

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

After the shenanigans of our hotel quarantine in December and the opening of the secondary school in early February we were desperate to get back to Lesedi to help / get in the way all we could. We spent a wonderful week at the school followed by a trip to Botswana to rejuvenate Benson slightly after fifteen months of constant construction and stress.

Stepping off the plane at Victoria Falls airport this time felt very different than November. There were more fellow passengers for a start which was heartening to see given the devastating impact of the pandemic on tourism. It had also just rained heavily, another positive sign. However, the rains had come too late to save most crops so another tough year ahead – my 21st century western view still struggling to comprehend how most of the world still survives or thrives on the vagaries of the weather.



Lesedi Secondary School – some of our Form 1 students outside the Mel Mitch classroom block

We were so excited when we rolled up to the school gates at 7am on our first day at Lesedi. The yellow and brown caterpillar of kids already waiting as patiently as youngsters can do for their temperature checks before being allowed to enter. Lots of big smiles, waves, and huge eyes as they saw us, and we saw them.



Temperature checks at the Lesedi gates



Turn left for Primary and right for Secondary!

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

Rather than carry on to the primary we turned right on the new road up to Lesedi Secondary, 300m beyond. Wow – what a transformation in just 3 months. The two double classroom blocks were smartly painted and kitted out with desks and chairs, and the four vocational classrooms had gone from knee-high brickwork to fully functioning learning spaces proudly signposted with their functions – Food Tech Hub, ICT Lab, Wood Tech & Design and Metal Tech & Design. And Benson had worked his usual magic to somehow add all of this organically into the natural surrounds with trees and flowers all around, and benches hidden away in wooded groves. It looks beautiful.



Vocational Block I: Food Tech Hub and ICT lab



Vocational Block II: Wood & Metal Tech workshops



The new school has two double classroom blocks



Impressive ablution blocks – including shower facilities

The most profound difference for us was that Lesedi Secondary had transformed from being a construction site to a fully functioning school, teeming with life, energy and laughter. All 36 of our pioneer Lesedi primary students had enrolled into Form 1 at Lesedi Secondary, and they had been joined by 31 children from other rural primary schools in the area – Monde, Chidobe and Chisuma – along with a few from schools in Victoria Falls town. I hope you will agree that all our learners look super smart in their new uniforms.

We finally ‘properly’ met our four new secondary teachers who are all wonderful, warm and passionate. Also brimming with ideas and excitement for what they can do to make the secondary school even more special. The subjects they are teaching are:

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

- Mr Mholi Moyo: Geography, Ndebele, Wood Technology & Design
- Mr Jasper Dube: Mathematics, Combined Science, Principles of Accounts, Agriculture
- Ms Blessing Luphahla: English, History, Food Technology & Design
- Mr Simbarashe Masusela: Computer Science, Physical Education, Metal Technology & Design

Mrs Mutori is based at the secondary school for the time being, leading the charge. She looks as glamorous as ever with the lovely twinkle in her eye. We are so lucky to have her.



From left to right: Mr Moyo, Ms Luphahla, Mr Dube, Mrs Mutori and Mr Masusela

We joined the Form 1s at Assembly which was a lot more fun than I can remember from the 1980's state school assemblies we sat through in the UK. Lots of beautiful singing along with words of wisdom and encouragement from the teachers. It ended with a rousing rendition of Happy Birthday in Ndebele to Fiona which was really moving. Then off to class they went...

We spent a lot of the next few days at the Secondary, in constant awe at what had been achieved in such a short period of time. I will talk about the future later but a huge thank you and respect to Benson, the construction workers, Mrs Mutori and all the teachers for making a patch of land, some bricks, cement and all the other gubbins, mixed with a lot of sweat, tears and love into something this special.

And none of this would have been possible if not for our incredible supporters who enabled us to raise the \$300k spent on building the four double classroom blocks, including teachers' offices/storerooms, plus four teachers' cottages, ablution blocks, boreholes and water tanks, electricity connections and all the other infrastructure needed. A special shout out to Melanie Mitchel and her dear departed friend Helene Beaver whose combined generosity funded the land, one of the classroom blocks and a considerable proportion of the initial equipment and textbooks. Other individuals have also made substantial donations to make this possible and we thank you all.

