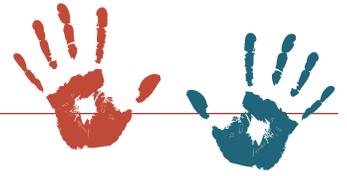


HANDS OF JOY

Newsletter #47 - Winter 2010



“There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways that you yourself have altered.”

– Nelson Mandela

UPDATE

Our time with my niece Christie was rich and rewarding. She became one of the family and enjoyed meeting people and experiencing life in Pretoria after we returned from our trip to Nature's Valley in the Cape. She worked a 5 day work week and became a valuable asset to the Design company she worked for... I think she will be a great ambassador for South Africa!

With the World Cup Series being broadcast into homes around the world, many people had a glimpse of the "New South Africa" at its best. Patriotism was high as many of us purchased flags for our homes and cars and the "vuvusela" made its world debut. Each of the stadiums, had a unique personality and was completed on time. South Africans of all ages and colour joined together in celebration, while crime and prostitution were at an all time low! As a consequence of all the prayers, preparations and hard work, this was an unprecedented time of peace and glory for our country.



Stadium in Soweto

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Soon after the glorious World Cup, teachers and civil servants went on strike, creating havoc in the schools and hospitals especially. Our children at school, lost out on valuable learning time and a daily meal. While in hospitals, things became so desperate, the public was asked to assist. One of my friends and her son, did an evening shift in a maternity ward where they changed bed linens and cared for babies.

Though the strike was difficult, the plight of teachers and hospital staff was highlighted. They are undervalued and underpaid in our society and this needs to change!

Fortunately, our students who are sponsored to high schools, were unaffected by the strike as their teachers are paid independently. Classes carried on, which was especially helpful for Mavis Morobane at Bophelo Impilo. Mavis is in her final year of High school and has been interviewed by a Business college for a Bursary next year. The good news just in is that Mavis was one of the top 5 students in her class this year.

HEALTH CARE CENTRE

Thandie has updated me on some of the students she was concerned for in the beginning of this year...

1. Tsakane Chauke – 9 years – Grade 4

Unfortunately this young girl has sustained brain damage after her Traumatic accident. The physiotherapist is of the impression that she will have to attend a School for Special Needs next year but her mother is having a difficult time to accept this...what mother wouldn't? Thandie has made a plan for Tsakane to have a psychological assessment so she can receive a grant if she does need to attend a special school..

2. Ellen Mphimbya – 7 years – Grade 1

(first year at Riversands)

After a 2 week stay in hospital, Ellen continued on medication and is now looking much better, having gained weight and showing signs of renewed energy. The possibility of her having a more serious illness like Cancer or HIV, has been ruled out, so we are very thankful.

3. Hlulani Mathevula – 12 years – grade 6

This young man has remained in grade 4, where he was placed after his eye treatment. He is now reading. His teacher describes him as happier and gaining confidence!

One has to wonder without Thandie's intervention from the Health Care Centre, and Dr. Sonia's expertise, just what would have happened to these children???

I am so pleased to report that some of our prayers have been answered as we have an offer of 50 pair of school shoes from our friends at the Randburg Rotary. And we have an offer to provide uniforms for some of the neediest children from a Canadian friend of Hands of Joy!

According to reports from Thandie and the teachers, many of the children are in desperate need of uniforms and we will now be able to provide some of these at the beginning of the year. Further donations would be used to purchase jerseys and track suits for the children in the winter season...

In addition, we are still looking for food supplies as Thandie describes the condition of many families this year as desperately poor! To give you a graphic example of just how desperate....

Unemployed parents with a family of children have been "hiring" their 14 year old daughter out to older men for money to buy food. The result, is that this poor young girl became pregnant! It was brought to our attention by Jill in the Art Centre as she had begun showing. Her name is Khutazo, which in Zulu means "encouragement". Already a shy girl, she is now being teased by the others and was highly embarrassed!

In a sensitive way, Nurse Thandie has intervened. She arranged for Laurie to take her for monthly visits to the baby wellness clinic at Witkoppen for counsel and

examination. And she will need testing for HIV... Out of compassion, Laurie has purchased a larger school uniform for Khutazo. Perhaps, she will need to go to a home where she can have the baby but this will only be possible with the intervention of a social worker.

