



LESEDI NEWS & UPDATE

JUNE 2023



Introduction

Our latest Lesedi visit was the usual intoxicating combination of photo-taking, financial discussions, planning meetings, and more photo taking, interspersed with moments of pure joy with the Lesedi kids.

Rather than share the usual trip report reflections, we wanted to continue from our April update to focus on the stories and voices of all those who are blessed by Lesedi.

From the last update we heard Amanda's life story *"the next option for me was seeking employment as domestic help. I didn't want that. I wanted to be educated and to become a nurse. I got a place to learn at Lesedi ..."* to Nyasha's simple truth on the food *"Being at Lesedi School has been a great relief for our family and others; parents are no longer struggling to find some food for their kids"*.

In this update we share more stories about the transformational impact Lesedi is having on the children and the wider community, this time from some of the primary school teachers. We then outline the main developments over the last six months.

Keeping our Lesedi updates brief is always a challenge, as the level of progress remains staggering. In under 10 years (including

pandemic and lockdowns) we have grown from a handful of youngsters and a trainee teacher in a concrete pre-school hut through to our present day 450 learners and staff across a beautiful two school and clinic campus. One day we will all look back and shake our heads in wonder, but there is still much to be done before that day arrives.

We were grateful to receive some extremely generous support at the end of last year to fund the Form 3 and 4 classroom blocks which are now nearly complete.

Our focus now is on ensuring we can offer our pioneer Forms 2s, and all those who follow, the best education, skills and experiences possible to equip them for their adult lives – whatever their aspirations. We are aiming to offer a broad range of subject options for their final two-year stretch in Forms 3 and 4 leading to 'O' Levels, with an option for learners to focus on vocational skills or more academic options.

For academically minded learners, we want to offer a choice of science or commercial subjects, so that each child has a chance to follow their preference of future career. To do this we need to properly equip the classrooms we have, especially in science, computers and vocational equipment.





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Our dilemma – and what keeps us awake at night - is doing all of this and still covering the monthly running costs. We are doing everything we can to limit the regular outgoings, including reducing the frequency of meat in school meals, and starting to grow and rear our own food. We still have zero administration costs for the UK charity.

The sponsorship program has been hugely 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 commitment to cover salaries, food and other running costs needed to keep Lesedi open.

2023 and 2024 were always expected to be our biggest stretch financially, with higher monthly outgoings AND an additional \$100k-\$150k+ investment per year for all the buildings, equipment, books and supplies needed to complete a high-quality secondary school.

So, we are in a crunch year and need your help please. Are you able to provide an extra donation (monthly or one-off) to help cover the shortfall in our critical food and salary costs, or to fund desperately needed equipment to give our Lesedi kids the breadth/quality of learning they deserve?

If you can help, a reminder of how to donate is at the end of this report, along with details of our most pressing needs. Thank you.

If we can raise the additional funds needed, then from January 2024 we can provide our pioneer students with the best and broadest opportunities for their key Form 3 and Form 4 learning. Together we can achieve a legacy that will inspire, educate and care for many thousands of poverty-stricken children for generations to come.

Finally in this opening, thank you! There would be no Lesedi without you and we look forward to continuing this wonderful journey together.





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Enough from us 😊. Let's hear from a few of the Lesedi Primary teachers...there are more comments at the end of the report with the extra photos...

What does Lesedi mean to us?

“Lesedi is a Tswana word that means Light. The institution came into existence with the sole purpose of bringing light to the children of Ntabayengwe and the community at large.

Lesedi is important because it is helping many children from poor or not well to do families with their school fees being paid and at least one good meal a day. Lesedi also provides employment to close to 50 employees who would be really struggling otherwise. And Lesedi is empowering learners to be self sufficient when they leave school so that they can become entrepreneurs and be employers themselves.

Lesedi is also empowering the local community with some financial generating projects that help them to support their families such as the chicken projects and sewing club. It is full proof that Lesedi is really bringing light to everyone around.”

Sipho Ndlovu – Grade 3

“Most learners are sponsored which means they don't have to worry about where to get money for their school fees. This means that they can become what they want to be in life and change their often-sad stories into positive ones.”

Yunah Sibanda – ICT (Computers)

“My role is to assist in giving learners with special needs dedicated attention and care for their diverse needs in an environment where they are comfortable to try and make mistakes without being laughed at or labelled by their peers.... The joy I witness when a learner grasps a concept keeps me inspired and makes me want to keep pushing and playing my part in the Lesedi team.”

Hazel Mhlanga – Special Needs

“When I first joined Lesedi I thought it was just a normal school, little did I know that it was different from our schools in Zimbabwe. I love working with kids and I love to see them do well. I started teaching the current Grade 7s in 2017. My motto is “no one is left behind” and the children I teach quickly adopted it too and started helping each other.

