with safer stove designs in squatter camps and at equipping hospital burns wards to save more lives. Our hospital tour in May 2006 showed how some hospitals had problems with equipment being stolen; some had the Africa-syndrome i.e. good equipment had been acquired and then, when it broke, there was no one capable of getting it repaired. Around this time, Dr Charles Balthazar, a Belgian immigrant who has dedicated a couple of decades of his life to helping South Africa, contacted Children of Fire. He knew that we visited the hospital where he is head of surgery and handed out toys there regularly, but asked, could we do something more? Well it seemed that we could. “Make a list of the most important equipment that you need in the ward: we might just have a funder for you.” So the faxed list

arrived: Infusion pump; vital signs monitor with stand; Flow Gard syringe pump; Low blood flow and fluid warmer; Dermatome Macro Flexible cable; skin graft mesher. In total the list of life-saving equipment cost R179 278. With one visit to the ward where they met survivors of paraffin stove explosions, people who had been poured with petrol; and one girl aged 11 with the sad hopeless look of death in her eyes as she battled desperately against pneumonia and her painful burns, the Dis-Chem Foundation was convinced of the need. It agreed to buy the lot and even some more. No one can really prove if it will save 20 lives or 2000 lives, but the gift was a God-send and made Leratong Hospital better equipped to handle the winter’s terrible burn injuries that follow as surely as season follows season.

In June we also gave 226 donated books to Leratong:

The titles for young children included “Sizes” by Jillian Powell; “Shapes” by Lynne Burgess; “Animal Legs” by Rod Theodorou; “Day and Night Animals” by Karen Rice Evans; “Isivunguvungu”, “Isipho”, “Landela umholi” and “IsiZulu Yigugu Lesizwe” by T. Nxaba, P. Msimango and C. Nxaba.

Children of Fire research in Gauteng hospitals

Marietta Neumann rounded off a hardworking gap year in South Africa by joining with short-term British volunteer Mike Downes on a Children of Fire hospital tour. While the charity naturally spends a lot of time in different hospitals, this journey was largely to reinforce goodwill, remind the medical community of the different services that the charity offers and share some toys among the burns survivors and other paediatric patients.

Marietta writes:

Jubilee Hospital

Just after a fruitful visit to the schools of Linda Tshabalala (16) and Kagiso Mathebula (16), two of our Hammanskraal teenage burns survivors, we drove to Jubilee Hospital which serves their area.

I met with superintendent Dr. Keba Mokgethi while Mike set off to give toys to the young patients in the children’s surgical ward.

Dr. Mokgethi recognised that Children of Fire has a useful role to play in the health services sector. Though questions had been sent in advance, he delegated the task of gathering statistics to Head of Nursing, Mrs. Tsakani Ngwenya. They will be collated in future for the website or the newsletter. Jubilee hospital has 551 beds and services 250 000 people around the largely rural area. Patients

with more than 25 per cent burns are regarded as emergency, and usually referred to Klerksdorp or Dr George Mukhari Hospital (Ga-Rankuwa). The burn units in these hospitals are often full so they sometimes stay at Jubilee. At other times larger hospitals say that their burns wards are full but it is our experience that this is not always true.

Jubilee Hospital does not have enough ventilators. They have eight adult-ventilators, and one child ventilator, which was broken.

Dr Mokgethi and Mrs. Ngwenya thanked us heartily for the toys and who knows, they might refer some of their patients to our unique holiday activity weeks for burns survivors in future.

Contacts: Front desk: 012 717 9300; Superintendent: Dr Keba Mogkethi 012 717 9338; Fax: 012 717 7404 Email: kmokgethi@nwpg.gov.za Head of Nursing/in charge of hospital: Tsakani Ngwenya 082 303 8472/ 012 717 9398; General Manager: A. Ramukumba; Sister Phyllis Sibiya; Matron Margaret Kunutu

Kalafong Hospital

Superintendent Dr. Lancelot Phalatsi had not even read Marietta’s email in which she had talked of the impending visit. Maybe it’s a generation thing that youngsters look at their emails several times a day while older people

sometimes don't mind if they only read them once a week. So in the quest for information he seemed slightly caught off guard when asked questions about hospital policies and about burn statistics. He pointed out that he needs permission to give out information but we hope statistics will follow soon.

A bag of toys brightened the faces of children in the surgical ward. The whole unit was not decorated in a child-friendly way, so we were sure that these children would especially enjoy something to cuddle.

