



## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



### Introduction

I have never smiled so much in my life. At the end of an intense two weeks of finances, problem solving, planning and meetings at Lesedi, we stood on the stage in the incredible school hall watching all 450 children and staff singing and dancing away. Three hours of joyous prize giving, birthday and 10-year anniversary celebrations followed.

Benson sat with the Grade 6s on a little chair watching proceedings like a proud dad. As the prizes were read out, best in grade 3, most improved in grade 6, best netball player, best in science... the winners rushed to the stage, to whoops and cheers from the crowd. With huge grins, many were mobbed by their friends or picked up and carried by a proud elder brother to receive a beautifully wrapped prize.

The monetary cost of the prizes was small. But the sense of achievement, recognition, success and pride for these kids was priceless.

This is why we do Lesedi. In a world full of bad news, in one of the most beautiful but impoverished countries on earth, in a community surviving day-to-day with poverty, social upheavals and drought – to have the opportunity to provide light and hope and the possibility of making a life changing difference to all these kids and their families is humbling.

We are extremely proud to announce that the Lesedi project is now 10 years old! Our pioneer

learners started in the little concrete and metal pre-school shack in January 2014. Many of these students are still with us and will be starting Form 3 next year. As part of our celebrations, some of the original kids plus their teacher Ms Mpofu returned to their original classroom and even sang the alphabet song we used to hear them chanting.

Who would have thought that in just 10 years, this simple shack would have ballooned into a \$1.5m primary, secondary and clinic campus with facilities surpassing most rural schools in Zimbabwe? Back in 2014, I think we would all have laughed at the very idea!

The constant pressure of Lesedi means that we rarely take time to reflect on what has been achieved. We are so focussed on worrying about what is needed next – another classroom block to be funded and built, more teachers needed, \$20k per month to be raised for salaries and food, 60 more sponsors to find .... It feels like a runaway train with us laying the track down just before the train goes over.

It is only when we give a tour of Lesedi to visitors that the enormity of our accomplishments sinks in, as we see the campus through fresh eyes. It really is remarkable what we have all achieved together. In providing your financial and moral support you are giving these children a unique opportunity to become the best version of themselves they can be. Thank you!



*Lesedi Pioneer Students in 2014*



*10 years on – now learning at Lesedi Secondary*



## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



Looking forward again - as we can only allow a few moments to wallow in our achievements - we now need your support more than ever. Africa has too many decaying derelict ghost schools and clinics. Well-meaning, hard-working charities, NGOs, individuals seemingly did the hard bit raising funds and building these structures – but the really, really hard part is then paying the teachers' salaries, feeding, equipping for 5 years, 10 years, 20 years, forever.

You have already done so much but to keep the Lesedi dream going we desperately need your continued help in these key areas:

1. **Sponsorships** – with a few kids still on the waiting list and many more starting in January please keep spreading the word to friends and family. The sponsorship money is our life blood that covers 60% of the food, salaries, medical and other essential costs. With limited tourists visiting the school post Covid we need to keep expanding our supporter base to keep pace with the growth in the school. \$30 / £20+gift aid per month makes a huge difference.
2. **Operating costs** – if possible, please consider increasing your monthly contribution or making a one-off donation

to cover essential salaries, food and other running costs. We hate asking, but the financial pressures are immense. After all the investment in Lesedi, we feel a huge moral responsibility to ensure the schools and clinic continue for generations to come.

3. **Books and equipment** – we have now raised enough to purchase the Form 3 textbooks for next year but are still requesting donations for primary school revision textbooks, vocational and sports equipment.

Any additional financial contribution you can make is hugely appreciated. As a reminder, every \$/£/€ you give us after bank and fundraising platform (PVF/CAF) fees goes in full to Lesedi. We have no costs for the UK charity with all our time freely given, and we cover all UK charity admin costs personally. We also personally cover all our travel and other costs when we do our regular trips to Lesedi.

Finally in this opening, thank you! There would be no Lesedi without you and we look forward to continuing this wonderful journey together. On with the update as we have so much to cover. To keep it manageable we have broken all the news down into bite size chunks with lots of photos. Enjoy.







## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



### Construction

Thanks to some amazing donations (thank you Mike & Michelle, Barbara, Marti & John), Benson and team have completed two double classroom blocks (Form 3 and Form 4) plus four teachers' cottages so that we now have the base minimum of structures to teach up to the end of Secondary.



*Lesedi Secondary Form 4 Block*

This is a special milestone in Lesedi's life and a proud achievement since that first concrete shack – we now have 12 primary and 8 secondary classrooms, 4 vocational workshops, ablution blocks, a beautiful clinic, a huge dining/community hall, teachers' and nurses' cottages, plus all the infrastructure (boreholes and water tanks, mains electricity, access roads, Wi-Fi etc). Oh, and the concrete shack is still there!!

From a rough count that is 1.5 million bricks, thousands of tons of sand, and an incalculable amount of blood, sweat and tears.

Thank you to everyone who has financially contributed to this amazing achievement. And thank you Benson who has tirelessly donated 10 years of his life to creating this incredible legacy. The progress has been staggering especially when we had over two years of pandemic and lockdowns.

There is always more to do but the main infrastructure is now in place to teach and care for 500+ 4–16-year-old children. Wow.

### Science Block

As we go to press, we have just received our largest single donation ever (thank you Volker 😊) that will cover a fully equipped science block at Lesedi Secondary. The structure will include two labs, each accommodating 36 learners, a prep room, waiting area, storage and office. Once again, we have been rendered speechless – not just at the generosity of such a donation, but also the level of trust being placed in us to create the best science block possible. Along with the vocational buildings, the addition of a dedicated science block will provide opportunities to the Lesedi learners that we could only have dreamt about.

Benson has already started the foundations and we have just recruited an excellent science teacher so by mid-2024 we hope to be able to deliver high quality science teaching at Lesedi.



*Foundations for our new Science Block*



*Benson showing cottages to the new teachers*



## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



### Agriculture Projects

One of our most exciting developments in 2023 has been in Agriculture, driven by our new teacher Mr Romeo Nyereyemhuka. Thanks to his tireless efforts, plus funding from our fabulous supporters, the secondary school now has several ongoing projects:

- ✚ **Vegetable garden** with drip irrigation and shade netting providing regular crops. Growing anything in the Kalahari sands is frankly a miracle...
- ✚ **Chicken project**, now on a second batch of chickens;
- ✚ **Rosie's piggery** – a clean, modern piggery unit. The waste from the pigs is discharged into a biogas plant that in turn powers the lighting and heating requirements.



The produce from these projects either supplements our school feeding requirements or is sold locally to generate income. It's the ultimate win win – the school becomes more self-sustainable, the kids learn amazing hands-

on skills and the community sees what is possible in a very barren agriculture area.

Thanks again to Mr Nyere who has made this happen. A few days before we arrived there was no electricity, and the new batch of chicks were just one day old. Without heat they would all have died, so Mr Nyere put a charcoal stove in the chicken coop and stayed there all night to ensure the grass bedding didn't catch alight. That is dedication.

### Competitions

Competitions are a normal part of school life in Zimbabwe. The kids relish them and gain a lot from the experiences. Our teachers are confidently planning that the primary and secondary schools will take part in more competitions next year, but - as always - we are restricted by our finances. The cost of travel can be onerous, particularly when transporting the whole school choir! Unless we receive specific donations for competitions, some difficult decisions will need to be made.

In October, one of our Grade 6 boys, 11-year-old Franklin Mhembe, won the under-14 boys category of the NAPH District chess competition. Franklin continued to the Provisionals where he was placed 2<sup>nd</sup>, narrowly missing out on proceeding to the National Chess Tournament. Well done to Franklin for his achievement!



Our Primary School choir also took part in competitions for the first time, being placed a very respectable third.





## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



### Grade 7 Results

After extremely impressive Grade 7 results last year (91% pass rate), this year has given us a dose of reality. The pass rate was 62% by subject, or 73% by units. This excludes several learners from the special needs class, but includes a number more who probably should have been in special needs as they continue to struggle with reading, writing and comprehension.