Once again, we are looking for someone who would be able to transport sick children to see Dr. Sonia on Wednesdays which was taken on by Hazel, an English woman who lived in Thailand recently and is now hoping to settle here in South Africa for awhile. She began to assist with transport a few months ago but has just been employed to assist a boy with Down's Syndrome to attend the nearby American International School, where her children are at school. Hazel is still hoping to be involved in some capacity, as she says she loves to help out at Riversands and has already grown very fond of the children!

ART CENTRE



The Art Centre has had a major clean up this year, thanks to the fact that Tessa's son Ross had a community service project to complete for his final year of high school... Both Jill and Tessa's family rolled up their sleeves and made a day of cleaning. What a wonderful difference they have made! One of the other groups that use the Centre have been very careless. We hope to have the locks changed so they won't have access in the future.

The strike has been very disruptive to our plans for this year but the students are currently enjoying drawing and painting leaves which they collected from nearby trees.

Jill is not sure whether she will be able to teach again next year due to numerous changes in her circumstances. She is deeply committed to teaching and would ideally like to continue but it may not be possible. So we would be looking for a new Art Teacher to run the program 2 days a week with the Grade 7 students. Tessa and Jacqui are still willing to assist which is really appreciated!

Jill has brought a grade 7 student named Mthobisi to my attention. He is a gentle creative boy who loves to sing and make art. Two years ago, his father died which was

terribly upsetting. And this year, his situation has become even more difficult as his step father is mistreating Mthobisi.

One day in Art class, Jill and Tessa found him distracted and unable to work. We are wondering whether it might be a good solution to find another home for him and send him to a school where he could improve his talent.

Over the years, we have found that Sekolo sa Borokgo (SSB) has really given the students a firm foundation in Academics, while setting strong boundaries and giving good counsel. They also have an excellent school choir! After making inquiries and receiving a good report about Mthobisi's classroom performance from the teachers, Thandie is trying to set up a meeting with his mother to discuss his future...

STUDENTS AND THEIR STORIES

While waiting for his courses to begin in June, Ashley began to study in anticipation and also enrolled in a program called "Real Dreams" by Samsung. The company has been offering this course free to disadvantaged youth across South Africa.

He has learned Life Skills, Effective Communication and Basic Computer Training. Parts of the course prepared him for his studies providing guidelines for study habits and motivation. One of the quotes he remembers is "if you are failing to plan, you are planning to fail!"

At the end of the course, there is a competition to write an essay on HOPE. The winner will receive a Samsung Notebook (computer) When he finishes his fourth and last exam on Friday, Ashley assures me he will get stuck into this essay in the hopes of winning!

Ashley has taken four subjects in Accounting and Business Management this year and seems to be doing well – in fact some of his marks have been near 90%. He spends his days studying and prepares dinner for his 11 year old brother, while his mother works far away and only comes home every two weeks to bring supplies.

As working professionals, brothers Gibson and Petrus have both been making contributions to their family home. Gibson has nearly completed a new brick home for his mother and Petrus is providing food, as well as school fees and clothing for his nephew whose mother died a few years ago. We keep praying for Petrus to find a permanent position as his salary would increase. He has attended several interviews but sometimes loses out due to racism by the coloured people who favour their own over the black students...

Since he has studied tourism and loves the bush, we try to take Gibson on a hike with us each year. He was able to take leave in October and accompanied us to a Nature Reserve not far from Pretoria. We walked and talked and enjoyed the plentiful buck around us on the hillside. There



Gibson on a hike with us

were Jackals calling in the night, herons and Kingfishers near the dam and ostriches roaming around, so it was a feast for the senses.

Since he is now more used to working in the prison, Gibson has been working out to increase his size and maybe the appearance of authority. He seems more relaxed now and explained how at first, he didn't realise how manipulative the prisoners could be. At times, they would pretend to be his friend and respect his wisdom but soon try to use him to bring in drugs or cigarettes for them. Other times, they would intimidate him with their size and numbers.

Over time, he has been able to give counsel to some on a one to one basis and is heartened when they return later to report they have been pondering over what he was saying...