Contacts: Front desk: 012 318 6400; Superintendent: Dr. Lancelot Phalatsi 083 701 2593
Email: lancelotp@gpg.gov.za Fax: 012 318 6791
Address: 1 Klipspringer Rd, Atteridgeville

Ga-Rankuwa/ Dr. George Mukhari Hospital

Dr. George Mukhari Hospital, formerly known as Ga-Rankuwa after the area it is in, can be found a far way out north-west of Pretoria, just next to Medunsa Clinic College.

It is a big hospital with several superintendents and a large managing staff, and the receptionists are so confused by so many people at the top, that they did not even know the clinical director was - Dr. Dafel. But they were sharp enough to show us the way to the management offices and from there we made our way to Dr. Dafel's office on our own. He was not in.

His PA Lydia took us to Senior Supt. Dr. Nathan instead. Dr. Nathan seemed quite fond of her position and refused to say anything without a written proposal (though this had been emailed before our visit), not even about the hospital policies regarding admission of burned children. When we said that we want to give toys to the children in the ward, she started to complain about all the hassle she would now have to go through and that the permission must be obtained beforehand and we had to be supervised, but she would make the phone call anyway seeing as we were there now... it is a shame that Ga-Rankuwa sees it as such a burden when somebody wants to give presents to its children. The nurses were friendlier and appreciative and somewhat rescued the hospital's image.

Contacts: Switchboard: 012 529 3111 Senior Superintendent: Dr. Nathan (f) 012 529 3691
Clinical Director: Dr. Dafel PA to Dr. Dafel: Lydia Her email: lydiam@dgmh.co.za

Tembisa Hospital

Friday, the 5th of May took us to Tembisa Hospital in Tembisa, north-east of Johannesburg. The hospital has two main buildings, with the nurses' homes in between. The main entrance is not easy to distinguish from the street, because there are numerous hawker stalls in front of it with people selling fruit and other things. The sign that reads "Tembisa Hospital" is small and almost hidden behind the fence. That block has the pharmacy, the casualty and eventually leads to the wards. Another entrance, further down the street, takes one to the other building, housing administration

and management offices. There is a way through between those two sites, but it is difficult to find. Neither the CEO nor the superintendent were in on this Friday morning. Luckily PA Ms. Jacobs felt inclined to help and after a short talk she sent us to the PRO Mr. Lesibana Ledwaba. He was appreciative of our donation, thought he too did not fail to mention that it takes many phone calls to get permission and a supervisor for us. In the end he even accompanied us to the wards where we gave out the toys. The only thing he asked for was a note about the value of the donation. We gave toys to every single child in the hospital.
Contacts: Front desk: 011 926 2865 Superintendent: Dr. Msenyane 011 923 2000 Fax: 011 920 1195
CEO: Dr. Mfenyana PA Annetjie C. 923 2053 Fax: 926 2719 Email: annetjiec@gpg.gov.za
PRO: Lesibana Ledwaba 011 923 2199/ 082 574 5857

Pretoria Academic Hospital

Pretoria Academic, formerly known as HF Verwoerd Hospital, gave the best outer impression of all. It is a clean tidy hospital and it is very spacious. However the lifts take inhumanely long and according to a doctor that we met while we were waiting for the lift, there is only one fire escape at the far end of the building and it would be really difficult to get out if there is a fire. We met with Sibongile, secretary of superintendent Dr. Mathebula. Dr. Mathebula (f) was not in but Sibongile is clever and helpful. She forwarded our research request to Dr. Kobie Marais, the Deputy Manager of Nursing, and also arranged for permission for us to give toys to the children in orthopaedic ward 8.5 on the 8th floor. There were not many children in the ward. The sisters said most burned children are referred to other hospitals (e.g. Baragwanath) because Pretoria Academic does not specialise in burns. The ward is, like the rest of the hospital, clean and tidy.

Contacts: Front desk: 012 354 1000 Superintendent: Dr. M.P. Mathebula (f) 012 354 1548
PA to Dr. Mathebula: Sibongile 012 354 1017
sibongileb@gpg.gov.za
Address: Dr Savage Rd,

Leratong Hospital

A sunny Saturday morning took us to Leratong Hospital, where we met with Dr. Charles Balthazar. He is a general surgeon in charge of the burns unit and is responsible for the improvements that the ward benefited from over recent years. He was also the first person who provided some decent information about burn injuries treated at his hospital. At the time of our visit there was an 11-year-old girl Sonia with 40 per cent burns and pneumonia. She was in a critical state then and Dr. Balthazar was not sure whether she would survive. Today she is fine. She still has a long way ahead but she will make it. While we were talking a little toddler kept peeping through the door and burst out laughing when I gave him a thumbs-up.

