



Newsletter No 18

January 2014

Happy New Year to you all.

How the time flies and the start of a brand new year and newsletter time again. I had decided to do only one a year but then realised two a year would get everybody in the picture as to what has happened and what is happening with the charity and the children in Africa.

John Walker who is a sponsor and friend of One Life was on a business trip in South Africa for a much larger charity and he diverted his flight to Cape Town so he could spend a whole day with Nancy, Khanya and the children who we support. This was a wonderful opportunity for me to receive up to date news and photos. On John's return he gave a talk down at St Anne's Parish Church and shortly I will print an abridged copy of his speech to share with you all. Because of the length of John's speech plus the included photos I will try and keep the rest of this newsletter short.

We now have 229 children educationally sponsored. We have a new young man started college last September and Lihle, Nancy's eldest foster child starts university in February amidst great excitement and Brendon starts the third year of his IT course shortly. We are blessed that people are in the position to come forward and give some of our young people such wonderful opportunities to change their lives totally and in return that of their siblings and families.

We are still receiving beautiful hand knitted goods for our children in Africa and lightweight various other items, knitted scarves, toys etc. My thanks go to all concerned.

Last year an amazing £40,680 was sent out to Nancy and since the charity's onset £245,118.94 has been sent out to South Africa and that is thanks to you all. An amazing amount!!

Donations since May excluding school fees came to over £11,000, £1000 of that being raised by St Anne's Parish Church at a Charity Auction, a great success. Sally Rolfe and husband Johnnie ran the promised half marathon in the city and with the sponsorship of St Anne's parish Church raised over £400 for One Life, another great amount.

With specific donations from individual sponsors and also from the charity, we managed to send funding for 5 breeze block two room houses to be built to replace the worst of the broken down very unstable shacks. Only when John came back from his visit did I discover the houses badly need insulating and now it has been arranged for five young male school leavers to take on this job, see Africa News.

Now for John's visit to Nancy and the children as told in his own words. The full version of John's

visit can be found on the website posted 21st December 2013 under JOHN WALKERS SPEECH.

One Life South Africa – visit, October 2013

John Walker

I have had the humbling opportunity to visit the One Life supported children and families in Nseleni, Kwazulu, South Africa. In spite of often harsh and brutal conditions and tragedies of inexplicable heartbreak, I found collective resilience, hope, belief and rays of sunshine for the Nseleni children. I have no doubt, this wouldn't be the case if it wasn't for One-Life's – our – ongoing support to the work of Nancy and others at the children's centre.



I spent a full-day with Nancy, Khanya, family, helpers and the wonderful children. A large banner they had decorated welcomed Uncle John. I was then treated to a wonderful performance of traditional Zulu song and dance, poetry, thoughtful, powerful readings in local Bantu language and English; prayer; and the national anthem. Each and every child (young and old)

performed – even baby Princess giggled on queue. The children had diligently rehearsed. It was their opportunity to give –back, to say thank-you, to proudly portray their heritage, and – probably without realising it – it was their opportunity to be children. This was priceless. The stark importance of the children being children hit home with the awareness that the majority of the 40 children in front of me were not just orphaned by the South Africa's AIDS epidemic, but had HIV/AIDS themselves.



Lunch followed the show, where community spirit and collective responsibility were evident. The older children helping and setting example. In fact, such spirit was a constant throughout the centre. The values that Nancy and everyone believed in had meant that in spite of many setbacks – Nancy and Khanya's illnesses being the latest – the older children, now young adults and Lihle Nancy's adopted daughter, had stepped-up, and along with other helpers, had more than kept things going. The centre *is the centre* of the children's' lives – it ensures they get a meal before school, without which their school learning wouldn't be half as good and a meal after school. The centre is a sanctuary – it provides safety, love and a sense of belonging. It gives dignity to young lives, that in many cases, will be painfully cut short.



In response to chronic need, One Life now supports better shelter as well as food and school education. I visited half a dozen families, where typically seven to eight family members live in two small rooms. All were a tough existence. One

Life-funded breeze block houses and essential repairs are helping these families live in better conditions. The task in hand is though bigger than physical resources. Mbali's family life highlights this.



