



Children of Fire

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Newsletter No. 1 2008

From caterpillar to butterfly

Top left: Simamkele after eyelid surgery



In 2007 Doreen Msimanga (10) at last got to Johannesburg (see previous newsletter), but now the severe contractures to both her feet have been eased. After escaping a veld-fire Doreen was kept at home near Verkykerskop. When she arrived she was a shy, insecure, almost sullen character who hid her damaged scalp under a woolly hat. Doreen now sports beautiful curly extensions thanks to Share Hair Salon in Campus Square, Auckland Park and is confident to smile for our camera. In future she will require more surgery to her hand in order to divide the stumps of her fingers, which will improve their dexterity, as well as improvements to her feet, to her scalp and to her ears. She has a new best friend and class mate, Katrinky, from a similar area of the Free State.



Children of Fire—Africa's first burns charity

Car fire survivor rescued

Jana never thought it would happen to her but a beautiful 23-year-old dancer was trapped in a burning car in 2006. She came to us in late 2007 when Discovery was about to throw her and her boyfriend off the medical aid. Thanks to long term charity friend Werner van Rhyn, the medical aid is still intact.

From N'Djamena to Johannesburg

Sudanese burns survivor Rachid Dahiye (estimated age 12) arrived in South Africa on 26 December 2007, accompanied by his grandmother Kadamala Hamat Hassan. He had been living in a refugee camp in Chad for a few years, his burns untreated. Within a few hours of his arrival he was seen by Dr. Roger Nicholson, an expert hand surgeon, and booked for surgery on January 10th. Contractures of his elbow and hand were released at Sandton Medi-Clinic, the gentle anaesthesia being managed by Vaughan Oerder. Though his tendons were not exposed, the joint had been damaged by the delay in treatment. He will require serial-splinting and occupational therapy to regain full function. Once the thigh donor site has healed and he is fully recovered, he will again be operated on to release an armpit contracture. He was treated for scabies on



Kadamala Hassan, Dr. Roger Nicholson and Rachid Dahiye before the first consultation.

the day that he arrived and he has also started vaccinations that should have been given in early childhood. Rachid speaks Massaleit, one of a thousand languages of Sudan. He also can speak tribal Arabic.

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Xhosa boys Simamkele and Siyabonga had surgery



Siyabonga Nonkumbi (14) was burnt as a toddler when he was sleeping on a sofa with two of his siblings, and a candle fell over and set the sofa alight. He was severely burned on face, head, hands, lower limbs and buttocks. He had an operation to his hand but needs more surgery to divide and straighten his fingers. After that he may have surgery to improve his face. He was seen at Johannesburg Academic Hospital and booked for January 2008, then moved to February. Siyabonga has 11 half siblings, from different fathers. He now stays with his younger brother Amos and his aunt and uncle. They are both unemployed and struggle to pay their day to day care.



Simamkele Hlanzela (7) fell face forward into a fire when he was five, allegedly when he was having an epileptic fit (he is not epileptic now). He was treated at a hospital in the Eastern Cape and later seen at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto. He had eyelid and hand contractures released in December 2007 at Johannesburg Academic Hospital. When not with us, Simamkele stays with his father and aunt in Katlehong; his mother died soon after he was injured. Ellerines helped buy clothes for him.

Top: Siyabonga shows his burn-damaged hands

Bottom: Simamkele is in need of hand and facial contracture releases

Carol Concert helps Feleng

UK volunteer Chris Wilson and Feleng Mahamotse set off to meet people at a carol concert in early December. Before they knew it, Multitool and Electrovers had each committed to helping the little boy on his travels to America or Europe for skull bone surgery; and an international tennis player pledged his “voyager miles” to help cover towards one return airfare for the boy and an escort. Thanks to Elise for making this happen, for Lana and Victor for singing, Sue-Anne who shares a birth date with Feleng and many other kind helpers.



Feleng (front right) with his friends Rachid (left) and Sizwe (back right) and volunteer Chris Wilson.