It didn't take long for me to get attached to these beautiful little souls and I felt I needed to help them and keep them at school. I remember at one time I had vowed to pay for two kids to continue learning after losing their guardian who was their bread winner. I paid for two terms then they got sponsored.

At times I have had to look for the children who might be kept at home because parents didn't have the means of bringing them to school or requirements for each year for their child's learning. I believe each child should be allowed and accorded the chance to learn and to prove her/himself.

In my position as a teacher and deputy head I get to know the needs of most of the children. Many time I have had to negotiate on behalf of children for them to get what they need from parents, getting them to school on time and also making sure parents play a part in their children's education. Lesedi has helped these children to grow and I'm confident they are going to help create a different society, different from the one they live in now.

I look forward to each day at Lesedi and I hope by the end of each day to have made a difference in at least one child if not more. It is always interesting to see a positive change in a child. Teaching new things each day in a conducive learning environment really expands their minds.

A huge thank you to all our supporters. Your contribution has made Lesedi a reality and you will always be remembered for your helping hand.”

Cathy Ncube – Deputy Principal / Grade 4



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Lesedi 2023 Update

Let's take a look at the key developments at Lesedi over the last six months:

The final (for now!) secondary **classroom blocks** for Forms 3 and 4 are near completion. A huge thank you to Barbara and Mike & Michele for funding and to Benson and team for building. They look amazing!!



The next most visible change to Lesedi is our **agriculture** field which now has perfect vegetables (tomatoes, lettuces, chard...) being grown for the first time. Our new agriculture teacher Mr Nyere along with the Form 1 and 2s have worked miracles to grow crops in the barren Kalahari sand. Manure from Benson's cows + drip irrigation system + netting to reduce the harsh sun + seeds + lots of sweat and toil = veggies that will be partly used to improve the school diet and some sold for extra funds to reinvest.



We've been told for years how difficult it is to grow crops here, so it is also a real beacon of hope and possibility beyond Lesedi's fence.

Mr Nyere's next focus is to expand the production of veggies, and also to get the chicken project working properly and at scale with 500 birds. He then wants to start a piggery and a project for fattening up beef if extra donations can be found. This is all hugely exciting for us. Not only are there benefits in providing agricultural skills and experiences for the kids, it should also help reduce our food bill and expand the nutrition in the school diet. Could you help Mr Nyere with some funding for his big ideas? Please read his separate report to find out more.

Where funds permit, we continue to purchase **equipment** to ensure our learners have the benefits of a fully equipped school...providing classroom structures and dedicated teachers is only half the journey:

- ✚ A drive through Bulawayo and another Benson genius idea netted us two \$50 **guitars** and two **keyboards** which were met with huge whoops and cheers by the kids and teachers when we handed them over. As Mr Sinala explained just the feel of holding a guitar is incredibly exciting for all the kids...





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✚ We continue to expand sports equipment. With a huge thank you to one of our supporters (Catherine) and friends, whose fundraising has enabled us to purchase **gymnastics mats**, with the delivery being met by squeals of excitement from the Grade 3 kids who were desperate to demonstrate their acrobatic prowess! The first African gymnastics Olympic medal may have taken its first tumble?!



✚ We had the usual fun getting through customs with 50+kgs each of mainly **school supplies**. This time our delivery included an assortment of geometry sets, calculators, rulers, maps, football kit, netball bibs and 3 pizza cutters (it's a long story!). The excitement from kids and teachers when we handed over these relatively inexpensive items was humbling but also super infectious.



✚ **Vocational and science equipment** are our main priorities, especially as we build

up to Form 3 requirements for 'O' Level syllabuses. The equipment is being added to incrementally but much more is needed.

✚ We currently only have 20 desktop **computers** at the secondary school for up to 34 learners per class. A couple of supporters generously answered the call to help out on Fiona's latest Facebook fundraising request, but we are still \$12k short of a reduced total target of \$15k. Given the remaining shortfall we have paused this purchase, but we hope with this plea we can secure the extra funds, ensuring enough computers to avoid learners having to share.

After two years of no **sport** due to covid it was wonderful to watch the kids play sport again. Donations helped us buy football and netball kits, and soccer boots (most kids somehow play barefoot on our football pitch which is more like a wheat field!!). The whole secondary school decamped to Vic Falls on the final day of our trip to compete in a big inter-school competition at the stadium and the huge buzz when they arrived back exhausted but happy that evening was so special.



We continue to expand **extra-curricular** activities. A local organisation, Wildlife Encounter, has starting a Lesedi photography club using donated camera equipment, and it was great seeing them at the school.