We always knew this year would be challenging, given the learners in Grade 7, however the results are rightly prompting discussions about how best to assist those kids who fall behind early in their schooling.

Our special needs class is progressing well and some children have already moved back into their mainstream classes. Unfortunately this year's Grade 7s only benefited from the special needs class for one term (as the class started in the final term of 2022). This year they had to return to their main class as part of the Grade 7 exams included coursework. We must find a way to help some of these children improve, otherwise they will fall further behind at Secondary.

### Form 3

In January we will be introducing Form 3 at Lesedi Secondary. This is the start of two key years of 'O' levels, ending in exams and graduation at the end of Form 4 in December 2025.

After much deliberation we are offering two streams for the learners depending on their strengths. This will include a more academic stream, with options to focus on sciences or commercial subjects, and a more vocational stream.

Every subject needs one teacher, so it has been a real balance in providing a sufficient breath of subjects / choice vs stretching ourselves financially with too many teachers to fund.

We have recruited four great new teachers and we look forward to welcoming them into the Lesedi family. We are also now actively recruiting for a metal work teacher.

There is a huge amount of work to be done and our plans will inevitably continue to evolve, but we are happy to be offering a range of subjects that should hopefully allow each child to learn, flourish and leave school well equipped for future life.

### Clinic

The clinic continues to grow and expand its outreach, providing essential medical and welfare support to all the Lesedi children and staff along with the wider community. We support several children with long term health needs as well as the usual injuries rambunctious kids get (although you don't get too many scorpion stings growing up in the UK!). Lifesaving polio and other immunisations are also provided throughout the clinic catchment area.

The clinic remains a key distribution hub for essential aid programmes such as the World Food Programme for expectant/new mums and their babies.

On our final day a flurry of swanky SUVs turned up. It was an advance party of NGO and embassy officials prepping for a visit from the acting US Ambassador to Zimbabwe who was visiting the following week to see first hand the food delivery programme. Lesedi is well and truly on the map.

### Eye Screening

It has been a long-held dream of ours to offer eye screening to all the Lesedi kids, as most would never have the opportunity to have their eyes tested. However there is very little point offering an eye test if the charity isn't also prepared to fund spectacles or further treatment as necessary. So it is a project that has been repeatedly kicked down the road – until now!



## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



After approaching the [EyePod](#) clinic in Victoria Falls, we were thrilled that they offered to bring a team to Lesedi Clinic for a couple of days to provide free screening for all the Lesedi kids and staff.

Hosted by Sr Irene and the clinic team, 5 specialists from Eyepod tested 350 children and 17 adults over 2 days. The initial ECDs were a bit of a challenge and also most kids associate going to the clinic with a painful injection, but things soon settled into a very smooth operation.



The team identified 39 children requiring a follow up (mostly for allergy treatments or spectacles) and additional consultations are ongoing. The [Eye Institute](#) (owner of Eyepod) has generously offered heavily discounted rates for consultations and spectacles. Huge thanks to Dr Ron Mhizha for supporting us, and Gracious Phiri and her team for their hard work and enthusiasm whilst screening.

Excitingly, it looks as though our partnership with EyePod may become a longer term project, as they are tentatively discussing setting up a base at Lesedi Clinic. More to follow on this in the New Year!

The prompt for the whole eye screening initiative was a donation of kids sunglasses from our Uncle Colin. This was followed by another donation of sunglasses (and lots of helpful discussions) from friends Hazel and Seb, and their company Kay Pictures. We performed our usual delivery service and the

sunglasses were distributed around those kids that were struggling in the harsh light.



### Intellectus Campus

One thing inevitably leads to another and it was exciting to discover that the Eye Institute have a partnership with [Intellectus Campus](#), which has colleges around Southern Africa offering training solutions in Healthcare, Business, IT and Education & Training. They are considering building a campus in the Vic Falls area and we would love it to be next to Lesedi. What a fabulous opportunity that would be for the kids! One of the team, Mr Leo Chipendo, helped out with the eye screening and after a tour of Lesedi was totally inspired by the prospect of basing themselves at Lesedi...so we hope we may be able to bring this to reality.