Although it was a long time in coming, we are delighted to learn about Dennis' new job at a cabling company. Some of the electrical courses he took were necessary for this job. He sounds like a new person and is enjoying the work. He was happy to tell me that his colleague is a mentor to him and teaches him principles of Faith as they travel to and from work...

Time passes when I don't hear from some of the boys. Jonas called a few months ago to tell me he was feeling sad and depressed after losing his job at a car wash. He wanted to ask forgiveness for wasting opportunities in the past with his studies after his mother died. Only recently, I heard from him again to tell me of a new job on the night shift at Mac Donald's. Although it is difficult to work that shift, he is extremely grateful for the work. And he has hopes of doing studies in Sales and Marketing

I read a statistic that 40% of the population in South Africa is unemployed! Tshepo Phiri has also been looking for employment and recently assisted the builder at Gibson's Mom's house. This served a number of purposes and allowed him to learn the skill of brick laying. He has enrolled in Saturday morning computer courses and

moved to Alexander township where he stays with and assists his blind cousin.

After dancing at the opening of the World Cup, Duke Machitele found himself in a whole new position as Youth Development Coordinator in Diepsloot! He is working without pay on a 3 month trial for an NGO run by a remarkable 19 year old Diepsloot youth named Neftaly. In September, we arranged for Duke to attend Strictly Hip Hop Dance Competition in Pretoria with Jonah and in September he hosted Diepsloot's own Dance Festival at the Akani Centre which is run by the Methodist Church as a remedial Study Centre for students after school during the week.



Dancers at the World Cup

There was a full house and a full program where crews of dancers came from far and wide to compete for the prize money of R2,000. Both Duke and Jonah performed solo numbers as guest dancers in between competing crews. Since Veronica had accompanied her daughter Naomi to Johannesburg to write a medical exam that week, they were able to join us, as well as many of the students from School for the Arts. It had been more than 6 years since they were working with the students and they enjoyed seeing the changes in the boys.



Veronica and students at Akani

In fact, it was heartening for them to see... They are now running "Treasure Kidz" - an after school program with disadvantaged coloured children- at their home near Worcester in the Cape. It is wonderful but demanding work and sometimes hard to have faith that the children will respond....

I think Duke, Neftaly and the other organizers learned a lot about running such an event and the importance of setting standards for behavior as well as, putting boundaries into place before the next event!

Duke's older brother Tshepo goes from strength to strength and you can learn about him in the article below...

BOY FROM ORPHANAGE MAKES A BREAKTHROUGH

Author: Phathu Ratshilumela

It's not often that an experienced musician will take the time and effort to nurture a raw talent. However, in 2006, singer and producer Nde Ndifonka, known as Wax, visited the Sithabile Child & Youth Care Center in Johannesburg, Boksburg as part of his giving back to the community mandate. While at the care centre, Ndifonka, who is also a talented guitarist overheard a boy whose singing caught his attention...



Ndifonka left the shelter without paying much attention to the boy but three years later, the same song kept playing in his head. In 2009 the artist decided to trace the boy he had heard singing and after an extensive search, the vocalist finally managed to meet Tshepo Machitele. Ndifonka, who runs the independent label, Lolhiphop Records, offered the now twenty-four year old Machitele a record deal. Explaining why he decided to sign the artist, Ndifonka said for him it was an issue of uplifting someone who comes from a vulnerable background with limited opportunity. "When I heard him singing, he was singing from the heart and that touched me." He added that he heard Machitele's singing just once but three years later, the song was still struck in his head. Ndifonka was convinced there was more to Machitele than a song he sang.

When both parties agreed to record, their first studio venture was the song 'Mother, Father' -the same song that Ndifonka heard three years earlier. According to Machitele, the song talks about children who have been physically and emotionally abused by their parents. "When I was at the shelter, I used to talk to other kids about their experiences and I realised that there were parents who would call their kids names or tell them that they will never

be something in life." Through those talks, Machitele created a song that he says is a dedication to kids who have been abused and also dedicated to parents who do not believe in their kids or who abuse them in any way. "I am talking to the parents not to call their children names and start encouraging them to work hard and be something in life."

