

Dear All

July is here again and with it school holiday time for some of our large family of children. Christine, Sarah and Rachel have already left to spend 2 weeks in Scotland and Nicholas and I will join them this week. We hope to spend a further 3 weeks there, visiting family and friends and catching up on all that has been happening. We are looking forward to the trip and we hope that we will be able to see some of you in the course of our travels. We plan to return to Zambia on 13th August and pick up where we left off with the remaining 28 children. Our girls attend schools which follow the British school year and so this is their long summer holiday from July to September, while the boys in Zambian schools run the academic year from January to December and so have only 4 weeks off just now during August. They will then go back at the start of September and will go into third term at the end of which they will write their main exams. There are 3 national exams in Zambia, one at the end of Grade 7 for entry into junior secondary, one at the end of Grade 9 for entry to Senior Secondary and one at the end of Grade 12 for entry into college or University. We have 5 youngsters sitting Grade 7, 2 doing Grade 9 and one doing Grade 12 this year so it will be a fairly fraught last term for us all.

Last time I wrote was in April and I told you of the difficulties we were facing from Social Welfare, then in my second email in April I was able to tell you about the intervention on our behalf of a number of Zambian friends who brought us to see the Minister in charge of the department. The Minister received us very kindly and told his officials to stop harassing us. Since then we have been left in relative peace but we have been pursuing registration of the work with the boys as a Children's Home in order to comply with the letter of the law. This has been a slow, and drawn out process, and is not yet complete though we are now close to finishing it. Part of the conditions for achieving final confirmation is that we complete the work we have started on the dormitory and the care givers house. I may have mentioned before that we had started the dorm, but unfortunately the contractor whom we paid to do the work on both buildings has stopped doing anything on our project. He used our cash for other projects and as a result is unable to finish what he started with us. We have been pursuing him now for months and have had to involve the authorities but when he has no funds left it is very difficult to get anything practical done. We hope and pray that somehow we will be able to finish both projects by the deadline we have been given of the end of September,

as we do not wish to be closed down, even temporarily, by the authorities. It is strange that it is acceptable for children to be living on the street, but not acceptable that they live in our house with us, but that seems to be the attitude of the officials in charge here and that is why we have to build the separate dormitory for the boys.

We are truly grateful to you all for the support, prayer and sympathy throughout the difficult days, and we felt that we, along with all our children, were very much cared for by you all.

Of course lots has happened since then and much of it cannot be covered in a newsletter. The lads have continued to go to school and learn. They continue to make us proud with the effort they put in and the results they achieve. We now have 2 at University and a third writing Grade 12 this November for entry to University. Others have taken position 1 or 2 in their classes, while even those who may never achieve such heights have really tried hard and done their best – sometimes exceeding everyone's expectations. For those who are not academically inclined, we try to find vocational training or apprenticeship places with companies in Lusaka. This has worked well so far and we hope that we will succeed in our aim of giving the lads a chance to achieve their full potential and provide for themselves and their families in the future.

We have been blessed with the provision of high quality volunteers in the last 6 months. We began with Anna and Chrisy, two young ladies from Canada who got stuck into helping out around the house and working with the boys on homework, extra lessons etc. Anna stayed for 3 months and Chrisy for 6, and both have been missed by the lads since they left. One of the things they really made a difference with was taking time to teach some of the little children who stay around the compound, and under their kind attention you could watch little boys and girls blossoming both intellectually and in their personal development. Some of these children are pre-school and stay with their parents so they are not officially part of the Home, but the impact made on them has made us wonder whether the next stage of the work might be to establish a community school providing free education of a good standard to the children around us. We are now being helped by 3 other ladies, all from England, Kate, Dorne and Christine. All of them are ex-teachers, and again the input into the children's academic work is phenomenal – I'm not really sure teachers ever actually become "ex" – they certainly seem to retain their authority!

Kate is coming to the end of her time with us while Dorne and Christine are staying on – bravely – to manage the house while Christine and I are away. They have support from Cammy, a sports science student from Edinburgh who is great at managing the boys for games, bathing, washing clothes etc, and having spent the last 2 weeks being looked after by them all, I am actually very confident that the house will be run as well if not better than when we are around. The only complication seems to be the confusion caused by the similarity of their names to ours, but as they are normally addressed as Auntie and we are called Mum and Dad, we seem to have got over that.