Thulani holds his head proudly high after neck contracture release

After visiting three hospitals—each more than once, getting opinions from third parties and trying to charm or cajole the medics, a Johannesburg Hospital consultant finally booked Thulani for an operation in late November. A skin graft taken from his thigh was used for the release; unfortunately the surgeons decided not to put a skin graft underneath his lower lip, as they had suggested at the ward

round before the operation, but more surgery is planned. Thulani enrolled at Stan West High School in Standerton but asked to return to a school for the disabled as he feared teasing. Chris Wilson visited the area again to try to ease Thulani’s fears and to make the school population more tolerant. He still wants his left ear improved. Thulani is booked for mouth surgery in late February 2008.

Teenage girls seek help at Children of Fire after rapes

In Newsletter no. 5 2007 we wrote about a teenage rape survivor. Since then, two more came to us for help; one a girl who is almost blind; one a burns survivor. One of the girls was raped at a state boarding school and not taken for medical help; not taken to the SAPS; nor taken for counselling within 24 hours of the event. Fortunately it occurred near the end of the school week, so the boarder was

fetches by her family on Friday (only then did they realise what had happened) and the post exposure prophylaxis could still be taken to protect her from the risk of HIV-Aids. The Department of Education is now investigating but the alleged perpetrators were simply put into the custody of their parents. We urge much stronger and swifter measures to protect young girls from this epidemic of violence.

Poor spelling not suffered gladly, even from teenage volunteers

Praise to the German volunteers who come to Children of Fire, because their spelling in English is better than that of the English volunteers! Makes the older members of the volunteer team wonder "what the world is coming to?"

As to local teenagers, without a computer spelling checker, they're lost. They don't recognise the need to give capital letters to place names and to school subjects like "English" ... and the apostrophe appears where it should not be and is absent in places where it belongs.

One youngster even said that she hoped to achieve "a A matric" (*sic*).

Work at the charity is quite pressurised and carelessness with report-writing is frowned upon—be warned dear volunteer(s) and give of your best ... the Director was trained at *The Times* of London at a time when one was thrown out instantly for one spelling mistake. Old habits die hard!

We remain open to community service youngsters and still get a variety of naughty boys (14-year-olds who did awful things like urinate in classmates school bags) and even naughty girls who fist fight with other girls, from local schools thinking that meeting burned children will help them to understand the important things in life.

SA media breaks its own rules on television age restrictions daily

We've said it in old newsletters but as we get new readers, you haven't read all that came before (*most is on the website though, especially in the newsletter section*). PLEASE don't give our children toy guns, toy tanks, toy armies. We accept water pistols that don't look like real guns. And we accept archaic weaponry such as plastic swords and armour. Books about guns are thrown away. All toy guns are broken and thrown away.

One in three of the children that we assist were intentionally burned. They have been subjected to enough violence in their lives without us encouraging them to mimic murder with modern day missiles

and implements. So if you think it is acceptable to buy or sell such toys, that is your business. Children of Fire is a pacifist organisation and while we cannot remove all historical images or all portrayals of violence, we can minimise them.

It is worth noting the overall high levels of violence that exist in South Africa and how television depicts far more violence here than would be allowed in safer countries. What you sow, you reap.

A media analysis will be on the website in the future. The existing rules on age restrictions on television programmes are broken daily in South Africa.

ChiFi North Africa

In November 2007, Africa Outreach Manager Lindiwe Ngwenya travelled to Tunisia, the northern-most country of Africa, to set up a Children of Fire branch there:

»Several weeks after I began working for Children of Fire, the Director told me of how the charity is often requested to set up in other African countries, as there is such a great need for the kind of assistance the charity provides. There's Christian Tchintcha from Cameroon who was never treated in hospital for severe burns to his arm when he was ten. Or Evelyn Minto, the acid burns survivor from Gabon. Or Musiwa from Zambia, who suffered severe burns as a five-year-old when his father locked him and his mother in a hut and set it alight. So, at this point you might be wondering, Of all the countries on the continent, why Tunisia?«

Read more about Lindiwe's experiences in the *Tunisia Newsletter*, to be published soon.



Burns care team at their former base in Aziza Othmana Hospital in Tunis.