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Music, choir, quiz (we witnessed a grade 7 boys vs girls English spelling bee quiz which was a) hard! and b) very very competitive 😊) ecology, chess and other clubs continue to inspire, broaden and entertain...



We now have 370 children **sponsored**, with a dozen or so remaining if you would like to sponsor any more, or if friends or family are interested. And we've received a lot more letters written by sponsors this year which the kids are super excited about – please keep sending them to Fiona fiona@ngoko.com.

One challenge that has increased post-covid is that the revolving door of kids in and out of school has grown significantly as parents move to find jobs, relationships break down, or kids are moved to live with relatives. We are hugely grateful that sponsors understand when “their” child moves on and are prepared to accept a different child.

Pre-pandemic we relied heavily on Road Scholar and OAT visitors to the school who during their short visit became bewitched by the kids and the Lesedi dream such that over half of our supporters have come from these trips. For different reasons, both of these tour operators ceased their visits to Lesedi, to our great regret and that of their tour guides (although if you are still travelling with either please keep mentioning Lesedi!).

We are now looking at attracting new supporters with other **partnerships**. For

example, we have started to partner with Camp Hwange a lovely safari camp in - you guessed it - Hwange National Park, such that camp visitors are encouraged to visit Lesedi whilst in Vic Falls. They are also keen to host an eco-camp for Lesedi learners and other local schools.

Our Lesedi visit enabled us to finally meet our three new secondary teachers: Mr Romeo Nyereyemhuka (Agriculture and Science), Ms Rumbidzai Marongwe (Food Technology and Geography) and Ms Chizuva Mukucha (Wood Technology and Geography). We now have 19 teachers at Lesedi – and we couldn't have achieved what we have without their hard work and dedication. Thank you.

Economically Zimbabwe remains in a real mess and inflation is having a devastating effect. The Zim bond note was 650/1US\$ in November 22 – in 6 months it has dropped to 3,000/1US\$. Paying all our 44 staff a proper living wage is important to us but increasing salaries would be a huge financial stretch, particularly given all the current construction and equipment needs. We have recently provided a small increase to all staff, but we need to do better when extra funding allows. We remain extremely grateful to all our staff for their patience on this, and their continued dedication to Lesedi.

Lesedi Clinic continues to expand its reach and impact across the surrounding communities. The third polio vaccine program for all under 5s was being rolled out during our visit, both at the clinic and via home visits with amazing efficiency. Several malaria cases had been treated in the community, the first for a long time, but these were linked to visitors from Hwange which had suffered an outbreak that appears to have been swiftly dealt with by the authorities. A massive thank you to Sister Irene, Sister Nhondova and the rest of the team who do a fantastic job providing essential services



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with little extra cost to the charity over and above salaries.



The clinic also helps the teachers to provide a **welfare** safety net for some of the children, with teachers and nurses sometimes becoming something of a surrogate parent during a challenging period in a child's life. Some kids are sadly passed around their families or have incredibly tough upbringings. We've lost count of all the positive interventions the teachers and nurses have done to get kids back into school, ensure they see a doctor, provide extra welfare/food in emergencies etc. It has been actually lifesaving in some cases. Lesedi is so much more than a place of education!

Remaining 2023 priorities

Our focus now is getting ready for the key years of Forms 3 and 4, with 'O' Levels coming at the end of Form 4. This includes:

- Confirmation of the **subjects** we want to offer the kids. From our last trip discussions, we were focussing on offering just the core academic subjects plus vocational. On reflection it felt wrong to limit the choices for learners on the basis of (hopefully) short-term financial constraints, particularly given the potential long-term impact on their future studies/career aspirations. A further consideration is that it would be more difficult to change

direction of the school once set – much better to get it right initially.

Ideally, we would love to be able to offer kids a science path over and above combined science (at least chemistry and biology) and a commercial path (business studies and accounts). It will be expensive for us to provide various science subjects, especially for the limited number of children who may wish to follow this route, but it seems wrong after guiding some children for 10 years to limit their opportunities at the final hurdle. We would love to hear from anyone interested in science or business who would like to help support these functions to cover salaries / equipment.

- We estimate that at least four more teachers are needed at Form 3 and more at Form 4. We need to construct two double **teachers' cottages** by the end of the year (at \$30k each) to provide the facilities these new teachers need.
- Equipping** the new classroom blocks with tables and chairs (\$10k each block) plus textbooks for Form 3 (\$15k+). To be able to teach properly we also need additional equipment, especially in science and for the vocational options (\$10k+).
- Completing the **registration** of the secondary school as an independent school out from the under the wing of the big Mosi High School in town. This will give us more flexibility, but we will also need to make decisions on a full time **Secondary Head teacher** plus local admin support.

How can you help?