### Other Partnerships

The conversation with the Eye Institute / Intellectus ties in with other conversations we are starting to have about the longer-term plans for Lesedi and its graduates.

As we've mentioned before, we are not yet convinced that we can ourselves offer the breadth and quality of facilities required for students beyond 'O' levels through either 'A' level or vocational further education training. The complexities and financial cost of secondary education vs primary has been a huge step up and placed considerable financial strain on the charity. Tertiary is an even bigger step up than that.



## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



We clearly don't want to stretch ourselves too far and potentially put at risk all that we have collectively achieved. However, we also don't want to "abandon" our kids at the end of Secondary for those who wish to continue with their education and skills training.

We don't yet know the best way of assisting the kids post 'O' levels but will be exploring all options, including partnering with suitable like-minded institutions and possibly setting up a scholarship fund to cover transport and fees for those wishing to continue to 'A' levels or further training.

### How can you help?

As mentioned in our last few reports our main challenge – and what keeps us awake at night – is ensuring we have enough money every month to pay for all the essential outgoings that keeps Lesedi running. We are doing everything we can to limit the regular outgoings but two schools and a clinic with 500+ children and staff is a huge undertaking!!

The sponsorship program has been incredibly successful, and we simply couldn't run Lesedi without it. But the reality remains that even with the recently increased rates, sponsorship revenues only cover \$11k of the \$16k-\$20k monthly costs for salaries, food and other running costs needed to keep Lesedi open. And this cost will rise with 5 new teachers and 60 more students from January.

Stopping meals is the obvious saving that we could make. School meals are not provided at any other school and at \$4-5k+ per month (which sounds a lot but equates to 30-40c per serving) financing the feeding program is a big financial strain. We are doing all we can with the agriculture projects to become more self-sufficient. However, for many of the community children this is their main source of nutrition and from their letters to sponsors it is clear how hugely appreciated the food is. It also encourages some of the kids to come to school when otherwise they might drop out.

After the plea in the last report, we raised another \$1k per month in regular contributions – a huge thank you to those who contributed.

However, we would be hugely grateful if you could do even more:

- ✚ Encourage friends and family to sponsor. If we can find sponsors for all the children at school in 2024 the monthly sponsorship income will be \$13.5k per month;
- ✚ Adding to your monthly sponsorship payments or providing additional one-off donations. The total costs for educating, feeding, welfare and love is more like \$500-\$600 per child vs the \$360 sponsorship rate;
- ✚ Consider sponsoring a teaching post at circa \$5k per year;
- ✚ We also have specific fundraising requests for textbooks (\$7,500) and equipment (\$5,000).

It is frustrating for us that we now seem to be becoming victims of our own success. The few tourists who pass through Lesedi are clearly wowed and impressed by what has been achieved – but understandably look at Lesedi and assume we are financially secure. What we are struggling to communicate is that the school only functions if we raise a minimum of \$20k each and every month from private donations. So far we have managed this but it becomes harder and harder to do so without expanding our support base.

If you are willing and able to provide further help, a reminder of the links for online donations are shown on page 8. Other donation options (including donations of stocks and shares) are always shown on our [website](#).

Finally, we know that some of you have already added Lesedi into your legacy planning, for which we are incredibly grateful. If you haven't already done so, please give consideration to leaving a gift to Lesedi in your will. We recommend bequests are made to





## LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE DECEMBER 2023



Ngoko Charitable Trust, UK-registered charity no. 1163965. We can assure you it would be a most worthwhile legacy.

### Thank You

And a final thank you from those who matter most. One of our Form 1 girls, Kudakwashe Chimbangu, approached us with the following note during our trip. She wanted to express her gratitude for Lesedi. Apparently she almost backed out until her friend, Gladness, convinced her that she had to hand her note over to us. We are so glad you did!

Salutations of the day to you ladies and gentlemen. My name is Kudakwashe Chimbangu, and I would like to tell you how grateful we are as Lesedi students.