Tears over lives lost in Khayelitsha, slain by a father

Some weeks ago an email came in at the Children of Fire offices from psychologists in Cape Town. Two young girls had been burned to death in a shack fire in Khayelitsha by one's own father. We were asked to give a speech on prevention of burn injuries and deaths to the Cape Flats mourners.

When my boss asked me if I thought I could talk about that topic, I wasn't too sure. Giving safety lectures on how to prevent and react to accidents is easy. Stop, drop and roll. Stay low and go. Don't pour water on an electrical fire, don't play with matches.

But intentional injury roots deeper.

When someone is angry, scared, drunk, tired, worried or frustrated, they can do things that they would never normally do. A fight with the spouse or losing a job would make matters even worse. I had hardly any background information about the two girls' story so I wrote a generic speech with the intention of putting in the details once I had more background information.

I found out more about the girls when teachers Lulu Gigi and Xolisiwe Qendwana picked me up from the airport. The girls' names were Alude Ngqono and Siphosethu Magadla. They were second cousins. The people that stayed in the shack were Alude, her older brother, her mother, her mother's cousin, and the cousin's two children.

Alude's parents had allegedly been arguing for a long time. They weren't married and the father did not live in their shack. Allegedly he'd been unemployed for quite some time. One day, when they were fighting again, the father left with the words "I will get back at you." Then, one midnight, he sneaked up to the shack where the two girls, Alude's mother and Alude's older brother were sleeping. He



The place where Alude and Siphosethu died, cleaned and ready for someone else to build a new home there.

barricaded the doors, poured petrol over the shack and set it alight. Then he left, quietly.

When neighbours woke up to the blaze, it was already too late. They heard the children screaming inside but they didn't know what to do. The fire brigade put out the fire but then they were already dead. When the police arrived the next morning to recover the corpses, they found Alude's body still clinging to her mother's back.

What could they have done to save themselves?

Once your house is on fire, you only have a few options. Know your exits, stay below the smoke and get out as fast as you can, and call the fire brigade once you are safe. If the fire is small you should try to put it out with water, so long as you are safe. But if it is an electrical fire, water will conduct the electricity to you, so you should use a properly rated extinguisher. Liquid fuel fires should be tackled with sand. If your clothes are on fire, roll on the ground until they are out, or wrap yourself in a blanket. If you get burned, pour cold running water over the burn for 15 minutes. Help others only if it won't put you into danger, and *do not run into a burning house*.

This was the more mundane part of my speech.

The school hall was cold and it was windy. The metal roof and walls gave strange, eerie acoustics to the hall. When I entered, the teachers, who sat together by the side of the stage, were singing. They sung mourning songs in Xhosa. They sounded melancholy and cheerful at the same time, and for a moment I wondered whether it was a "cultural thing" that mourning songs were so full of hope and resilience. I was in awe.

Black-and-white prints of pictures of Alude and Siphosethu were stuck on the walls and to the side of the stage. Alude looked just like a plucky 10-year-old with a cheeky smile and full of beans. Siphosethu's picture did not show much detail.

One poster, also multiplied and stuck to different places, read: "Let us not look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness." It reflected exactly what I wanted to say.

There were several local priests who had volunteered to speak at the service, as well as a representative from Child Line and a representative from a Western Cape charity against woman and child

abuse. Everyone spoke in Xhosa, so when I was finally called to speak I had no idea what had already been said.

I talked about how children have the right to speak up when there are problems at home, and how adults have the same right but also the responsibility to protect the children in their community. I emphasised that that they should always take threats seriously. I then continued by explaining how to react if they found themselves in a burning house, or if their neighbour's house burned, or if their clothes had caught fire. I felt a bit awkward giving "lectures" at a memorial service, but I felt encouraged by an old woman who sat in one of the back rows and nodded appreciatively every time I



"Hands off our children": "We should be protected from abuse"—pupils brought their messages across on posters that they put up in the school hall

gave another useful tip. I was positively surprised when my host Xolisiwe told me later that most of the service had been about the community's duty to stick together to help people in need—the concept of ubuntu. I had expected it to be more spiritual.

