

LESEDI SCHOOL & CLINIC

May 2021

Our last major update was in December, after Graeme and I were able to travel to Lesedi. More travel restrictions have since been imposed, so it is likely to be at least the end of this year before we can return to Zimbabwe. In the meantime, we have prepared the following update with helpful input from our Principal, Mrs Mutori.

LESEDI PRIMARY SCHOOL

When schools in Zimbabwe finished for the Christmas holidays, we were expecting to welcome the students back in early January. However a spike in covid infections and a strict lockdown meant that the re-opening of schools was postponed.

After the long closure of schools last year this news was met with considerable dismay. Our teachers once again began the challenging task of distributing schoolwork for the children to do at home, although this had limited success given most families do not have access to smart phones or the internet. It was finally possible to distribute hard copies of homework to the children when they all came to Lesedi to collect their allocations of porridge meal.

Schools eventually re-opened in March and not only have we welcomed back all our existing students but another 53 children have enrolled at Lesedi, taking us slightly by surprise given we were just expecting a new intake into ECD A. There is now a huge demand for us to enrol children from other schools and Mrs Mutori is under daily pressure from parents pleading with her to take their children.

The reason for the increased demand seems to be two-fold. With Victoria Falls being a tourist town, the impact of the pandemic has been keenly felt. Virtually everyone working in the tourism industry has been laid off and families have been moving in numbers to the rural areas around Lesedi where the living costs are much lower. They are then keen to enrol their children at Lesedi, rather than remaining at the expensive schools in town.

The other issue is that our neighbouring government schools have much larger class sizes than Lesedi and in order to manage social distancing requirements they have split their classes into two streams. Each stream attends school for just two days each week. So parents can see that children attending the government schools are falling further and further behind. By restricting our enrolment to a maximum of 36 learners per class we are able to implement social distancing while continuing the school week as normal. Ideally we would prefer smaller class sizes but in these circumstances we need to help all the children we can. It is frustrating to everyone that we cannot help more children who are currently missing out on their schooling.

We have introduced a Grade 7 class at Lesedi this year. A new grade means a new teacher and we have welcomed Mr Peter Simtenda to our Lesedi team.

In order to help the children catch up with work, term times have been revised this year and holidays shortened. Our new term dates for 2021 are:

Term 1: 15/22 March to 04 June
 Term 2: 28 June to 10 September
 Term 3: 04 October to 17 December

The table below shows a breakdown of our current enrolment at Lesedi Primary:

GRADE	BOYS	GIRLS	TOTAL
ECD A	18	11	29
ECD B	15	12	27
1	18	13	31
2	14	19	33
3	15	19	34
4	16	20	36
5	20	14	34
6	18	16	34
7	16	20	36
TOTAL	150	144	294

The loss of so much school time over the past year has had a noticeable impact on performance, with the children now a bit below the level they should be. The school decided that each teacher should remain with their learners as they progressed from one grade to the next. This way the teachers can cover work missed last year, as they slowly bridge the gap into the current grade.



The Grade 7 students are receiving extra attention given they will have examinations later this year. Pupils will write exams in Mathematics, English Language, Indigenous Language, Agriculture, Science and Technology and ICT, Social Sciences and Physical Education and Arts. These exams are normally used to determine whether a child continues to secondary school.

It is an early start each day for our learners, with the Lesedi school day starting at 7am, giving time for all the hand sanitising and washing routines. Most grades finish after lunch, although the Grade 7 class continues until 4pm to try and cover lost ground.

Besides the effort being put in by the Grade 7 teacher to help prepare for the examinations, the other teachers have developed a program for helping with revision topics during the afternoons. The Grade 7 class will also have an extended term time, taking just one week break next month, rather than the three weeks allocated by the Ministry of Education, giving them an extra two weeks of tuition.

As a result of Covid, children can no longer share textbooks. So we were thrilled to receive a donation at the end of last year which enabled us to purchase a full set of Grade 7 textbooks, one for each pupil. We have just been advised by Mrs Mutori that Grade 7 revision books are now becoming available, so we have approved the

purchase of another set of books at a total cost of \$3,500. We are painfully aware that these costs are far beyond the reach of most rural schools in Zimbabwe.

The school is not yet able to function normally, as sports and music are still not allowed, much to the dismay of many of our children. However, here is a summary of some of the notable events at Lesedi Primary so far this year:

Library and Staffroom



Our fifth and final classroom block has been completed, majority funded by donations from OAT guests who visited Lesedi on their travels (in pre-Covid times!). One of the rooms is being used as a library and the other is temporarily being used as a staffroom until we build the long awaiting administration block. Eventually we aim to use the second classroom for teaching children with special needs.

The library is proving extremely popular, with children borrowing books and reading at home. Our thanks to the [Zambezi Schoolbook Project](#) which has donated many of the books.