We now know that building and equipping a Secondary school is a herculean task – and it is one that we have only just started! Benson has of course used his usual ingenuity, scouring junk yards, auctions and clearance sales for anything that may be rescued or repurposed. A surprising amount of useful materials came from Benson cheekily asking “can I pay \$20 for that” wherever he went. All of the desks, tables and stools have been made by local tradesmen, including the special tables for metalwork,

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

woodwork and food tech. During our time at Lesedi, a team was working on some metal shelving that Benson had convinced a local butcher to part with. Apart from the immense satisfaction gained from kitting out the school in this way, it will also have saved the charity a huge amount of money. Each and every dollar works incredibly hard for us at Lesedi thanks to our dedicated team on the ground!

Our biggest financial outlay on equipment so far has been the purchase of 20 desktop computers, along with laptops for the teachers. The learners will need to share until we can raise another \$20k to purchase the remaining 20 desktops needed for one per student. Donations for this will be most welcome!

Finding suitable (and affordable) textbooks is always a challenge and we mainly sourced these from Harare and Bulawayo. We supplemented the main book purchases with a wide range of reference books we brought out from the UK – as usual our packing had comprised a couple of pairs of shorts, t-shirts and undies with the remaining 45.9kg of bag allowance each stuffed with anything useful for the school.

Fiona had spent many a winter's evening ploughing the internet for relevant subject workbooks which went down a storm with the teachers when she was handing them out. The harder task she had was fiction books. The situation is slowly improving but most children's books have "western" heroes, role models and villains with the majority of the 2.2 billion kids not well represented.

Other goodies in our baggage included a classroom projector (which got me into trouble getting through Heathrow security) and a Peter's projection world map which shows the proper size of countries in the world not the "make us feel good" European Mercator view (although see the picture below on the true size of Africa which blew me away the first time I saw it – Africa is BIG!).

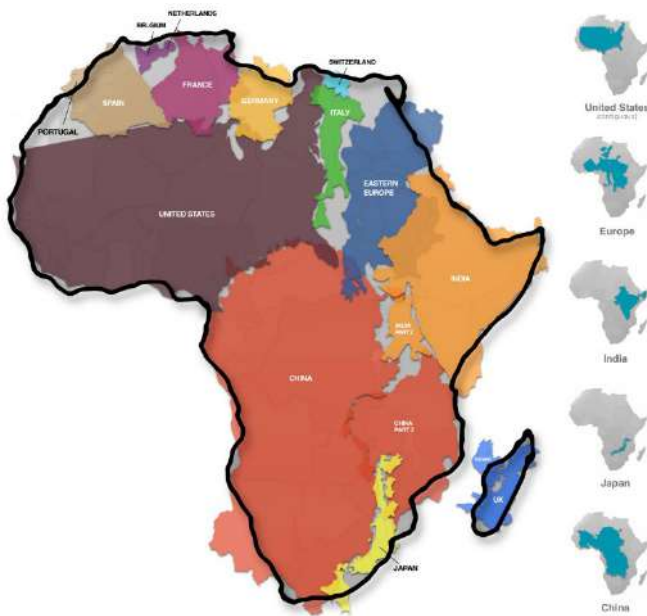
The biggest hit from our UK delivery were four walkie talkies (hello again to all the airport security staff out there). The Lesedi site is now big so getting messages between the primary, secondary and clinic generally involved lots of kids running around or other similar enthusiastic persons (Edmon the lad we are sponsoring through his degree was volunteering at Lesedi during his holiday which was keeping him very fit!). The Lesedi team now has one walkie talkie for each site, plus one for Benson. Much hilarity ensued while testing with Benson trying to instil some sort of comms etiquette to keep things semi-professional, whilst also teaching the phonetic alphabet and call signs. By now he may have accepted defeat!

A huge part of our Lesedi vision is ensuring that every child passing through our classrooms learns skills that will help them in their adult lives, whilst also gaining an appreciation of the value of education to pass on to future generations. Despite the best endeavours of the teachers, many of the children at Lesedi struggle with academic subjects so we are keen to ensure that we provide as much practical hands-on education as possible. Life skills are also hugely important and are a major focus of learning.

As mentioned in our last trip report, we finally settled on allowing our Form 1s to choose two of four subjects from Wood, Metal and Food Technology & Design and Agriculture. Plus, they all study IT/Computer Science. Our students seem genuinely excited to be doing these options. I learned a lot listening to Mr Moyo during an outdoor woodwork lesson next to a tree, showing which bits are useful. We also watched some of the agriculture students preparing the ground for their first planting (with some having a golf swing that wouldn't look out of place at Augusta!).