As far as individual boys are concerned we have run into a number of troubles as well as successes over the past few months. We had an unfortunate situation where a couple of youngsters stole money from one of the volunteers. Of course they were quickly discovered and had to be expelled since it was their second offence. We took them to Social Welfare and asked them to find other places for them to stay, which they completely failed to do, and 6 weeks later both boys were on the street again in complete destitution. We really could not leave them there so we had to swallow our pride, bend our rules and allow them back. I do have to admit that they have both behaved extremely well since then and show every sign of having changed for the better. We have not allowed them to go back to school as we want them to see this as a privilege that has to be earned rather than a right to be abused. They are both working extremely hard at home with the volunteers and we are ready to allow them to go back either for this term or at the start of next year. A third boy is in the same situation for repeatedly fighting, and he also seems to have made every effort to control himself helped greatly by anger management counselling from Christine. It is very hard to know what to do with such boys in terms of discipline. If you are too soft, they cause havoc in the household, and upset the other well behaved boys, yet if you try to be strict there is the danger of wrecking their chances for ever. Most of them recognise this, and even when we expel them, they ask to come back and do not blame us for what we have done, which is a very unusual thing amongst children who have lived on the street. I think they also recognise that we do care for them as individuals and therefore do not speak ill of us even when under suspension. Unfortunately, there are always a few who simply want revenge and go around spreading stories of abuse, and unfortunately there are always people too ready to seize on these stories

and try to stir up trouble. As one good Zambian friend said to me recently – “No good deed will go unpunished”.

In December I wrote of 4 new boys, Sam, Gift, Danny and Patrick. Two of these boys have left us, while two have stayed on. Sam didn't last long as he proved very unreliable and troublesome, and in the end decided he didn't like the rules at our place. Danny and Patrick both decided to make abreak for freedom in February, but Danny quickly came back and asked to be re-admitted. He is now 10 and a real little livewire. He is the littlest boy we have ever looked after and is very bright but still very wilful and naughty, although he is also very loveable. We have seen very little of Patrick since he left. Gift has remained stable and constant throughout the year and now goes to school although he really struggles with most subjects because of the lack of foundational teaching in basics. We have also added another by called Clifford, whom I have referred to before as being a very sad retarded lad. His problems are compounded by many years of sniffing glue and abuse on the streets including sexual abuse, and he has great difficulty in learning anything new. He is being taught at home just now by Christine and Kate, and while he is a nice friendly lad, it is hard to see how he will ever progress to being self-sufficient. I have attached a group photo of 25 children (I have no idea where the others were) and one of Clifford, and all the comings and goings and returns mean that we are now at 28 boys and 3 girls in our “immediate” family. The third photo is of our little football team wearing the new strips and boots that were sent to them by a group called KitAid from England whom we would like to thank sincerely. Danny is second from the left in the back row. We have a number of boys who are gifted musically but have never had the chance to learn to play instruments. Does anybody now of a charity which collects old instruments and donates them to groups in Africa who can use them? If so we would like to hear from you so that we can try and give the guys a chance to develop their talents.

From a work perspective, we continue to struggle against the problems caused by the global recession and its knock on effects in Zambia. Business is very hard right now but we can record God's faithfulness as we have been able to meet our family expenses so far often from unexpected sources. Christine continues to be part time doctor and full time Mum to 31 kids plus the many other families we try and help from a distance, and I never cease to wonder at how much she gets done in a day. Sarah and Rachel carry on well at school, and Sarah is now contemplating her future

after she finishes school in the next year or two. She would love to study music and drama and is already looking at possible colleges. Nico and Mulenga are hard at work in their classes and Mulenga writes Grade 9 exam in November, which is why he cannot take time off to join us in Scotland this year – he has to attend extra classes all through his holiday.

Thank you all for your continued support. It is invaluable and very much appreciated. I hope we see some of you while we are home, and may Godrichly bless you all,

Love from us all

Don, Christine, and all the kids