Mbali, one of the most creative performers earlier in the day, is thirteen years old. Both her parents are dead. Last year her sister froze to death in her arms in the cold of winter in an un-insulated home. She lives with her six young siblings and cousins, in the care of her older cousin. All are HIV



infected. Mbali, lucky to have treatment, has skin blistering side effects to her medication so painful at times she can barely sleep. Living conditions were distressing. Physical accommodation improvements would help, but it is hard to feel that only by supporting the reinstatement of a family unit would life outside the centre become bearable, and in any way self-sufficient for Mbali's family. This is so much harder.

On the day I visited, tensions in the townships were heightened by a political rally from a party with a history of violence. With scant jobs and the consequences of inherent real and felt inequalities, community, society cohesion – Ubuntu – felt wafer thin. I was afraid for me and all at the centre.



Life after childhood – particularly work - feels much less certain. It would be easy at this point to feel dissolution, to question even what we are trying to achieve: to show at school what may be, only to close down this hope at adulthood, feels cruel. In many ways it is this very problem that provides for the most hope. Here the stories of Sakhile and Zama need telling. Sakhile was the first One Life young person to be funded through university, in the event his drive, values and knowledge won him a scholarship. An engineer, Sakhile is now moving through the ranks of one of Africa's biggest and most important employers. His spare wages get sent home to help his

extended family and his achievements provide inspiration. The same applies to our other One Life graduates. Zama is now our fifth young adult to get this chance. This opportunity changes the generations that follow. Being funded by South Africans for South Africans does not happen for these young people. Sakhile would not be in that position without everything that One Life, Nancy and the centre have given: food, schooling, safety, belief, inspiration, hope and love.



I know that not all of our One Life children will follow in Sakhile's and Zama's footsteps. For those that don't, for reasons that tear at our hearts, our support gives dignity to all lives lived. It allows all our children to be children. But there are many difficult choices – where to spend; what is the priority. For instance, with extra funds, the centre itself could provide so much more and perhaps even skills to help families like Mbali's cope better. One Life and our support matters wherever donations are spent. They make a difference; a big difference. One Life is now many lives. Lives connected from Chingford and beyond to Nseleni and beyond. I hope my visit is one small part of that.

AFRICA NEWS

Khanya is out of hospital after a year of being mostly in hospital and Nancy is still unwell and suffers constant pain in her hands and feet, this is a result of chronic neuropathy due to the diabetes, if I cannot get funding together to help with medication this will spread throughout her body. It has already disabled her and she cannot walk now but has a wheelchair so she can move around.

At the beginning of the newsletter I mentioned the five breeze block two room houses badly in need of insulation, I asked Khanya to find five young male school leavers to do this job by finding out how to do it and finding the cheapest but good materials for the job. We have been blessed as Khanya knew a man whose job it is to do this type of insulating and he has found us the materials at an affordable price especially now as the pound to rand exchange rate is very high at the moment. He is showing one of the boys what to do by insulating the first one of the houses for us himself with the help of this boy and he will train this young man who in turn will train the others who will insulate the remaining four houses. The qualified man who is helping us, Mr Shandu, said that if the work is done well he will put the boys' names forward to businesses he knows in the same field of work giving them a chance of employment. I am absolutely delighted and the boys, I hear, are excited.

The electricity is back in the township at long last but because of the Christmas and New Year holidays we are still waiting for the computer, scanner and printer to be connected and for the technician to show Khanya and Lihle how to work them. Maybe then I will receive the long awaited photos, receipts and letters. I sincerely hope so. Since beginning this newsletter some of the receipts have now arrived having been sent to me via the parish priest's computer.

John will be returning to South Africa this year 2014 and on one of his trips he will spend another day with Nancy, Khanya and the children. This is wonderful news for them and more so for me and One Life. My grateful thanks go to John.

Last month I was in a position to send enough money for a Christmas party for the children who attend the centre. This as always was a great success, a rare exciting time for the children and young adults. Money was also sent out from sponsors who wished to buy the child/children they support a Christmas gift and to support the child's family in some small way.

Now into January, spring is not too far away with the promise of new growth, warm spring sunshine and hope for a good year ahead. My good wishes for the New Year come to you all and as always come my grateful thanks for your continued wonderful support which you give so caringly to One Life to educate and enhance the lives of these vulnerable Aids orphans.

Thank you so much.

Elena.

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