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



The true size of Africa



Mrs Mutori on her walkie talkie...cup of tea anyone?



Wood Tech & Design with Mr Moyo



Agriculture students preparing the ground

One of the main drivers when setting up Lesedi was to enable the local children to break out of the cycle of poverty and subsistence activities experienced by many of their parents and grandparents. We were therefore excited to hear our new teachers discussing plans to invite speakers to the school from various occupations, so that the students can start to understand the career opportunities which may be open to them if they work hard. Conveniently for us, Benson's nephew, Armstrong, is an airline pilot and happened to be doing a training course nearby. He was able to sneak out for an hour to do a talk on his job, the qualifications needed etc.

The talk was followed by a lively Q&A from the kids and teachers which initially centred on pilots' toilet facilities but thankfully broadened out to a wider range of questions. At the end of the session, after a show of hands, 60% of the students now want to be an airline pilot. Clearly the real world will make these dreams tough to achieve, but aiming for an occupation that requires strong IT skills, science and maths is no bad thing. The chief engineer from the electricity company turned up to do the final connection for the secondary on the day of Armstrong's talk. The engineer in charge of a team of men happened to be female, which delighted our girl students. She got slightly more than she bargained for,

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

graciously agreeing to do our next careers talk, whilst also asking how to enrol her child at Lesedi. As a bonus the secondary also got its long awaited connection to the electricity grid. The lights came on, literally!

We are thrilled that the new Secondary is already attracting initiatives from partner organisations. We arrived one morning to find a team from the local [Painted Dogs Research Trust](#) digging some holes in a sandy fenced area at the entrance to the school. Led by a wonderful, passionate environmentalist Mr Zulu the team then spent time with one of the classes explaining the importance of trees, how they grow etc before each child then planted their own tree. It will be wonderful to watch the trees and kids grow together. A big thank you to Dr Greg Rasmussen and his team for their community outreach and educational work.



Armstrong giving his talk on becoming a pilot



Planting the PDRT Pocket Forest

As a further motivation for the students, a prize giving ceremony was held for the Form 1's who had passed their Grade 7 exams at Lesedi Primary. Special gifts (a Lesedi T-shirt – priceless) were awarded to the top 3 students (Kelvin, Tamia and Loreen) and small gifts given to those who had passed all the exams. The learners from Grades 6 and 7 at the primary school attended the prize giving, to see what their future hard work could achieve. We then had very sweet thanksgiving to Fiona and I from a few of the students. It was notable that every volunteer to speak was a girl, which prompted a lively debate whether to make Lesedi an all-girls' school but it was eventually decided to let the boys stay! One of the speakers also said she was looking forward to going to Lesedi University which had us both nervously laughing...

I could keep going on about other developments at the Secondary, but we need to move on with our journey around Lesedi. Next stop the clinic.

Walking through the gates of the clinic is always a wow moment. The buildings and the grounds (and the staff!) are just soooo beautiful.

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Lesedi Clinic – incomparably beautiful

We mentioned a lot of the wonderful developments at the clinic in the last trip report and how impressed we are of the smooth operation that Sister Irene and her team run there.

Covid booster vaccinations were the main draw at the time of our visit, and it was great to see that Sinovac and Sinopharm were available – thank you China. Benson had just had his booster the day we arrived and was being a (fairly) brave boy about it. With limited testing and reporting of covid deaths it is still very hard to gauge how badly Zimbabwe has been hit by covid. The official numbers are 245k cases and over 5k deaths, but the real numbers are likely to be much higher. They had just gone through the omicron spike with the rest of the world. 23% of the population are now fully vaccinated, a big improvement on 5% 6 months ago but still a long way to go.

Rural Zimbabwe is a tough place to live and too many die of treatable diseases or accidents. But speaking to Sister Irene about the health of the surrounding community it felt that things are really improving. In the two years since opening, they have only had one positive malaria case (government spraying controls working well) and one case of TB. Child mortality is improving, partly as now all new mums get tested for HIV and syphilis which helps diagnose potential issues with their children.

Our long wait for authorisation to be able to issue antiretrovirals (ARVs) from the clinic continues. There is a lot of politics around this which is sad given the benefits it would bring but the team are patiently working with local officials and health workers and we remain hopeful that Lesedi Clinic will become a distribution point for ARVs in the not too distant future.

