

**Family selling beaded necklaces and bracelets at entrance to Tsodilo Hills in The Botswana Kalahari**

*“ Now we should live when the pulse of life is strong.  
Life is a tenuous thing...fragile, fleeting. Don't wait for tomorrow.  
Be here now! Be here now! Be here now! ”*

*—Captivating by Stasi Eldredge*

*“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.” –Helen Keller*

## UPDATE

It is my prayer that in this year of 2012, we would be able to live more from our hearts than ever before!

Each year, there seem to be more and more opportunities as well as more and more distractions; sometimes these are one and the same...

We need wisdom to be able to choose well.

At Hands of Joy, we remain committed to working with our students and helping them to have a better chance for the future!

## NEW DEVELOPMENTS

On the same day in the second part of 2011, two things happened... I was informed by Jill who has been running the Art Centre for this past four years, that she was required to move to Cape Town immediately. Her husband Russell, who is an architect, was awarded an urgent design commission. This is a breakthrough as he is 65 and has not been working for over a year and a half...

Then I had an SMS from Thandie, to say that her health was still not good - even over the holidays - and she could not go on running the Health Care Centre.

After much deliberation, Thandie believes she has no option but to retire. Both women are in their mid 60's so they would not have been working for too much longer. Still in any case, this news came as a shock.

I discussed the situation with Milly of “Changing Lives”, who runs the feeding scheme and now has a substantial garden on the premises. She believes the children are generally much healthier due to her feeding program that is now in its 10th year. So this is a great relief. She also keeps an eye on the children as they line up for food each day, to see if any are suffering.

It is possible that Milly would be able to liaise with Dr. Sonia if there are children who need medical attention and I will look into this...Perhaps one of the women who provided transport in the past, would again be willing to assist in an emergency situation.

Aside from the Health Care she administered, what was so valuable from Nurse Thandie, was the spiritual input, the nurture of the children and the contact she had in the lives of the staff, as well as with the children.

She was able to connect with Psychologists and Social Workers and distribute food, shoes and clothing to the most needy. We have often looked without success, for someone she might mentor and train up....Her shoes would be difficult to fill.

We are at a crossroads and would be grateful if you would pray for God's guidance and direction. My great concern is for Thandie – her health and her future. She has applied for Unemployment Insurance Benefits and will be eligible for a meagre pension.

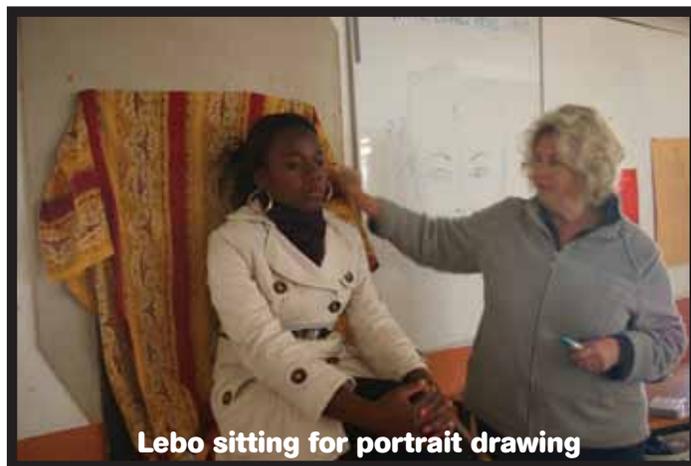
We had hoped that she would eventually move over from her work at Riversands, to a home for orphaned children. The trend in most homes for orphans however, is that they are looking for a couple to work as house parents.

Besides, at present, Thandie would not be well enough for this. The Principal at Riversands and the teachers are beginning to realise what a gift Nurse Thandie has been and how much they will miss her!

Once Thandie is feeling better, we are praying that she will find some meaningful work in the area of Vosloorus where she lives. She has made an incredible contribution to Riversands over the past 7 years and the South African Board of Hands of Joy has agreed to honour her with a financial gift, to be disbursed over this next year.

## ART CENTRE

Now that Jill has relocated, we are also at a crossroads in terms of the Art Centre. Jacqui is available to assist on Fridays and Lebo has been assisting Jill on Tuesdays. She even posed so that the students could draw her portrait...Now we need to find a new teacher to run the program. Hopefully, there will be someone from one of the nearby churches. At this time, the students' home room teacher is struggling to cope with this as she has no training. I do know that some of the other teachers have a background in Art and perhaps their schedules can be shifted to accommodate the situation.