We gave the hospital piles of books, mostly children's encyclopaedias, and two big boxes of activity toys. Two toddlers, Thato and Thabelo, were running around in the ward and instantly hijacked a toy truck and a telephone car that rang as you pulled it over the floor. Sonia received a game and a colourful story book. As the burns unit is for both children and adults, we also brought some magazines for the older patients to read while they were waiting for yet another day to pass.

For more information about Leratong and Children of Fire links, please read the lead

article – "Burn unit improves at Leratong".

Contacts: Front desk: 011 411 3500 Superintendent: Dr. Wotjowicz 011 411 3510 Fax: 011 410 84 21
CEO: Mr. G J Dube Head of Department of Surgery and General surgeon: Dr. Charles Balthazar 011 673 0762/ 083 415 5851 Email: Balthazar@samedical.co.za
Head of Anaesthesia: Dr. Pikheth Sisters in burns unit: Desiree, Makaya



Sebokeng Hospital

On Sunday, 7th May 2006, accompanied by eight-year-old burns survivor Sicelo, we drove out to Sebokeng Hospital. Since superintendents and CEOs do not work on the weekend, we met with Sister Leah Mataung from Ward 16, the paediatric surgical ward. The ward was small and simple but there were colourful pictures on the wall; they tried to make it look nice. We gave toys to each of the children. We were not allowed to take pictures. I spoke to the matron's supervisor and asked her to give me the number of the CEO so that I could ask him for permission. She said she'd call back, but of course she didn't.

There was one burned girl, Maselloane Matlokoa, age 8 (though she looked older by her size). She was covered in bandages and her voice was weak and high. She and her sister had tried to make a fire; the wood was wet, so they poured petrol on it. The fire exploded and burned them both. The sister died. When we visited, Maselloane did not know about her sister's death. Her mother did not come to visit her because she has to wear black to respect her late daughter. If Maselloane saw this she would know that something had happened. It seemed that nurses should have offered the mother a change of clothes so that her surviving daughter would at least have a visitor. We went on to ward 4, another paediatric ward, and shared out our toys there as well.

On a home visit to Beka pupil Keba Makaqa afterwards, we gave 30 McDonalds toys to the children in his township street and in his family.
Contacts: Front desk: 016 930 3000 Superintendent: Dr. Gavanescu 016 930 3301 016 988 1964 (fax)
PA Helena. Sister Leah Mataung (Ward 16)

Tambo Memorial Hospital

On Monday, 8th May, we drove out to Tambo Memorial Hospital on the East Rand. Again the superintendent was not around, so we were

helped by matrons Mpho Salanyane and Julia Langa. Both seemed grateful when we handed out toys, and promised to assist with our research once we had permission from the superintendent. It was the only hospital to send us a thank you letter later.

The three burned children in the ward, Themba Lukhele (11), Nkosinathi Mahlangu (8), and Romanico Thomas (1)

particularly enjoyed the attention from strangers and liked to pose with their toys. The other (non-burned) children too were pleased with the soft toys they received and often rewarded us with a grateful smile and a soft "thank you".

Contacts: Front desk: 011 898 8000 Superintendent: Dr. Vis Naidoo 011 898 8320
Fax (general): 011 892 0358
Address: Railway Street Boksburg

Far East Rand Hospital

While we had tried to contact all relevant personnel before hospital visits, this often proved hard to do and was tediously bureaucratic. We asked CEO Dr. T.D. Moji for his help in the research project, but he said we could only contact the regional officer to ask for permission to "conduct research" at this hospital. We left two boxes of toys in the staff room for the hospital to establish a "play room". We also gave at least two toys to each little patient there. The ward was beautifully painted with many pictures on the walls.

The hospital may have been on edge because of recent media reports alleging mishandling of a child rape survivor who was a patient there.

Contacts:
Front desk: 011 812 8300 CEO: Dr. T. D. Moji. PA to the CEO: Gracious. Social Worker: Jacobe Botha
Chief Director Ekurhuleni-Sedibend, Health Region: Dr. F Benson Tel: (011) 878 8503 Fax: (011) 878 8587

Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital

At Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital we spoke to the PA of Superintendent Dr. Dungu. Her name is Priscilla and she is rather efficient. She brought us together with Mrs. Ngidi, the Deputy Director of Nursing. Mrs. Ngidi was open to help us with data as soon as we would have the permission of the CEO.