Letter to a doctor offering to use Dorah as a guinea pig for a full face prosthesis

Dorah's nose was lost by a 'skunk' on a December 2007 cinema outing. Her story made it on to several national news bulletins, briefly even rivalling the African National Congress' Polokwane meeting for news interest. A Sandton specialist then offered to make her a R20 000 mask. Our reply:

We have had a long discussion with the volunteers about all the ethical, emotional and physical issues around creating a new "false face" for Dorah.

Our conclusion was that Dorah, while she is aware of the distress that some strangers feel upon meeting her, because of her unusual appearance, is nonetheless Dorah with that "face". She is used to it and so are those who have become her family and her circle of friends.

Two older girls read out letters that Alude's and Siphosethu's friends had written to them after their death. One of them was in English, and I remember that the person had written about Alude being smaller than her but yet bigger in her mind. The audience gasped and cried on hearing these letters. The girls who read them also cried, and one or two of the family members seated in the front rows, wailed with emotion.

Alude's father had turned himself in to the police the day after he set the shack alight. The minister said that he cried day and night for his lost child. He has to live with the painful feeling of remorse for the rest of his life, which probably serves him just right. Alude's and Siphosethu's relatives as well as their classmates will carry with them the trauma of losing a niece, a grandchild, a cousin, or a friend. This incident has caused pain to everyone involved. For those who believe that everything happens for a reason, they face a challenge here. Even though Alude's and Siphosethu's death made the community pull together and raise awareness of child abuse, this still seems too high a price to pay, even if it's for the "greater good".

We keep asking "Why?" and get no answers.

By Marietta Neumann

One in three serious child burns in South Africa are intentional. Psychological help is rarely available to the people maybe with most needs. Depression and anger are sister emotions. If we do not deal with one, we may have to face the repercussions of the other.

She enjoys people commenting that she "looks pretty today" because people say that when she is wearing a lovely dress or new shoes or even if she has a flower in her hair—they say it *and they mean it*, because when one is living or working with severely disfigured children every day, one simply stops comparing them to more "perfect" kids and enjoys them for who they are.

She can feel the sun on her skin, the splash of raindrops, the caress of a breeze. She can feel kisses and she can kiss back, even though her reconstructed lips are not flexible. She will rub her face next to a man's beard stubble if she hugs him, and enjoy that sensation—or similarly hug the dogs and laugh at their furry features. To be "wrapped in a plastic bag" would take away many of the tactile

sensory pleasures, even those of walking through tall scented plants that tickle the skin.

Dorah likes food very much; it is a sociable activity. The website* that you directed us to, indicated that one could not eat and drink with full face prostheses. This would mean Dorah would have to revert to "ugly" for one of her favourite shared activities. She does go out to meals or for ice cream or a milkshake. We think the general public's reaction to peeling off her face when she started to eat, would be astonishing... and possibly terrified.

In a charity like Children of Fire, there is a lot of debate about appearance and what is cosmetic and what is essential.

So... we try to get kids to have two realistic ears - whether they start off with one or none. Once we understood CT scans, rapid prototyping, etc we got Bongani a perfect match for his existing ear.

The trauma of waiting so long for it to be fitted though—for a variety of factors beyond our control—has added substantially to Bongani's psychosocial issues.

It is notable that our littlies can cope with being bareheaded much of the time, but teenagers missing hair, ears or more, almost always hide under hats—whatever the weather.

Others will avoid being in a swimming pool except here at Children of Fire where they are with friends.

We also do our best to reinstate hairlines for part-bald girls and with less urgency, for part-bald boys. Sometimes the hair loss is too great but where a hospital like Joburg Gen declines to help, a hospital like Sunninghill will step in and achieve a good outcome. Wigs are a poor choice—they are hot, uncomfortable and can come off at the wrong time.

We have rebuilt noses. But there has been some serious disregard for children's feelings, when surgeons move skin such that a child has hair growing on the outside of his nose. There is also no electrolysis available in the South African state system. And then they fail to put enough cartilage in the nose and it collapses such that the child has to wear macaroni-like tube in the nose-holes all the time.... And there is no sense of urgency to rectify the problems. Maybe surgeons in training could spend a week walking around with stents sticking out of their noses to fully empathise with their patients... because it is no fun being ugly or odd.