## STUDENTS AND THEIR STORIES

Mthobisi has been a real star in his first year at SSB this year! He joined the choir and participated in drama at the end of the year...His teachers have mostly commented that he is working hard and his marks have improved throughout the year. Only his English teacher wants him to practice his handwriting. It frustrates her that he has such good things to say but when he writes down his thoughts, they are sometimes illegible. I encouraged his mother to make him practice over the holidays!

Since Tommy Makhuru was in his last year of high school at the SSB Matric Centre, I was invited to his end of year award and prize giving. It was exciting to see all of the students being recognised for their achievements and Tommy was no exception!!! He received distinctions for Physical Sciences and Life Sciences and was singled out for his attitudes of Politeness and Deportment. He has been a member of the Chess Club and Young Rotarians. As promised, Tommy worked hard this year, achieving University entrance acceptance!



**Tommy Makhura**

He was accepted to study Accounting and Economic Management Sciences at a new University called Monash which originated in Australia. His marks were good so he may have an opportunity for a bursary and I have asked him to keep in contact while he inquires about this. Since he has worked hard and achieved well, Hands of Joy will assist Tommy with future studies once he finds the right course of Study...

Patricia Mothonsi, is one of the students who attends SSB and is being sponsored by the Randburg Rotary Ann's. In appreciation, she wrote about her studies and I have captured some of her letter. She writes;

"This year 2011 started out well enough and progressed well. The year has not been easy for me however I have tried to maintain not only my life but my school work as well. I have had problems with a few subjects and have had to work hard...

When I chose my subjects, I didn't have a particular career in mind however when the second term started, I had an idea in mind and since then I have been expanding this idea. In the first term, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I enjoyed my school days and enjoyed being educated further while I think of what I want to do all my life. My school days were filled with a lot of homework, assignments, weekly tests and class work. It was not easy having to do all these but I managed. By the end of the first term I had a grip on how to manage everything at once and by the time we were in the second term, I was doing well.

The second term started out with a lot of assignments and I had to do alot of research with limited access to the computer room. However, I managed to hand in every assignment on time. I enjoyed most of my second term because the assignments were not difficult and some of them were fun. I particularly enjoyed my L.O. (Life Orientation) assignment where I had to research about my career and find someone to interview. This pushed me to decide on a career and even better, to pursue the idea that I had. I found someone called Mr. Bradshaw who was a former Air Traffic Controller. This man opened alot of channels for me. When I interviewed him, he was very

helpful and I got the information I wanted and so much more. This made my whole second term my favorite so far. During this term, I took another subject called Advanced Program Math. This subject took normal math to another stage-a higher stage. Then I entered my third term and things got even better...

During the school holidays, I went to a learnership program at Lanseria International Airport where I spent days in different sectors of the airport –mainly the control tower. This program was educational and I not only discovered new things, I also got an opportunity to do things I have never done before. Things like being inside an airplane or inside a firefighter truck and this made me extremely happy. This final term I plan to work even harder than I did in the last term. I also hope to pursue more of my career and work at different sectors of aviation to expand my opportunities and to learn more. Thanks again for giving me this wonderful opportunity!"

Sincerely, Patricia Mothonsi

Despite difficulties at home after the death of their father and their mother's recent illness, Zanele and her older sister Lebo, continue to work hard. At SSB, Zanele will continue with her scholarship, with Hands of Joy paying a portion, along with her school supplies.

And Lebo will continue her correspondence studies at UNISA with a number of friends of Hands of Joy contributing to her studies. The opportunity to sponsor Lebo has been a wonderful new development and we are grateful to all who are contributing!

Several months ago, Lebo called in distress over her Mother who was severely ill and weak. Elizabeth (Maserufe) was receiving treatment for Tuberculosis but unable to eat or walk. And she is the sole breadwinner for the family! We were able to give her a package of immune which contains a number of natural products that work together to build up a person's immune system and overcome disease. In a few weeks, she was walking again and back to work which is truly an answer to prayer!