Sister Segola showed us around the wards and told us a little bit about the history of the hospital. The hospital was originally a camp for the soldiers in World War II. After the war it became a hospital for all the soldiers that had contracted TB. Eventually the government bought it and made it a real hospital.

Baragwanath has a pure burn unit with separate adult and child sections. This unit was sponsored by pharmaceutical company Johnson & Johnson in 1994.

The children were given toy animals, cars and other activity toys. One of the smaller children thought I was a doctor when I came in, and started to cry. But when I showed him and the others the gifts, he soon relaxed. Maybe doctors should bring something nice to their patients before or after the injection so that they are not so afraid!

Contacts: Switchboard: 011 933 8000.

Superintendent: Dr. Dungu 082 446 1048. PA to Dr. Dungu: Priscilla

CEO: Dr. Manning 082 371 4334 Deputy Director of

Nursing: Mrs. Ngidi 082 376 9568 PA to Mrs. Ngidi:

Thuli

Matron of Burns unit: Victoria Makelima 011 933 9173/4
Sister Segola

Coronation Hospital

Coronation Hospital is renowned for its big nursery station. Thus most of the patients that received toys from us were babies. We had two big boxes of McDonald's toys from a previous donation, and even though 5-day-old, prematurely born babies may not yet see the joy in a soft ball or similar, their mothers will hopefully keep them and tell them in later years how miraculously this gift had appeared their cradles! Marietta was about to go down with flu on this visit ... so other volunteers will go to Coronation again. What was sad though was that in phoning one ward there was no answer despite two nurses being on duty. Why? They were simply too busy watching soapies to get up and take a call.

Linda Tshabalala and Kagiso Mathebula home and school visit

Combined with hospital visits on the Children of Fire research project, two volunteers visited 16-year-old Linda Tshabalala at her home in Hammanskraal north of Pretoria.

Linda (called Nana, her second name, at home) lives with her mother Margaret, her father Samaperi, her sister Yulanda (called Tsolo) and her uncle. They have two small houses in a yard right at the main street. One of them is new and has electricity but no running water.

The whole family except Linda slept on the kitchen floor to make space for the two volunteers, one of whom shared a bed with Linda. They were served with a nice meal of rice, pasta and chicken.

The family seemed reasonably intact – no fights, calm dialogues between family members.

However as the evening proceeded, various disturbing facts showed and made our volunteers worry about the behaviour these people presented. Linda shamelessly copied her homework from someone else's exercise book – right in front of her illiterate parents. Nine-year-old Tsolo first watched wrestling with her father Samaperi, and after that she saw a show that was announced not to be suitable for children under the age of 16. Samaperi did not react to this. Linda's mother Margaret complained to one volunteer that Linda's facial skin was not nice. Does she say that to Linda herself? Linda did not start school until age 13 allegedly because she was scared of the teasing for her appearance.

This is only one of many families that have problems. What will be the consequence of all the families that do not "work" as families, and that nobody hears of and never will?

The following day, the volunteers went to Linda's school Marokolong Primary and had a word with

her teachers. The Deputy Principal Ruth was asked about Linda's progress at school and how it was possible that she was in Grade 6 and unable to read. The explanation was that Linda did not want to be in class with children six years younger than her, so they put her straight in Grade 3. Of course she did not get any basics then and without basics any other teaching is pretty much useless. Linda refused to take remedial lessons. Because of her age she was eventually promoted to higher grades even though her performance spoke against it. Ruth pointed out, that after Linda returned from Children of Fire she was suddenly willing to learn how to read, but still often missed the classes because she was allegedly "going to the clinic". The school should ask for a doctor's certificate, if Linda so obviously lies.

We gave the school several hundred magazines that educate about HIV safety and other life skills, as well as pens and "Read for Peace" stickers.

The Principal, Johanna Matjile, gave us information about Kagiso Mathebula, a 17-year-old burns survivor whom we assisted to get surgery at Ga-Rankuwa and who had been at Marokolong before and was now at nearby Lethamaga Middle school in Grade 10. She gave me his father's cell number and I called him. His surname is Mohlasedi. He said that Kagiso was at school now but we could visit him there. He was afraid that we would take him away, but I assured that we would not. So we went to find his school, and after seemingly hours of driving back and forth, we found it in a side street no-one had bothered to mention when giving directions. The principal, Mr. Silas Selomo, was very helpful. He called Kagiso and I spoke to him; first in English, then Mr. Selomo translated because he did not really understand me.