Prosthetic ears seem to look a lot better than surgically-reconstructed ears in our limited experience.... But the flesh ones don't fall off or get lost in the forest, or get knocked off by abusive dads...

And Kenyan nipple reconstruction is better than South African nipple reconstruction for burns survivors, with children that we have assisted.

With Dorah, because her central face does not grow, a flesh nose is not an option. The prosthetic noses have worked well (the later ones made by Colin Haylock in London, with a cavity-lug, adhered the best because of the coating he puts on the prosthesis) but the more active Dorah is, the more at risk they are.

We long ago mooted the idea of a nose ring and a small chain to her better ear, as in Indian fashion... but no one has risen to that challenge yet. (Then if she knocked the nose off, it would at least be left hanging from her ear and it would make taking her to swim in the ocean easier.)

Her nose is needed, because Dorah likes to feel like other people. She knows that we have noses and in the past, she would try to take her adoptive mum's off. She now knows that only her nose is removable.

It also protects the orifice, not least from flies that will try to bother her on a sunny day.

And it makes her socially more acceptable to other people. They don't like a triangular hole in the middle of her face.

But that line between what is done for public comfort and what is done for Dorah's own comfort, does not extend to encasing her whole face in artificial material.

It was interesting to look at the website and we would like to improve many aspects of Dorah's functioning and appearance within surgical possibility. But rather than shaping Dorah to the world's expectations, we'll maybe put more effort into shaping the world into a more tolerant place.

Jamie Els delayed his Christmas journey to relatives to make a replacement nose for Dorah. Not as pretty as some of the hand-stippled ones, but "socially acceptable" for Dorah and others and very kind of Jamie.

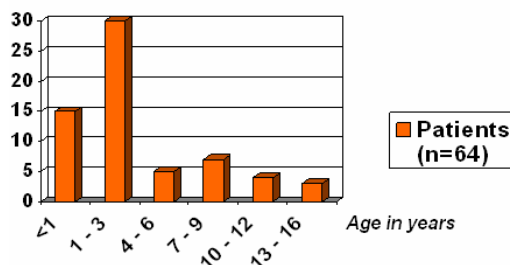
* www.prosthesis.com/face_base.htm

Burns research hampered by lax record keeping in Jo'burg

From February to June 2007 I researched burns statistics at Johannesburg Academic Hospital. I read through admissions books, registers and patient files in order to get a picture of how many children had been admitted with burns, how many of them were male/female, what their average age was, how they got burned etc.

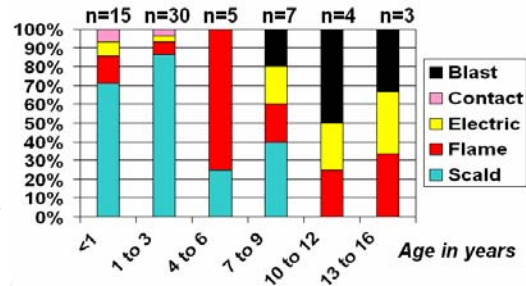
My first big hurdle was the remarkably bad record-keeping I found in all sectors (casualty, wards, records department). I found many of them inconsistent, inaccurate or incomplete. When the civil servants' strike hit in early June, I had no access to the records department anymore. Also, beginning with the date where a new hospital registration system was introduced in mid-2002, the majority (35 out of 40) of all microfiche I checked in the records department were missing. Therefore I split the patients' data into two groups: For patients admitted between 1 January to 8 August 2002 I had the complete information from their files in the records department. There were 71 patients, and I evaluated them for age, sex, type and location of burn, percentage of body surface affected and depth of the burn. I also looked at the records of 193 patients seen in casualty between 1 January and 29 December 2003, and evaluated them for the month that they got burned in, their age, sex and the area they lived in.

Results for "2002 group": The average age of injury was 3 years 9 months, in a range of 5 days to 15 years 7 months. 59 per cent were male and 41 per cent were female.