**Zanele, Mthobisi, and Patricia**

## MENTORING

We are eager for some of the young men to nurture the boys who have not always or ever had a positive role model in their lives. Over the years, Gibson has been friends with Tshepo Phiri, who really has no family that assist him. This has led to a situation of trust and respect where Tshepo now discusses important issues with Gibson before he makes any decisions. When meeting recently with Gibson, I learned that he lives nearby to Mthobisi and with his consent, I phoned Mthobisi's Mother Sarah, to see if she would mind a visit from Gibson so they could meet. Her response was extremely positive and Gibson will visit one day soon. Gibson's work at the prison is demanding but he seems to take it in stride. He was telling us that around Christmas each year, the prisoners are restless and there is often tension in the air. He has managed to get his driver's licence and continues to study in a Safety Management Program to upgrade his status.

His brother Petrus has been awarded twice for Employee of the month at Nedbank where he now works fulltime. He is paying for his young nephew's schooling and clothing since his sister died.

In 2011 there was a census and Mavis their niece, who finished Matric on a sponsorship last year, was hired to coordinate the program for the census takers in her community of Diepsloot. It was a formidable task. Although she is still not into a program of further study, she is eager to participate in a training program for outreaches to schools in this New Year.

I hear from former students often and towards the end of last year, Elijah contacted me. Hands of Joy sponsored Elijah in his first year of High School. Although he said he just wanted to chat, I sensed there was something more. At the same time Ashley was out of work and unable to make ends meet. I knew he had some time on his hands and though he had been looking for work again, had been unsuccessful. This is partly because he can only work part time with the amount of correspondence courses he is taking. So I asked Ashley to meet with Elijah and his response was positive. He told me that he would really like to "give back as he has been given so much." The subsequent meeting turned out to be a real blessing with the boys connecting well. Elijah told me he really valued the support.

At the end of the year, not long after their first meeting, Elijah was devastated to discover that he failed Math and Accounting in his Matric year. He can rewrite these exams in March and April and if Ashley can mentor him, there is a good chance of success. We have now worked out a solution where Ashley will assist Elijah and be reimbursed so he can buy food!

In Cosmo City, where many of the former students we sponsored now stay, we will have a reunion at the end of January. It will be a good time for making connections and sharing stories...

## CONCLUSION

I have included an article at the end of this newsletter that provides some insight into the kinds of problems we are facing in education in South Africa at this present time. There will be some adjustments to make in the future. One thing I remain convinced of, is that supporting and assisting committed students to receive a quality High School and Tertiary Education is a real key to the future for their families and for the future of this country.

My next Newsletter, will be Number 50 and we have been living in South Africa for 20 years now! This gives you an idea of how long Hands of Joy has been operating... In it, we will take a look back to reflect on and highlight some of the many aspects of our work at Riversands with the children and students, as well as volunteers and staff who have been involved.

There have been many challenges and opportunities along the way. And I am in awe of the way God has guided and provided for this work to bring so much benefit and blessing to so many! Each of you have made an invaluable contribution... Although there have been many changes, there is a wonderful path ahead and we need to look forward with prayer and anticipation!!! For your enthusiasm, encouragement, prayers and support, we are so grateful!!!

May God bless you and your families in 2012,

*Love Lou Ann*

*"We are to be salt and light. Salt is not the replacement of, nor an alternative of that which already exists.*

*However salt has the ability to penetrate without being noticed, yet able to bring the best out of that which already exists."*

*-Jericho Walls*

# 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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# Don't blame teachers for failure

Circumstances beyond their control mean they need government support, not vilification



Katalin Morgan & Barbara Dale-Jones

**B**laming and shaming South Africa's school-teachers will do nothing to heal the country's dysfunctional education system. Teachers are themselves part of a society marked by deep wounds and they need urgent government and other support, not vilification.

These were key points that emerged from the inaugural session last week in the "Teachers Upfront" series of dialogues. A collaboration involving Wits University's school of education (which hosted the session), the University of Johannesburg's faculty of education, the education NGO Bridge and the *Mail & Guardian*, the series aims to support teachers as the key agents in quality education.

Dr Mamphele Ramphele, formerly vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Town, celebrated what she called "a noble profession" when she delivered the keynote address last week to about 100 educationists. She recalled her own most influential teachers — her mother, her father and her science teacher in grades 11 and 12, who was responsible for her passion for science and her choice of medicine as a career.

From them she learned about taking responsibility, striving for excellence, what it means to be a leader under tough conditions, compassion and ubuntu, Ramphele said. Teaching is about "pushing students to the threshold of their minds" and being a teacher is about "giving of one's faith and love".