Here is his profile:

Kagiso Noah Mathebula, born 1st July 1989. He lives in No. 702 Marokolong (no street name; but there is only one number 702 he says). He lives there with his Grandfather Noah and his Uncle Sam. His mother Sarah lives in Ramotse, a nearby area. She has a job.

Kagiso was burned at age seven. He was sleeping on a bench in the small kitchen, when his brother poured petrol into the fire. The fire 'exploded' and burned his neck, lower face, chest,

and back. He had a skin graft done when he was in grade 5, so around 10 years old, to release the contractures around the neck.

He speaks Ndebele, Sotho and Setswana; his English is rather limited. He did not know what or where Kilimanjaro is. I told him he might possibly go on a trip with us. I told the principal he has to write an essay about why he wants to go up, and that we will get back to him.

Anele expansion, Sicelo waits

Sicelo Maduna (8) was due to have an operation to take the skin from the tissue expander on his forehead and move it to become his nose on 5th June 2006 but it was moved forward to August 22nd because surgeon George Psaras was himself hospitalised. Examination on the tissue expander on 21st August showed that there is not yet enough skin available, and he will have another insertion on 23rd August and 4th September.



Anele Nyongwana with her mother and baby brother

Anele Nyongwana (6), had a croissant shaped tissue expander implanted on Tuesday June 20th to start restoring her hairline. She has had two saline insertions to date and still more to go. Unlike her fellow Sicelo she is still very scared of the injection needle and requires not only local anaesthetic cream but also several people to hold her when the saline is inserted. We hope that a full hairline will make her realise that she is a beautiful person. Psychological problems continued that relate to teasing and social attitudes towards disfigurement. And the rough play of other burned children exacerbated an infection around the foreign body, so she was re-hospitalised briefly.

Sitting silent in Secret Garden

On 20th June 2006, 30 children from Children of Fire including our Beka pupils and a few extra from a local primary school, benefited yet again from the kindness of the National Children's Theatre (formerly known as Johannesburg Youth Theatre), as they were invited to a stunning performance by its young actors. *The Secret Garden* is a story about a girl who regains her joy of life and finds wonderful friendships in the

hidden garden of her late mother. The children, for whom flowers were rare in their home environments, were remarkably well behaved - entranced by the different layers of meaning in the play. They usually see four plays a year. Thanks also to Barbara Buntman for providing refreshments, Ian McLean for helping with transport again and Marcia Tunmer, who joined us recently and also helped with transport.

Dutch low vision expert helps Beka

Geerlande Homburg (50), a teacher for blind and low vision children from the Netherlands, came to South Africa to volunteer for three months at the Johannesburg School for Blind, Low Vision and Multiple Disability Children (Beka). Her main intention was to train Beka's staff but she turned her hand to many things. The entire learning atmosphere thrived under her positive influence and the children improved in attitude and behaviour. She organised the



manufacture of some special sloping desks and lockers for the children.

Her kind but determined spirit is missed in everyone she has affected - but the good ideas she brought will remain.

Geerlande was hosted for much of her stay by Roy and Marita Irvine in Brixton. They played saxophone and cello together. Marita was a volunteer cookery teacher for all different burned and blind children.

Speech therapy workshop

Seven speech and hearing therapy students from Wits University gave their time and effort to hold a workshop at the Johannesburg School for Blind, Low Vision and Multiple Disability Children (Beka). Backed by a PowerPoint presentation, the girls talked about the progress of children learning to speak; how parents can help them to learn more easily etc.

The talk given by the students was detailed and informative but only for one who had been to university and familiar with the jargon used in lectures. Their style of speaking was too complex

and rapid for those of our volunteers who had not been through a tertiary institution. Some were nervous and rushed through it and when questions were invited, they misinterpreted the confused silence for overall understanding. They could have been more interactive, which would have ensured that everything was understood. No hardcopy notes were available but they did leave the presentation for the teachers to fall back on. It would have been very useful if more notes were brought as further reading.