School Feeding

We are very relieved to be able to feed the children at school again. During the school closures we were providing food parcels to the most needy families. Over the rainy season many families were able to plant a few crops so there was food at home.

Now that the children are receiving two meals at school each day, it has relieved pressure on parents and guardians as they only try to provide a light meal in the evening. The school has had situations where parents push their child to come to school even when they are sick for the sake of getting something to eat.

As many families have now exhausted what they harvested from their fields there have been concerns about how the children will survive during the upcoming three week break, so we have decided to continue our school feeding program during the holidays.



Porridge Distribution

We are grateful to a joint initiative between Grand Circle Foundation, Children in the Wilderness and Wild Horizons which has made regular distributions of highly nutritious porridge meal packs to feed over 1,400 students and teachers across 4 schools, including Lesedi, for 5 months.

Donation of Bicycles



Lesedi is delighted to have been included in a distribution of bicycles by [Greenline Africa Trust](#) in partnership with [World Bicycle Relief Zimbabwe](#). All our children who stay about 3km or more away from the school were issued with bicycles which has relieved them of transport struggles.

Donation of Literacy Lights

Our thanks to the [Jafuta Foundation](#) which has continued its support of Lesedi with a donation of 82 solar reading lights. Our learners in Grades 6 and 7 received the lights to enable them to continue to study and read after dark. Many of the school-going children in rural areas rely on candles, paraffin lamps or even read over the fire, exposing them to health hazards and affecting their ability to pass their exams. The teachers also received solar lights to help with planning and marking.



Return of Effort & Available



Two of our sponsored children, brothers Effort and Available Muleya, were unable to return to school after the first lockdown as the parents had moved to Binga, over 300km from Lesedi. Although the parents were keen to return, they had lost their jobs and had no accommodation locally. After school opening in March, renewed efforts were made to get the family back so that the boys could return to school. After intervention by the teachers, the father was offered a job and a place to live by one of the villagers and the children were able to return. This brought smiles to the whole Lesedi family.

School Garden and Tree Planting

The school had a good harvest from their vegetable garden, which has provided mealies, okra, onions, eggplant, chillies, green pepper and some leafy vegetables.

On National tree planting day in December, trees were donated by the local supermarket, Pick n Pay in Victoria Falls. All classes participated in planting in the school orchard and around the sports grounds.



Help for Families

Our teachers and nurses continue to carefully monitor the welfare of our Lesedi children, often becoming aware of families who are struggling. With many parents losing jobs during the pandemic, support from the school has often provided a lifeline. In addition to food parcels and other ad-hoc help, we have been purchasing quarry stone from the community for our construction projects. This has provided a vital source of income for some parents.



We are immensely grateful to our Lesedi team for their dedication and commitment to the education, health and welfare of our learners and the community as a whole.

LESEDI SECONDARY SCHOOL

We are thrilled to report that official permission has been granted for us to construct a Secondary School at Lesedi. This remains a hugely daunting project for us but one that we are totally committed to.



Although construction will be phased over several years, the initial costs will be substantial. We intend to have two streams for each year, so each Form will require one double classroom block. Several teachers' cottages will be needed, along with other ancillary buildings. Then there is the infrastructure

to consider – water supply, electricity connection, internet and road access.

Before our initial intake reach Form 3, we are keen to build a fully equipped science lab and vocational training facilities. Then by 2026 we will need to have built new classrooms for the sixth form (Forms 5 and 6).

Unlike the primary school set up of one teacher per grade, teachers at secondary school teach specific subjects. Fortunately, most teachers in Zimbabwe double major so can teach two different subjects. Even so, we expect to employ at least five teachers in the first year with additional teachers added in subsequent years.

The funding of the secondary school construction and ongoing operating costs is clearly a major concern. However, we have confidence from the fabulous continued support we are receiving from our ever-growing supporter base.

Our fundraising had a huge boost before permission for a secondary school was even granted, with an awe-inspiring single donation of \$47k from one of our child sponsors. Words cannot express our gratitude for this incredible gesture. It has enabled us to acquire and fence the land, and construct the first classroom block. Another substantial donation has just funded drilling of two boreholes and installation of water tanks, pipework and pumps. We are so grateful to the donors for their immense generosity.



With the builders on site and Benson having spare time due to the devastating impact of Covid on the safari industry we decided to keep up the momentum, approving construction of a second classroom block (which is nearing completion) and two teachers' cottages (yet to be started).

Although our priority is for the basic buildings to be ready to welcome our Pioneer class in January 2022, we are keen to develop the new school as much as possible so that our first

students will have all the facilities they need.