The average percentage of body surface that was affected was 9.96 per cent in a range of 2 to 40 per cent. The most common types of burns were scalds (67 per cent), then flame burns (15 per cent), electrical burns (8 per cent), blast injuries (7 per cent) and the least common were contact burns (3 per cent). Scalds were more common in younger children. In older children, electrical burns and blast injuries were more common.

Scalds most commonly affected the limbs or the



chest. Flame burns were more likely to injure legs, arms and/or face. Electrical burns most commonly damaged the hands.

Results for the "2003 group": The average age was 3 years, and 62 per cent were male. Most burns (29 per cent) happened in winter (in the months of June, July and August).

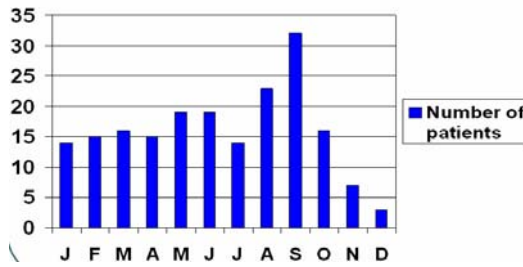
Comment, recommendations:

Blast injuries only occurred in children nine years and older. Notes in the medical records stated that the children were playing with fire crackers. It can be assumed that they either malfunctioned (e.g. exploded too early) or that the children were not aware of the dangers of explosives. Safety regulations for fire crackers need to be enforced, i.e. that they cannot be sold to children under the age of 16 years. Safety warnings need to be made more prominent and adults need to supervise their children continuously.

Scalds through hot water or hot tea were the most common type of injury in children aged 1 to 3 years. Common scenarios are a toddler pulling on a table cloth, causing a bowl of hot soup to fall; a toddler pulling on the cord or the handle of a hot water kettle or a pot on the stove; a mother holding her infant in her arm and a cup of tea in the other hand, accidentally spilling the tea over the baby. People underestimate hot water, even though it can burn a child's ear off. Prevention campaigns are not widespread enough. Most children do not learn about fire safety and burn prevention at school but in light of the number of burn-damaged children across the country, safety should be part of the National Curriculum.

Cramped housing circumstances add to the risk of accidents. If the kitchen is used as a lounge and a children's play room at the same time, accidents are bound to happen. Fire safety cannot be achieved only through public education. Government departments need to take responsibility for unacceptable

housing conditions, poor employment rates and poor environmental health.



The seasonal distribution showed that more burns happen in the cold months of the year with less hours of daylight. It allows the conclusion that many of those injuries were caused by heaters or any devices (mis-)used as heaters. In poor areas these are often rudimentary and involve open flames, such as the imbawula—a metal bucket or barrel with many small holes in the sides, which is filled with burning coal or wood. People also try to warm themselves by electric or gas stoves, and have their

clothes catch alight. The high prevalence of burn injuries in South Africa cannot be ignored. More vigorous safety campaigns need to be launched. This can be done via the media or through community safety organisations specialised in this field. Another issue is the rehabilitation of children with burn injuries. While most private hospitals as well as some of the central state hospitals can offer excellent surgery, parents often do not know their children's rights, nor do they know what is possible with reconstructive surgery as hospitals often do not advise them on the way ahead or give them follow-up dates.

By Marietta Neumann

This research was carried out with the permission of the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery. My thanks to Prof. George Psaras, registrar Willem Erasmus, and also to Prof. Peter Owen of the Department of Prosthodontics.

What's in a name? Les Enfants du Feu, Feuerkinder

Children of Fire is now a well-known name; increasingly too Les Enfants du Feu and Feuerkinder. For technical reasons our main website had the name "reversed" as www.firechildren.org but people who try www.childrenoffire.org will usually get automatically get linked through to our main site as well. But change a couple of letters and apparently one gets linked to a highly offensive child pornography site. So type the name *carefully* please—unfortunately we have no control over what other people do on the Internet.