Disaster Management Exhibition

On three consecutive days Children of Fire ran an information stall at the African Aid Relief and Disaster Management Exhibition on the Gallagher Estate. Many thanks to the organisers for allowing us the space for free and thanks to Dr Helene van Rhyn for setting it up and being there each day. Also thanks to Ad Outpost for the beautiful eye-catching poster that again graced our stand. The conference was not on a par with the exhibition because many people were such poor public speakers and could talk at length about their organisation without explaining what it actually did. They seemed to use grandiose terms like "paradigm shift" that really only make one laugh inside, for it covers when somebody does not know what else to say. But maybe it was just

my second-language English interpretation. Caritas Germany claimed to have some 5000 people working with it but even to me as a fellow German it was not clear at all *what* it does. The rest of the exhibition was better. We made some helpful contacts, which hopefully will have some follow-up... a Fire-Fighting Training Company could give us very useful information about toxic gases emitted at fires. George Long, inventor of the Parasafe wick stove, gave a presentation of one of his company's two safe paraffin stoves on the last day of the exhibition on our stand. The general public showed great interest in the product and its potential to remove one source of injury and destitution from squatter camp life. *mn*

Schools outreach

German volunteer Marietta Neumann honed her teaching skills at Hesperus Primary School by taking on four classes of bright, inquisitive and/or disruptive five to ten-year-olds, and by the use of blindfolds, talking calculators and a real walking cane for the blind she taught these children what it means to be blind and how a blind person can get along in life. Each class gave a different picture of themselves: The Grade R and Grade 1 children did not know what "blind" means. Grade 2 and 3 had obviously talked about the topic already and knew a little. The Grade 1 class teacher disappeared once Marietta entered that class room and left her with a horde of noisy and naughty children and one particularly talkative girl who had an opinion on everything but mostly stated things that were completely beside the point. Each class particularly enjoyed having a

blindfolded child find her way around the class room with only the help of the walking cane. In 2004 Hesperus Primary School had referred low-vision pupil Talha Mahmood to the Johannesburg School for the Blind (Beka). He had had several problems adjusting to a "normal" school situation, as he always needed to have his eyes extremely close to a book in order to be able to read it. He also has to bend his head down and look "up", which seems to make focusing easier for him. Many children teased him for something that was not his fault. But they just did not know better. We hope that telling the children a little about blindness and low vision, and how such people cope with life, will increase their tolerance towards fellow pupils with similar problems. And maybe some day they will not tease but support, and not only laugh but help.

Jeffers Zitha

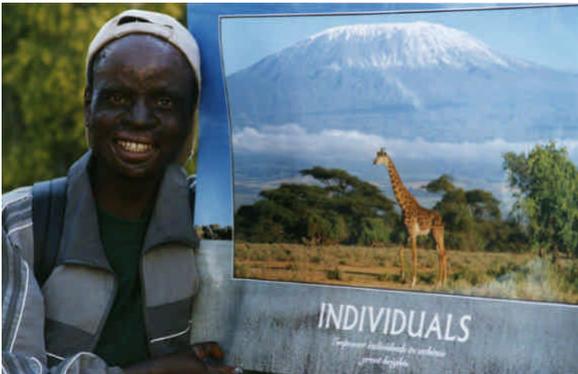
Jeffers Zitha from Tshepisonq near Leratong Hospital came to stay with Children of Fire for in early June.

At Wits Dental Clinic in Johannesburg General Hospital he had his age determined by Dr. Joseph Schmaman (**Special Thanks for that!**).

Dr. Schmaman took an X-ray of his teeth and his good hand. Judged by the development a certain bone in the wrist and by the progress of erupting teeth, he was approximated to be between 14 years 6 months and 14 years 9 months old. This is contrary to the age estimation on his birth certificate, which was issued a decade after his birth.

Jeffers assisted with disaster management as a squatter camp in Malvern was totally erased by a fire (see other article).

Finally he was sent back to Tshepisonq with a new shoes, new clothes and some other goodies... including some that were not his to take!



On a later date, volunteers Marcia and Marietta drove out to Tshepisonq on a home and school visit to Jeffers concerning some disciplinary issues. They also collected his passport and birth certificate from his uncle Simon Zitha so that Children of Fire can eventually apply for a visa to Tanzania/Kilimanjaro for him.

Jeffers' uncle, who in the past had presented himself with quite an inappropriate attitude

towards Children of Fire and Jeffers himself, was surprisingly positive...