Our dysfunctional education system is one consequence of a "deep woundedness in our society", she said. Apathetic and self-destructive behaviour throughout society, at individual, community and civil service levels, is a symptom of the wound — one inflicted

by apartheid's rupturing of the connectedness that defines us as human beings, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's failure to tackle the socioeconomic infringement of human rights.

Many teachers too are so deeply wounded that they cannot function, Ramphele said. Healing circles at schools to find ways of re-establishing lost connections would be one way of supporting teachers, rather than blaming and shaming them.

Yael Shalem, professor in the Wits school of education, developed this when she spoke about teacher morale. But she noted first that we should avoid talking about teachers as a homogenous category — there are not only race and gender differences but also vast socioeconomic inequalities in South African society at large.

The work of teachers in well-resourced schools differs intrinsically from the work in impoverished areas. Shalem stressed that a "dual economy of schooling exists between those children who have a second and third site of knowledge acquisition, such as access to books and the internet at home or tutorial support, and "those children whose only site of learning acquisition is the school".

Four variables are beyond the control of teachers, she said.

- "Access to learners who are cognitively well prepared for schooling, are physically healthy and whose homes are a second site of acquisition;
- "Meaningful learning opportunities in the past and in the present and a reservoir of cognitive resources at the level of the school;
- "A well-specified and guiding curriculum; and
- "Functional school management that mediates the bureaucratic demands on teacher time."

Between 60% and 70% of South Africa's teachers do not benefit from any of these four variables, Shalem said. "We must therefore challenge the commonly held view that school failure is a result of teachers' inefficiency," she said. Rather, it is time to flag "the



The work of teachers in impoverished schools differs intrinsically from the work in well-resourced schools. Photo: Oupa Nkosi

intractable pattern of inequalities produced by the close association between children's cognitive development and family poverty, adversarial market conditions, bureaucratisation of teachers' work and a radically new curriculum".

Phumi Mthiyane, a teacher at Realogile Secondary School in Alexandra, Johannesburg, was the third and final formal speaker at last week's inaugural session. Drawing on her experiences in a challenging township school environment, she attributed much of her success to a teaching mindset that is "open, humble and willing to change".

The Wits school of education had involved Realogile Secondary in "an inspiring project" that included Mthiyane spending two weeks at secondary schools and a university in England, including where she learned new teaching methods involving technology. And Wits research projects based at her school have made new resources available, including training and support.

In addition, Alex FM, a community radio station, has given the school a weekly discussion slot every Tuesday at 5pm. To prepare for these, learners serving on the school's representative council of learners research issues facing teenagers and parents such as

discipline, and pornography on cell phones. Participating in these radio slots teaches learners valuable lessons about community involvement, Mthiyane said.

For her, "the role of teachers is to be an inspiration to learners" in the face of challenges that include the fast pace of educational and social change, as well as the personal difficulties faced by many teachers such as HIV/AIDS, debt, loss of motivation and working in dysfunctional schools.

"We deal with angry learners who fight every day due to anger from home. Boys can't be easily disciplined by a male teacher because he represents a father who is not around," she said.

Mthiyane made a plea for mental health services: "We need at least one in-house psychologist in each school for issues arising every day with our learners." And she stressed that teachers' own needs and personal circumstances must be attended to — without that, teacher development is impossible.

"We must be aware we are role models for our learners because learners can fail to listen to us but they can never fail to imitate us," Mthiyane said.

The discussion that followed these speakers attested to the complexity of

a teacher's role and how difficult it is to transform the profession's image.

One suggestion that many present endorsed was to inundate the media with positive images of teachers to counter the blighting perception that they are not committed. The country should also have a national TV channel dedicated to improving teachers' content knowledge and profiling excellent teaching practices.

Also raised was a review of the state's resource allocation to ensure that the necessary prioritising of dysfunctional schools does not inadvertently incapacitate middle-category schools by under-resourcing them.

The current school curriculum reforms involve a content specification strongly directed from above, a discussion heard. This could remove from teachers the most interesting part of their work and further demoralise them.

There should be space in the system for teacher-led development driven from within rather than stipulated and required from without. "Fear does not make us work; being inspired does," Mthiyane said.

Katalin Morgan is managing editor of the journal *Education as Change* and publications and design consultant in the faculty of education, University of Johannesburg. Barbara Dale-Jones is chief operations officer at Bridge, an NGO that links educationists ([www.bridge.org.za](http://www.bridge.org.za)). The next "Teachers Upfront" dialogue will be held at the University of Johannesburg on May 31. For more info, call 011 559 3503