Besides having worked on this single, which will form part of his afro-pop album to be released next year (2011), Machitele has also collaborated with a new entry in the hip hop scene Motso on the song, 'Down Town'. According to Lolhiphop Records owner, Machitele is a very dedicated individual who goes all out to make something work. "I think it is important that he is doing what he believes in and because of that I would like to see him inspiring a lot of young people, particularly in light of his background," says Ndifonka. The newly signed artist, who is also a guitar player, echoed this message. For him, the main purpose of his musical journey is to help other children who come from a similar background to his. "I want to help other young people who have been through the same experience as mine. All I am saying is don't give up in what you believe in, don't ever give up your dreams. You have to hold on because one day you will make it." Even though it took some time to sharpen Machitele's musical style, Ndifonka is happy that his hard work is finally paying off. Machitele's first attempt, 'Mother, Father' has been introduced to international Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) Save The Children, which works to deliver immediate and lasting improvements to children's lives worldwide. Touched by the song, the NGO responded by offering to work with Machitele; using his song to assist in music therapy for children who grew up in vulnerable conditions.

Lolhiphop Records has since partnered with "Save the Children" to launch a pilot of the project: Peace of Mind through Music - Music Therapy for Orphans, Vulnerable Children and Youth (OVCY). The purpose of the pilot project is to assist OVCY to process emotionally disturbing issues so that they can concentrate on cognitive learning, to empower children to deal with difficult life experiences and to facilitate positive changes in behaviour, and emotional wellbeing.

As for Machitele, music is a tool he uses to express his feelings and views about what is happening around him, as well as an instrument to reach out to people. "Music is the most powerful medium that can be used to change mindsets and people can be brought together in unity, which is what I stand for."

Machitele's project does not only represent a step into an under exploited avenue in music and development, but also represents a success story as a new path is opened for him, who has overcome his adversity through music, and now has an opportunity to touch the lives of other children. MIO wishes the young man best of luck in his musical journey.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

The girls who were sponsored to SSB- Patricia through Randburg Rotary Anne's and Zanele through Hands of Joy directly – are doing well.

At the end of this year, Zanele learned that she was one of the top 5 achievers in her grade. As a reward, she will receive a scholarship from the ISASA (Independent South African Schools Association) for her next 3 years of High School at the Matric Centre. We are so proud of her!!! Patricia has found science and technology difficult this year but is doing well in her other subjects...

Both of the girls have benefitted from meetings with the school counsellor that I recommended for them.

Tommy at Matric Centre, has also been seeing the counsellor until she found they had worked through issues and he was pretty "well adjusted." How wonderful that the students have access to such a positive service!

IN CONCLUSION

This year of 2010 has been a most eventful year for South Africa and for the world! And I have been reflecting over the many years that we have been so fortunate to be able to encourage, teach and assist so many disadvantaged children. It's so rewarding to see the remarkable young people who have been given "a future and a hope" over the years!

As we prepare for 2011, Hands of Joy is at a crossroads. We are facing a challenge of being able to continue running our programs, as available funding has shifted. There is an urgent need for funding for Nurse Thandie's salary! We are so aware that all of the support received over the years, has always covered our commitments to the students and to this vital work.

I am especially grateful to those of you who have been so faithful in both prayers and support over the years. I would like to encourage your thoughtful, prayerful commitment of monthly support for the year ahead so that we will be able to continue to run the Health Care Centre, take care of the needs of the children and if more funds were available, give more children the opportunity to attend a good High School...

Remember "A happy heart is good medicine and a cheerful mind works healing." (Proverbs 17:22)

"A cheerful look brings joy to the heart and good news gives health to (nourishes) the bones." (Proverbs 15:30)

May this New Year be filled with joy!
God bless you,
With love and gratitude,
Lou Ann

HANDS OF JOY - MISSION STATEMENT

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

- To introduce and teach Art and Church to underprivileged African children at Riversands Primary School in a manner that will enrich their lives by stimulating faith, creativity and confidence.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

- Where possible, to meet the children's immediate physical needs for food, clothing and medical attention.
- To develop ways to empower unemployed parents and former students by teaching skills and creating job opportunities thereby helping to restore confidence and the ability to provide for their families.
- To sponsor Christian students who show some potential to attend special high schools. The aim is to continue a scholarship fund that will sponsor gifted, responsible students in both Art and Academics to attend secondary schools for continuing education. This has been largely dependent on donations.

HANDS OF JOY is a registered charitable organization. If you wish to contribute to it, please contact:

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