Generally he seemed in a very good mood and not as emotional as last time volunteers went to visit him (when comments fell like "Jeffers is not right in his head and I want to burn these papers that say I am his guardian). But maybe he was just overwhelmed by two young women floating into his house and smiling at him all the time...

Marcia pointed out that the uncle probably showed "bad behaviour" in the past because he felt left out of the loop. He would not allow Jeffers to go on a trip to Canada in 2005, denying him a once-only opportunity.

Marcia and Marietta then went to Tsakani Primary School (011 410 6181). Jeffers walks there every morning but it took them more than five minutes by car.

They met the very friendly principal Mr. David Chauke and Jeffers' teacher Mrs. Mukwevho, who was very zesty and cheerful. She had spoken to Jeffers about the various issues that raised concern both at Children of Fire and at his school. It was agreed that Jeffers is not a bad child and that he has had a lot of bad things happening in his life, which explains misdemeanours. However, it was also found that he must now grow up and show kindness to those who are kind to him.

Finally the two volunteers drove to Mafaesa High School (Tel: 011 484 6427, 6433, 6437), Jeffers' future school. Unfortunately the receptionist failed to inform the principal of the importance of this meeting and the principal herself seemed to have better things to do than to spare five minutes of her time to prepare for a disfigured child not to be teased at her school. After 45 minutes of waiting and nudging, the volunteers had to drive off in order to keep the schedule for the remainder of the day. It is a pity that the school did not see the importance of this issue.

Since that time social workers have liaised with Children of Fire on Jeffers' possible admission to Philadelphia in Soshanguve in 2007.

Radio Jacaranda Party

In May 2006 Children of Fire was contacted by Radio Jacaranda. Through a public appeal to its listeners, it had fundraised for the charity and in mid and late June delivered blankets, pillows and old curtains at a party for twenty of our children. A programme of magicians, balloons, clowns and food gave them a wonderful time, and little goodie-bags were given to each child.

After the party was over, everyone lent a hand and helped to carry the items donated by Jacaranda listeners over the past few weeks, destined to help when people had lost their belongings in fires.

More about the distribution of the blankets:
Newsletter September 2006

Malvern Fire

It was still dark on the morning of June 6th when a small group of people set off to help survivors of the squatter camp fire in Malvern, Johannesburg. Children of Fire director Bronwen Jones and a number of volunteers loaded up two cars with Disaster Recovery Bags and drove out to the wrecked settlement, where people were sitting in the midst of blackened ruins, warming their hands on braziers and small fires. Sceptical at first, then anxious not to be left out, they gathered to receive the red bags and later bundles of second hand clothes for themselves and their children. Lists of the people affected were taken and contacts given out for people in case they needed more help at a later stage.



Disaster Recovery Bags were given to:

Sithole Hlamvu; Jacob Majabu; Mandla + Lerato Vilakazi; Vuyani + Lokasi Khona; Paul + Mojosi Pantsi; Anton Chaukwe + Gladys Mabaso; Orient Bilankulu; Pat Malangani; Andries Thibedi; Sergio Mlambo; Nkululeko Motsema + Bonginkosi

Tabedi; James and Ma Khumalo; Mthokozisi Ndobe; Vincent Khosa; Ernest Shongwe; Edward Khosa; Melusi Gwalo; Nsizwa Mavimbela; Nobonani; Vusi Mlosho Makhubani; Bongiwé Ntombela

A lot of pre-packaged second hand clothes were also given out as well as some blankets.

Disaster recovery bags contained:

A 7h-stove+heater, a saucepan, small bowls, tinned meals, sugar, a candle holder, a candle, stationery, fruit squash, a toothbrush, toothpaste, soap, snacks, plasters and other items.

A full list of those affected was taken by residents: *(first name and number of family members)*