As explained at length in the last report, Lesedi is the most stretched financially that it has ever been, as we require significant sums for finishing secondary school construction / initial equipment as well as funding the large and growing monthly operational costs.



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Post-2024 there will always be further capital and investment needs, but it moves from being essential spend to being “a really nice to have if we can afford it” spend.

We need your help to get us through this challenging period with extra donations either monthly or one-off to help fund:

- ✚ critical salary and food costs, without which we simply cannot exist;
- ✚ desks, tables, chairs, whiteboards and other key ingredients to turn Form 3 and Form 4 classrooms from shells into learning environments;
- ✚ equipment needed to properly teach a broad range of subjects - in science, food tech, wood tech, metal tech, agriculture and computers. Teachers in rural Zimbabwe are masters of teaching without appropriate resources and “making-do”, but just because they can doesn't mean they should!
- ✚ specific projects to help us become self-sufficient. For example, \$20k for a piggery would broaden the learning opportunities for our agriculture students, whilst also supplying meat for school meals. The initial investment cost would be recovered after 2-3 years, enabling the funds to be reinvested in other projects.

If you are willing and able to provide further help, a reminder of the links for online donations are shown below. Other donation options (including donations of stocks and shares) are always shown on our website: <https://lesedizim.org/donate/>.

Online Donations:

USA/Canada/Other non-UK countries
(via Network for Good)
<https://donatenow.networkforgood.org/lesedischoolsandclinic>

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

Summary

And that's it from us for now.... We encourage you to spend a few more minutes reading the amazing updates from Mr Nyere on his agriculture dreams, along with Elaine and Russell's entertaining and informative reflections from their Lesedi visit (including helpful American to British/Zimbabweisms!!!).

2023 is a pivotal year for Lesedi as it will set the level of ambition and opportunities for our learners over the next 2 years. If we can aim big, we can together give our learners the best chance to leave Form 4 in December 2025 with their heads held high and the values, skills, qualifications and experiences needed to succeed in life.

Thank you to you and to everyone that has made Lesedi.

Graeme, Fiona and Benson x

United Kingdom
(via CAF)
<https://cafdonate.cafonline.org/17921>



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“Being an infant teacher has given me the best moments of my life. A smile on a sad face is always the result of being with the children at Lesedi. I learn new things every day by being here... Most achievements that I have made so far in my life are as a result of being at Lesedi...”

Patience Mpofu – ECD B



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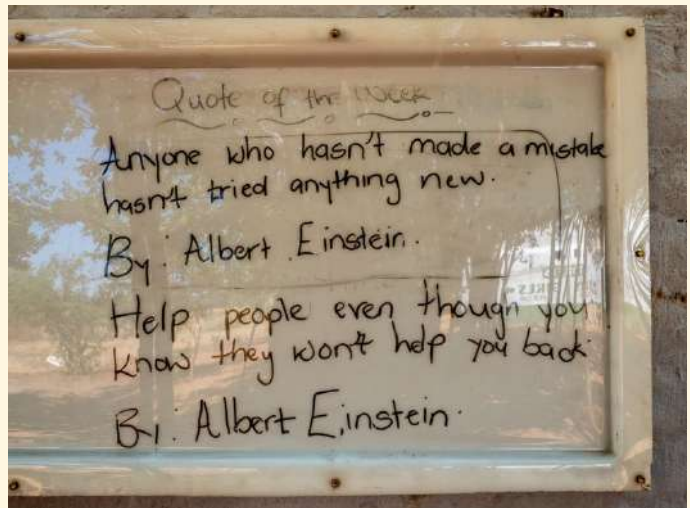


“Lesedi has exposed me to different children from different cultures. The environment, though it’s remote, gave me allowance to grow in my career. I feel more positive, productive and confident and Lesedi has given me the room to be a passionate and proud teacher. Lesedi has been my corner stone that has shaped me into what I have become. It has given my career a meaning.”

Sevatholis Nyoni – Grade 2



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"I first came to Lesedi as a trainee teacher undergoing a certificate in ECD with Solusi University. I loved the school environment from the onset. It was only up to grade 2 by then but the children were very open and welcoming. I was told that Lesedi means light and the school came as a ray of light to the community whose populace barely made it up to tertiary education.

I strongly agree with the mission of the school which is to bring quality education in order to enable all learners to realise their full potential. As an ECD teacher, I understand that the quality of education the children receive in their early years greatly impacts their future. At Lesedi I see children whose parents could not afford a decent education be given equal opportunities as those from affluent families.

I am so proud to be part of the Lesedi family that has children at heart. I believe we are yet to see the good results in a few years when our children finally graduate from the school.

I personally have benefited from encouragement from our directors to pursue our studies further. Now I am happy because I hold a degree in early childhood development. All thanks to Lesedi."

Zakhi Moyo – Grade 1