On one of our days - as I was tootling around Lesedi - I was greeted with a huge gaggle of brightly coloured ladies and babies at the clinic. It was the monthly feeding programme of Amalima Loko, a 5-year USAID-funded program designed to improve food security in Zimbabwe. Pregnant ladies/new mums are given 5.5kg of a nutritious porridge and 1.5 litres of cooking oil a month until the baby is 6 months old, after which the baby gets a porridge and oil allowance. Over 200 mothers and babies were receiving their allowance at our clinic alone, with some walking 10kms to get there. It was a bit of a riot with a huge amount of laughter and chatter going on. Each lady eventually got their turn and - after very careful measurement of the porridge and oil – happily departed with baby swaddled on their back and a huge sack on their head.

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Amalima Loko food distribution



Lesedi Clinic team

Continuing our first-day journey around Lesedi, we finally made it to the Primary School, where it all started. We were shown to the Dining Hall where almost 300 children and teachers were waiting to welcome us. Seeing the whole school like that - from the tiny tots in constant motion at the front to the Grade 7's looking cool at the back - was quite amazing. When they starting singing a welcoming song it was an emotional moment, even for my ice-cold accountant heart! It was the first time in 2 years we had seen the whole primary school together. Nice to be home. Makes all the hard work we do 7,000 miles away worth it for us in an instant and a genuine reminder for everyone who has supported this project financially or in other ways why we do this.

The children finished singing with another even more rousing rendition of Happy Birthday to Fiona, in English this time. We then enjoyed some lovely speeches from representatives of each grade, on what Lesedi means for them and thanking all our supporters for their amazing generosity. I think I'm on my 3rd wow by now but this one was definitely worth it.

We had a slightly dazed wander around the primary after that. The school is even more beautiful after the rains, with the trees and plants enveloping the school in their cool embrace. There is always more to do and improve on, but the primary school felt perfect.

The teachers at the primary school were their usual wonderful selves, being led by our Deputy Head, Cathy Ncube. We've known some of the teachers for 8 years now and we feel blessed for all their dedication and hard work to develop the primary into the Shangri-La of learning it has become.

The main event since our last visit was the success of the Grade 7s in their exams with a 63% pass rate vs 41% nationally. For our first exam year, everyone was rightly chuffed with the results, particularly given the considerable pandemic disruptions. Mrs Mutori and team are already planning how to do even better in the future. We certainly felt that our first set of exam results were weak in maths and are keen to address this going forwards.

We are very conscious that for sponsors their child's results were of great interest and the first indication of academic ability. As anywhere in the world, some children were academically stronger than others and we really appreciated the encouragement back from sponsors whatever the results.

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Special assembly in the Dining Hall



Lesedi Primary team



Lesedi Primary School – an oasis of learning

Since the earliest days of Lesedi, our wish has been to support those children who need extra help at school. With all the other developments we haven't previously had the capacity or finance to consider this properly, but it is becoming more and more evident that some special needs support is needed. To this end, we recently funded a special needs assessment with teachers identifying 43 children who they felt needed additional, specialist support. Unfortunately heavy rains on assessment day resulted in six children being absent and missing the assessment. Once we receive the report, we will review whether we can afford to employ a special needs teacher to provide dedicated support to those who need it.

Now that the children are back in school, the library is in constant use. All of the students choose books from the library each week, which is helping to improve their literacy and English language skills. Although our main library is at the primary school, we are also starting a library at the secondary school. Most of our books have been received through the [Zambezi Schoolbook Project](#) in conjunction with [Books for Africa](#). We thank everyone involved for their tremendous work.

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Selecting library books for weekend reading

One of the highlights of our trip was to discover that school sports were once again allowed. We were swept along by 300 children as we caught the wave over to the sports fields. Having not done sports for so long some of the younger ones seemed a bit bemused about what to do. The school is split into two houses, Cheetah and Leopard, to add even more competitiveness into the mix. The names resulted in some impressive cat like growling and pawing between many of the younger children.

The main activity of the day was choosing the best runners to represent each grade for the following week's sports day. There were definitely a few Zimbabwean Usain Bolt's in the making. Every child however fast (or slow) was egged on by all their friends to the finish line, where they were inevitably met by lots of cheers and hugs.

As a warm-up event (and also for warm-down) the kids were grouped into big circles of what probably should have been a class of around 30 kids but seemed to be more like 100 kids at times! Forming a circle was a mission in itself especially for the youngsters who kept singing "let's make a circle, a big big circle" whilst trying to grab the hand of a friend. The teachers energetically took it in turns to lead each circle in stretches and other exercises which inevitably ended with everyone falling in a giggling heap. It was all wonderful to behold.