Thuli 5, Moli 3, Bongiwé 2, Nikeziwe 1, Mduduzi 3, Bheki 1, Nsizwa 2, Patrick 3, Caroline 4, Thapelo 3, Sydney 2, Mpho 2, Lerato 2, MaKhumalo 2 **(made organiser of sharing out spare goods)**, Bonginkosi 2, Sibongisele 1, Trompies 2, Thandeka 6 **(especially in need – husband in prison)**, James 1, Nobonani 2, Handry 2, Bilelwa 2, Babheki 2, Sesi 3, Brown 1, Sindi 2, Skumbozo 2, Nosipho 2, Gedi 2, Bhange 2, Comeladies 1, Poll 3, Anton 1, Sesho 3, John 1, Chio 1, Balten 2, Berret 2, Goodness 2, Fatima 4, Thandeka 2, Ndaba 1, December 1, Patric 3, Thulakele 2, Hlengiwe 2, Sindy 2, Joe 1, Khila 1, Goman 3, Dumisani 1, Nelly 2, Nkosinathi 2, Jeffery 1, File 2, Siphwe 1, Sbonga, Sphamadla 2, Sbiya 1, Nonhlanhla 3, Lindeka 1, Lebu 2, Bagwejile 2, Jany 2, Sisarito 1, Patrao 1, Melusi 2, Guy 2, Siphwe 2, Thalosile 2, Thisha 1, Nkomela 2, Zandile 2, Zanele 2

Glorious parties and then to work!

Dear Volunteer

Any help or participation in our activities is most appreciated and of enormous value.

Unfortunately we have encountered certain problems as a result of help given by very well meaning, even well informed people and organisations.

What we generally find is that people tend to assume that the children who benefit from our services need to see and experience all things amazing and indulgent. This really is not the case. Parties for the children are all very well and plenty of fun but it does no good when non-resident children still are not receiving adequate nutrition on a day-to-day basis (chips, sweets and soft drinks will actually wreak havoc on a hungry

child's digestive system). Besides this, many of the children, due to medical conditions, have specific dietary requirements. The one-day party/outing is also no good if day to day needs are not met. There are a hundred little things which the children could really benefit from but never see, e.g. the school desperately needs qualified remedial teachers which, at the moment, we cannot afford. Please also keep in mind if you give a child a gift or treat, there will be around ten others who will feel disappointed when they hear about it later.

All children love sweets, but this is mostly because they usually get sweets as a reward, or in any case they are raised to regard it as something special. But children can find the same delight in fruits or other healthy snacks!

Children with HIV must have an extremely controlled diet to keep their CD4 count up for as long as possible. Sweets are 'strictly prohibited' but this cannot be reinforced unless everyone without exception sticks to this rule. Please think twice before giving the children treats.

'Flashy' outings such as trips to Gold Reef City are exciting but they are better if kept few and far between. The children benefit more from educational, hands-on experiences such as their trip to the chocolate factory, which was informative as well as delicious. Tactile (touchable) activities are also better of course for those of the children who are blind or have low vision. So, provide a lift to Delta Park Environment Centre, accompany the children to the theatre, fund the 'Zoo to You' animals, and that would really help!

A common misconception is that volunteer work is easy and one can come whenever it is

convenient. Let us reinforce that we need all the help we can get BUT we desperately need volunteers who can dedicate a certain amount of time each week or on a regular basis, consistently and punctually.

Another thing that volunteers and teachers alike need to be aware of is that the school as well as Children of Fire are there to give the children the care and education relevant to their needs. This means that classes need to be planned and structured. And discipline, which we know is tricky in any environment, is essential. Neatness is highly important as the children will follow the example given (and many do not get a very good example at home). Teachers and volunteers need to agree on a strict code of conduct and system of rules within the school.

In conclusion, please keep in mind what you can offer Children of Fire that will truly be of benefit, you may have talents to offer that are far more valuable than money.

In the news – again and again

Channel Islam international (Busisiwe Nhlapo and Bronwen Jones, 40 mins, stove safety); Radio 702's Tim Modise Show, 30 Mins, Bronwen Jones) Saturday Star (Dorah's birthday); Caxton Freesheets on safety candle holders; African Review on safer stoves; Channel Africa (Helene van Rhyn and George Long), safer stoves; The Star (Stove safety and Nsizwa's surgery). 3talk with Noeleen on SABC3, 28th June 2006; several interviews on Radio Jacaranda in a sustained two week campaign. Saturday Star, 24th June.

Children of Fire wants to say Thank You

Marita Irvine and **Julia Hill** for long-term support of the sensory cooking lessons at our school.

Smith & Nephew for donating Primapore dressings for Dorah's sore winter "hands"

Deloitte and Touche for donating electrical items, two blackboards, stationery for each child and several other useful articles to the Johannesburg School for the Blind. Thanks also for arranging lunch for the Beka children and children from Joe Slovo, and for the well-intentioned old tins and packets of food, that subsequently became 'famous' on TV.

Dis-Chem Foundation for donating pharmaceutical products to Children of Fire and for raising money to pay a qualified teacher for the Johannesburg School for the Blind

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