And even though our name has been legally registered in more than one country for a long time, when USA documentary maker Junius Hughes wanted to call a documentary about the charity—plain and simple—Children of Fire*—he found that the name had already been used in 2004 with Mai Masri's film of Palestinian children who had grown up in the intifada. This does not preclude our documentary name, but could cause confusion in bibliographic type listings.

*www.childrenoffirethemovie.com

Safety Candleholders on technology syllabus

Adrienne Louw, a technology teacher from Iona Convent in the Pretoria area, has asked to use information about safety candle holders from Children of Fire's website. She intends to create a CD with relevant Technology lessons and information for teachers and pupils, in an effort to equip them with the information needed to follow the National Technology Curriculum. One of her lessons focuses on the danger of fire in shacks and the object of the lesson is to make a sturdy and safe candle holder.

The information will serve as reference: pupils have to come up with their own design.

Check <http://picasaweb.google.com/TechnoCharmed> for pictures of work that girls at her school from Soshanguve, Mamelodi, Ham-

anskraal and Eersterust have completed in the past six years. Concepts that were dealt with regarding the candle holders by Grade 7s in 2007 were moulding, reinforcement, stability, and fire-proof material. They used tea light candles and concrete, reinforced with chicken wire. Ms Louw intends to incorporate an understanding of other dangers: of the shacks themselves—*Structures*. The electric cables—*Electricity*. The water tanks Children of Fire designed—*Frame structures*.

The four areas dealt with are:

- Systems & Control (Electricity)
- Systems & Control (Mechanisms)
- Structures
- Materials & Processing

Feedback from the U.K.

"I just got the very touching card of Sizwe and his teddy preparing for surgery, which prompted me to write and send my Christmas greetings to all the charity's children, and especially Dorah, of course. I regularly access your website, and was delighted to see the latest photo of Dorah. I hope the new year brings good things for Africa's children, especially those affected by burns or other disabilities. My close friend Latha's daughter was terribly burned this time last year in a house fire, so I do feel a special affinity for "your" fire children.

Love & all best wishes, Alison Davis, Devon."



Thanks to Chubb Fire Services for providing fire extinguishers for the house and for the associated school site. They were installed by Ludwick Mathabatha (left) and the charming Henry Zulu in December 2007. www.chubb.co.za

Stress and solutions

Children of Fire continues to try to help anyone who phones for advice, no matter how strange the request nor how unrelated to our main field of work. Finding an occupational therapist for a family in Bangladesh after an email plea was a tough one (it seems that people "google" key words and think we can solve *almost any* problem).

And the families of our burned children think that Children of Fire can fix all their (entirely unrelated) problems as well e.g. Andani Mphapuli's aunt clearly could not sleep with tooth pain on the night of December 12th 2007 and she had been to Baragwanath Hospital for help but they said no one could help until January (!) and she had been to someone in private practice who wanted to charge R800 that she did not have and so, at midnight, could the

director please get out of bed, answer the phone and give her dental advice?! Of course... while the family giving bread to the old street woman in Westdene, Johannesburg and wanting to find her housing, was directed to the Jordan Old Age Home in Sophia Town...

But when former volunteer Felix handed his passport in for a visa in Home Affairs and they lost it within the space of a few minutes... and he was flying back to Europe that same day... we were a little lost for words and ideas... Weep? Wait? Shout? Day-to-day life here is more curious than any soap opera... (They found the passport by the way!)

Understand the "soapie" through *The Inside Story*—a cartoon series by Marietta Neumann. Only those who volunteer here will get the full humour.

The Inside Story. Count the shoes



The Third-Grandmother-Syndrome

If you are a teacher you will understand. Students are probably the only match to would-be volunteers' creative excuses.

While some of them surely are genuine, others make you wonder why they don't just say "I changed my mind, I don't actually want to come anymore." This is an example of excuses we've had:

- My grandmother died
- My dog was eaten by my neighbour's Labrador
- My other grandmother died
- We had a power cut and the gate wouldn't open
- Another grandmother of mine died

We listen to your excuses and count the grandmothers. Rather tell us you don't want to volunteer than raising hopes without ever coming. ;-)

Notice Board

Thanks to the 227 readers of *Baba en Kleuter* magazine who SMSed in R10 donations to Children of Fire, totalling R2270. [Of this we received R1269](#) while Vodacom scored R606, MTN got R245 and Cell C received R150. While we acknowledge the kindness of the magazine to run the SMS line, we think that the mobile phone companies could waive their fees when it is on behalf of charity - most people would probably not SMS at all if they realised the huge cut taken.