We have reached the limits of what we can build without further funding, so donations to this project would be very welcome. Over the coming months we will need to equip the two classroom blocks with furniture and start purchasing books, computers and other equipment. Ablution blocks will be needed, along with additional teachers cottages. Longer term there will be significant ongoing construction costs for new buildings and of course an increase in day-to-day operating costs. This project is no doubt going to give us a few sleepless nights but we are determined to give our Lesedi children, and all the generations that follow, the education they deserve.

LESEDI CLINIC



The clinic continues to be a vital resource for the school and teachers, along with serving the wider community.

Earlier this year the clinic received a solar EPI fridge from the district hospital for storage of vaccines, enabling us to offer a full vaccination programme at Lesedi. The Zimbabwe Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) aims to reduce vaccine preventable diseases. Targeted mostly at the under-

5s, vaccines protect from Tuberculosis, Hepatitis B, Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Meningitis, Polio, Pneumonia etc. The clinic is also giving the HPV vaccine to girls aged between 10-14 years for prevention of cervical cancer. More recently, a typhoid vaccine has been introduced to be given to all children between 9 months and 14 years. In addition to Lesedi, another school – Monde Primary School – falls into the clinic catchment area so our nurses are travelling around to administer vaccines.

Lesedi Clinic is now a designated vaccination centre for the COVID-19 vaccine donated by China. Our teachers and nurses have been fully vaccinated – as has Benson – and the Sinovac vaccine has been made available to the elderly and vulnerable in the community.

Dr Gwenhamo continues weekly clinics at Lesedi every Saturday. Congratulations are due as his wife gave birth to a healthy baby boy at Lesedi earlier this month.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

We are supporting a community chicken project being run by a local lady, Tendai Mhere. After two successful batches of raising and selling broilers for meat, the last batch of chickens was a disappointment after receiving poor quality chicks from one of the hatcheries. However Tendai remains motivated and we are all learning a lot about raising chickens! We remain confident that the project will be a long term success. The plan is to rotate the community members involved in the project, with this team comprising a young single mother and a youth with HIV/AIDS who is supporting his whole family.

In addition to the chicken project, a college student has just started a sewing project at Lesedi. We are very glad to support anyone approaching us with ideas, energy and motivation.

JERERA PROJECT

Although our main focus remains at Lesedi, we are painfully aware that as the crisis in Zimbabwe deepens, more and more communities are desperate for help.

Our first venture to support a non-Lesedi project has been a relatively modest investment, funding some improvements to the Siyawareva Clinic in Jerera, south-eastern Zimbabwe. This is the rural area where Benson grew up, and family still live in the area. The Siyawareva Clinic (named after Benson's father who was one of the first inhabitants in this area) was in a desperate situation, and urgently required renovations.



Our initial investment allowed Benson to replace the broken electricity transformer, ensuring the clinic once again has electricity. The community volunteered their labour, digging pits for new Blair toilets, re-plastering and painting. The transformation has been remarkable and means the world to this community.

In addition to repairs to the clinic itself, we have constructed a maternity waiting-home for expecting mothers. Siyawareva Clinic covers a wide area, and this will be a hugely beneficial addition.

All costs for this work have been met from specific donations to the Jerera project.

CHILD SPONSORSHIP

At the time of writing, 257 of the 294 children enrolled at Lesedi Primary School are sponsored, an increase of 45 since December's trip report. This is especially pleasing given the pandemic backdrop, with no tourist group visits to the school for over a year. Another 28 children are patiently waiting to find a special friend to sponsor them.

Without sponsorship, many of our learners would not be regularly attending school, and certainly wouldn't have expectations to continue past their primary education. Our

school meals are crucial to the welfare of many children, and for some the access to healthcare is proving to be a lifeline.

The sponsored children write to their sponsors each term, or the younger ones do some colouring or a drawing. It is a privilege to read all of the letters, not only seeing the progress the children are making but also getting an insight into their world. We thought it would be nice to share a few extracts from the letters. Typically I got carried away, so at the risk of making this report far too long here are rather a lot of extracts 😊:

"I am so glad that someone somewhere loves me. That person is you my friend. Thank you for making it possible for me to learn." Jayden, Grade 1

"I am still going to school all because of you. Thank you very much." Sam, Grade 2

"I am very happy to have you as my sponsor. You will not only sponsor me but you are now part of my family." Anesu, Grade 2 (to new sponsor)

"I find it much exciting to have friends that live as far as you do. I wish you had visited so that we could eat fresh maize together." Darren, Grade 3

"The opening of schools this term made me happy. I did not think we would ever learn as normally as we are doing now." Thandolwenkosi, Grade 3

"My family look forward to seeing you someday. We together feel happy and grateful for the support you give. The Christmas clothes you sent fitted so well that I looked like a Queen. May God care for you until I am able to stand on my own." Gina, Grade 3