In Zimbabwe not all schools have the facilities we get here at Lesedi. In some schools, students are not being given food. Instead they are bringing food from their homestead. In many cases the food they are getting is not enough.

In Victoria Falls some families live in poverty, which leads to children dropping out of school, and girls being forced to marry. The help we get from our sponsors means we can avoid these outcomes, and it is changing the mindset of our communities.

The support we are being given is pushing us to work harder, to be creative and to be innovative. Lesedi is producing future doctors, engineers, welders, carpenters, chefs, musicians, scientists, farmers, agronomists and teachers. This is happening only because of our sponsors. So as Lesedi pupils, we say a big fat thank you to all our sponsors, Mr Siyawareva, Miss Fiona and Mr Graeme.

Thank you. With love from,  
Kudakwashe Chimbangu

### Summary

So that dear readers and supporters is it (well, almost) for another year! 2023 has been an incredible year for Lesedi with all the construction, projects and secondary school finalisations. After 10 years the Lesedi family has achieved so much.

There is a huge amount more to do, but the end of the initial construction phase of 12 annual grade/form additions from ECD to Form 4 is within sight. We can then concentrate on being better in all we do, become more self-sustainable and give these children the best possible start in life.

Thank you to the teachers, nurses and support staff who work so hard. You put the heart and soul into Lesedi.

Thank you to you our supporters for making this journey possible, for believing in us and for sharing in this dream.

We will finish with a visual reminder of the progress over the past 10 years, since the birth of the Lesedi dream, along with the usual random assortment of photos.

Have a lovely relaxing holiday season,

*Fiona, Graeme and Benson x*

### Online Donations

#### USA/Canada/Other non-UK countries

(via Network for Good)

<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/lesedischoolsandclinic>

#### United Kingdom

(via CAF)

<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/17921>



# LESEDI 10-YEAR ANNIVERSARY TIMELINE



Pre-school classes started in the initial Lesedi shack.



Teaching Grades 1 and 2 plus ECD. Construction continues with kitchen facilities, ablution block and fencing of land.



Sponsorship program introduced. Fourth double classroom block added, along with new ablution block.



Covid hits! The final classroom block is built. Sports facilities added. Now teaching up to Grade 6 and considering a Secondary School



Lesedi Secondary opens for Form 1, including impressive vocational hubs.

← 2014

↓ 2015

← 2016

↓ 2017

← 2018

↓ 2019

← 2020

↓ 2021

← 2022

↓ 2023



First double classroom block almost complete. Ngoko Charitable Trust established.



Grade 3 added. 150 kids now enrolled. Two further double classroom block built, along with teachers' cottages.



Construction of Lesedi Clinic. First boreholes drilled to resolve water crisis. School Dining Hall built.



Our first Grade 7 exams and our pioneer kids graduate from Lesedi Primary. Major construction projects start for Lesedi Secondary.



Added four more teachers' cottages and Classroom Blocks for Forms 3 and 4. Science block started.



## LESEDI IN PHOTOS



A "Funny Day" at Lesedi, with girls dressing as boys and vice versa – to celebrate International Children's Day



Some of our girls...



And some wonderful boys! A new student, Mark Ncube (in the white dress) was winner of prettiest "girl".



Our Pioneer students from 2014. They will be starting Form 3 in January.



Taking 10th Anniversary photos with help from Adiola and Nyasha from the Secondary Photography Club



Let the celebrations begin!!



## LESEDI IN PHOTOS



Benson enjoying the Prizegiving with the kids



Sharing the glory with friends...



A surprise appearance by Santa...bearing a few sweets!



Birthday Celebrations for September – December



Time to enjoy some birthday cake...



The Lesedi Team



## LESEDI IN PHOTOS



Wood Technology



Metal Technology



Food Technology



The finished product – Graeme and I had a generous portion for lunch with custard...yummy!



ICT Class



Graeme teaching some of the kids to play UNO (a great card game!)



## LESEDI IN PHOTOS



Netball in the searing heat



Basketball...with some impressive moves



Football (or perhaps Soccer)



Apparently this is called Acroyoga!



Merry Christmas and...



...love from Fiona, Benson & Graeme xx