Neighbour note :: Visiting teenagers find it interesting that a celebrity lives in the same road as our associated school—none other than kwaito (a singing style) star Zola 7... whose real name is Bonginkozi Dhlamini. They take endless interest in his latest car model or latest model girlfriend and seek to emulate his style.

Exciting moments in Christopher's life :: Our long lanky British volunteer Chris beamed one grey and rainy afternoon and said: Seiso told me "toilet" three times this morning." Ah... the little moments which make volunteering so worthwhile. (He'll be a great Dad one day...)



Children of Fire's Father Christmas holding one of many happy recipients of Happy Healthy Christmas Packs in Joe Slovo squatter camp.

Anniversaries :: A sad anniversary passed on 27th December, of the more than 240 people burned alive while scooping fuel from a Nigerian pipeline. Oil has a lot of injury to answer for.

Newsletter Feedback "A salute to your immeasurable contribution to mankind..." [Rocky Singh, Premier Foods.](#)

Children of Fire has helpers from different religions and the charity helps people regardless of religious belief. But a poem received recently by email struck a chord with many here at "no. 58".

Christians - By Maya Angelou

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not shouting "I'm clean livin'."
I'm whispering "I was lost,
Now I'm found and forgiven."

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I don't speak of this with pride.
I'm confessing that I stumble
and need Christ to be my guide.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not trying to be strong.
I'm professing that I'm weak
And need His strength to carry on.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not bragging of success.
I'm admitting I have failed
And need God to clean my mess.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not claiming to be perfect,
My flaws are far too visible
But, God believes I am worth it.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I still feel the sting of pain.
I have my share of heartaches
So I call upon His name.

When I say... "I am a Christian"
I'm not holier than thou,
I'm just a simple sinner

Who received God's good grace, somehow!

Bonne Chance and thanks to Marietta

Our hard working medical researcher Marietta Neumann this year starts the long road to becoming a doctor, studying at the University of the Witwatersrand. Other budding researchers can find challenging projects on our website.



Rachid and Sizwe racing across the charity pool

Sparkles and Skunks

- Gillian Nicholetts of WM Logistics for long running support
- Sheraton Hotel in Pretoria for making individual picnics for the children
- Gavin and Samantha Sharples and their circle of friends for individual presents for the children
- Sheila McCorkle for helping take care of the children and anything from hand-washing blankets to translating legal documents from English to French.
- To the northern suburbs primary school teacher who took the children to the cinema, "did not notice" when Dorah tripped and cut her lip open on the metal edge of a step and lost a nose that would cost 12 000 Rands to replace commercially. Dorah had a doctor's consultation, extensive antibiotics, and the re-constructed lip took more than six weeks to heal. The woman complained that Dorah disrupted the film but failed to see the open wound or to say "sorry".

Thank You to...

Baby Joe of Selimathunzi for sharing party food surplus.

M Lass for printing raffle tickets (please let us know if you can sell some before the Chocolate Fest in early March 2008).

Slam Pool Care for keeping our pool clean.

Louis Rutstein for providing accommodation for car burns survivor Jana Gefimovits and her boyfriend Shawn Marais.

Fleet Africa for bringing hot dogs and presents.

The CIPS 2 Social Committee of the Consumer and Industrial Product and Services Division of Price Waterhouse Coopers for providing bicycles for Oscar, Bongani and Thulani to take back to their rural homes, and thanks to Michael Baxter for arranging it all.



Drs. Du Buisson, Bruinette, Kramer Inc. of Ampath for doing Seiso's medical tests for free.

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Account number: 614 920 23919

Sort code: 25-65-05

First National Bank

Melville, Gauteng

South Africa

Children of Fire

Account number: 901 033 30

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