Now that school sports has resumed, athletics is being taught in term 1, then football (soccer) and other ball sports in term 2. In term 3 the heat is too much for sport, so the focus is on music and singing. Inter-school competitions are due to start very soon which everyone relishes.

The school sports day the following week was a great success, with not only the children racing against each other but also the teachers and the parents too. The younger children even had the obligatory egg and spoon race.

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Warming up



Selecting runners for Sports Day



Ready for the egg & spoon race Celebrations

During our time at Lesedi we spent a lot of time talking to the teachers about what is needed and going over some of the issues that we needed to make decisions on. For Benson, Fiona and myself it was also a case of re-grouping a bit after the heroics on the secondary school construction. So I will finish this report with a summary of a few of our discussions/thoughts:

Secondary school development. We need to keep adding teachers, buildings and infrastructure annually to keep up with the growth in the school. Our final year of expansion should be in 2027, with Form 6 (the second year of 'A' levels), after which hopefully Benson can put down his spade. This year should be a bit calmer (how many times have I convinced myself of that!!) at least on construction, with a few additions such as an outdoor cooking area for the Food Tech class. Internet around all sites remains a big issue with the current provider failing to offer a workable service. We are looking at new options which aren't cheap but we feel that internet is vital for the secondary learners. There finally seems to be the possibility of getting fibre internet but we are still waiting to receive quotations.

The big milestone is from early next year when we will need to start construction in advance of Form 3 starting in 2024. This is when subjects are selected for 'O' levels, with exams at the end of Form 4. Construction will involve at least one more double classroom block, along with additional teachers'

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

cottages and all necessary infrastructure and equipment. In addition, we are keen to build a properly kitted out science lab, something that is non-existent in rural Zimbabwean schools, so that the learners can have a great science education if they so choose. However, with an estimated cost of \$100k+ a lab may remain a distant ambition. If science is something close to your heart and you would like to contribute to our dream on this, please do get in touch.

Evening classes: I mentioned much earlier in this report that our new secondary teachers were brimming with ideas to make Lesedi even more special. Mr Dube was the first teacher to move into a teacher's cottage (the others were rather sensibly waiting for the mains electricity connection) and we were thrilled to discover that he had already started offering classes in mathematics to some of the Lesedi staff at the end of the school day.

There are many school drop outs and single mothers in the community who would benefit from the opportunity to take evening classes and the teachers are embracing the vision of helping the wider community. Starting in term 2, they are planning to offer evening classes in Maths, English, History, Geography, Combined Science, Ndebele and Accounts. This is very much a personal initiative from the teachers but they have our wholehearted support and we are excited to see the progress.

Where to draw the line: One of our biggest and liveliest debates revolved around how far we should (or could) go to help individual children. We are already helping kids with challenging health conditions (including diabetes, sickle cell anaemia, cerebral palsy and epilepsy) but these can be expensive (\$3k per year for diabetes testing, insulin, special food and support for just one child). We plan to continue supporting health issues wherever we can if there is a clear need, and the parents cannot pay.

Our main challenge is that due to the poor economic environment some parents are having to leave the community to find work. Others relocate as their personal circumstances change. With no boarding option at Lesedi, this can mean the child moving away to a more uncertain future.

We all agree that at some stage it is probably inevitable that we provide a boarding facility at Lesedi, even if we limit it to exceptional cases. However, with so much development still needed, our feeling is that the pressure and responsibility would be too much at the present time. As much as our hearts may want to assist an individual child, we need to focus our finite capacity and finances on the children and families within the local community.

Although we don't lose many children from Lesedi, it is always sad to inform a sponsor that "their" child has left, particularly as a relationship may have built up over several years. We are finding that 5 or 6 children a year leave Lesedi for a variety of reasons, and we are so appreciative of the understanding shown by sponsors who this has happened to.

Children's gifts: Since starting the sponsorship programme a few years ago, it has been possible for sponsors to donate a small amount to fund a birthday gift for their child. Teachers have purchased suitable clothing or even food parcels during the pandemic. It has worked well but we feel that it is now time to find another solution for celebrating birthdays. The existing arrangement puts too much pressure on our busy teachers, and we are also keen to avoid any jealousy between children or expectations of receiving a birthday gift. We also don't want sponsors to feel any pressure to fund a gift, so that their child doesn't miss out. We know that many sponsors take huge delight and pride in

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

providing a gift to their child when they have so little at home but hope that you will support our new plan for birthday celebrations.

We will continue to accept (and encourage) birthday donations from those sponsors who are happy to contribute. However instead of individual gifts, the funds will be used to provide a birthday cake for each class at the end of every term to celebrate all the birthdays since the last celebration. This is something we funded last month, and it was a huge hit with all the children – with lots of enthusiastic renditions of Happy Birthday being sung to those with birthdays since the start of the year. It is a wonderfully inclusive way to celebrate birthdays of all the children and the teachers. There is the added benefit that the birthday cakes can be made in-house by our Food Tech learners. We hope this decision won't cause too much disappointment among our sponsors, but know many of you will be relieved by the cessation of individual gifts.



Birthday cake anticipation

At Christmas we will continue with a Christmas Fundraiser, which will be used to fund a special day for all the students towards the end of the academic year.

Sponsorship: At the time of writing, 309 of our 360 pupils are sponsored. We continue to be humbled by the generosity that you as sponsors have shown in starting sponsorship or adding further children to your family. With no tourist groups visiting the school, we are relying heavily on our existing supporter base and friends of friends. The sponsorship program which we tentatively launched four years ago has become an essential element of Lesedi. We simply could not afford to run the school and feed the children without it, as the operating costs of running a school for c360 kids are sizeable. Aside from the financial benefit, sponsorship also has huge value in the friendships that are being formed which are nurturing the children as they grow.

Please keep spreading the word for us amongst friends and family and feel free to share this report. We would be delighted to provide more information to potential sponsors.

As I look at our sponsorship list for Lesedi, I'm reminded of all the wonderful first names that our children have. As well as many fabulous (and difficult to pronounce) local names, we have a host of charming names including Lucky, Wise, Beloved, Believe, Gracious, Effort, Blessing, Bliss, Blessed, Brave, Anxious, Forgiveness, Hope, Polite, Professor, Immaculate, Knowledge and Gratitude. Also a Lovegirl,

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022

Sunnyboy, Loveangel, Hopewell, Lovewell, Morerest, Melodious, Angel and Cloud. A sprinkling of royalty, with several Princes, Princesses, a Queen and a Queenly. One Last who has younger siblings, a Surprise and a recent addition of Godknows.

Hopefully a few readers have made it this far. Given we only did an update three months ago it is amazing the pace of change at Lesedi. Life in the local communities continues to be a real challenge, but we know that Lesedi continues to bring light and hope to the community it serves. The new secondary school is a major milestone in our development plan, and we are so pleased how well it has started.

None of this would be possible without the superhuman efforts and vision of Benson who has turned the dreams into reality. Nor the teachers, nurses and other staff who work passionately hard.

Finally, a huge thank you to you our incredible supporters who have enabled us to deliver so much. You have donated over \$1.5 million since the project started and this immense generosity, along with your belief and encouragement, has allowed us to create something really special.

For those of you who haven't yet had the opportunity to visit Lesedi, we very much hope it will be possible one day so that you can experience the energy and hope that the schools and clinic bring.

Take care and stay happy and healthy,

Graeme & Fiona x



The patient wait for the Amalima Loko food distribution



"Let's make a circle, a big big circle"

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Distribution of our supplies from the UK



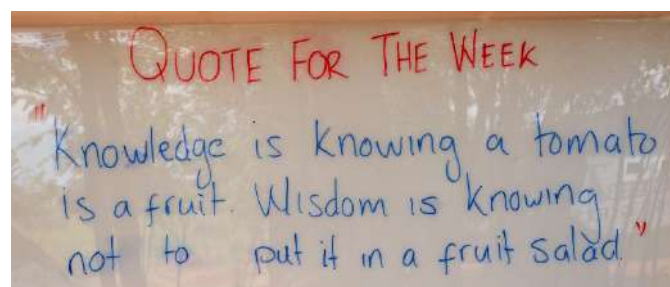
A rare photo of the three of us!



A quirky seahorse running on a cog, inserted into the wall of our Metal Tech block. Another Benson special!



Having fun



Lesedi Secondary notice board - quote for the week

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Athletics are back!



Seriously competitive



Heading to assembly



A wonderful vote of thanks from the youngsters



Lesson time



LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

March 2022



Serious concentration



A cheery ECD classroom



Washing face masks



Form 1 study time in the afternoons



Home-time – the donated bikes are being well used



Cheeky faces!