"One other thing I enjoy at school is feeding. I feel sad when I am to stay at home because of flu and coughing." Emmanuel, Grade 3

"I am writing this letter with a huge smile on my face for what you did for me." Telvin, Grade 3

"We had no food when schools were closed but we are now learning and having our meals twice a day." Shalom, Grade 4

"I would like to thank you for choosing me and paying fees towards my education. I am very happy. Last year I stayed home because my parents could not afford paying school fees. It is good you are helping me." Charity, Grade 4 (newly enrolled at Lesedi - to new sponsor)

"I am having fun at school. I am enjoying learning, playing and food. We eat two meals a day." Nokuthula, Grade 4

"I am working hard to improve my reading skills. I take novels from the library to read at home." Tanaka, Grade 4

"I promise you I will work hard in order to pass. I want to be a business woman when I grow up." Silethukuthula, Grade 4

"There is a library now at school. I get books to read at home every week. I like reading books after school." Muzikayise, Grade 4

"Thank you very much for choosing to sponsor me by paying my school fees. I feel very happy and lucky. I want to work very hard in order to not waste your money. I want to be a doctor when I grow up." Philippa, Grade 4 (to new sponsor)

"Life is not easy at times for little children like me." Zinhle, Grade 5

"My father lost his job so now my mother is baking buns to sell so that we get food to eat." Loice, Grade 6

"We have opened school and we are learning very hard. We have a lot of work to do. I am very fast when I am writing and finish quickly the teacher then gives me more work. I love to show off my marked work to my friends and the teacher always tells me to stay away from them." Nimrod, Grade 5

"We have started building new classroom blocks for form 1 at the secondary school. I hope to continue to our secondary and not move to another school." Brandon, Grade 5

"We have learnt a lot in school so now many children want to come to our school and learn with us, as we are learning as usual while they go to school for two days only." Prisca, Grade 6

"It has been a long time without seeing visitors at school. We miss you. I wish the corona can just end so that you can come and visit us. Our school is now big we have a secondary school and I would love to complete my education here." Philip, Grade 6

"I love going to the field with my grandmother. We planted maize, groundnuts, pumpkins and watermelons. We also have plenty of sweet potatoes. At times my grandmother allows me to get some for my teacher. I love to share what I get with my friends." Mellin, Grade 6

"When the pandemic started my father lost his job and we had a difficult time. I used to stay with my little sister when my parents went to collect charcoal so that they sell and we get food. I like to help my mother to sell charcoal. When she is tired I help." Shirley, Grade 6

"Learning is not easy for many of my friends as some only go to school 2 days a week. They have to exchange classes with others since they are many at their school. With us we still come to school five times a week." Monique, Grade 6

"My friends told me that even if they go to school they do not learn but play all day. We learn every day and write tests every Friday." Lessley, Grade 6

"Now I have a little brother by the name of Surprise. I love him a lot and when he grows up I will take him to school with me and show my friends." Matron, Grade 6

"I am a very intelligent, smart and willing child who likes reading books and playing basket ball. Sometimes during my spare time I like playing alone with my teddy bears." Dineo, Grade 6

"I joined this school in March and I love it here. We are learning a lot." Zara, Grade 6

"I love my teacher because he is kind and patient. My favourite subject is Maths. I like the subject because I wish to be a doctor when I grow up." Ashton, Grade 6

"I think of you all the time and wish you the best in what you do." Daisy, Grade 6

"Nowadays it is easy for me to go to school. I was given a bicycle by the school. Sometimes I ride it to the shops when I am sent there." Cedric, Grade 6

"I am really grateful to have you as my sponsor. I shall never thank you enough. We are now back at school and I am happy. Being away from school was affecting us." Monalisa, Grade 6

"This year we only harvested two buckets of maize and sorghum from our field because the sun scorched most of the crops. Because of this we were eating boiled maize or going to school without eating. We ate once a day during the weekends." Sibonokuhle, Grade 7

"Last year we planted some maize in our field. We did not have a yield at all. This was a bad situation." Amanda, Grade 7

Finally, you may remember us mentioning Karen in our last report, elder sister to three of our learners. Karen attends Mosi-oa-Tunya Secondary School in Victoria Falls town, is a prolific reader and wants to become a lawyer. She wrote to me recently and this comment made me smile:

"Congratulations are in store for me. I was nominated the debate captain and I feel pity for our competitors."

I also pity her competitors as I would not like to compete against Karen in a debate. She will no doubt make a very good lawyer one day. For anyone who asks "what is the point" in educating all these children (as they do from time to time)...this is exactly the point. Together may we give the children roots to grow and wings to fly.

We applaud our Sponsors and Supporters for your tireless generosity in supporting our developments at Lesedi. You are moulding the lives of our learners, staff members, our parents and the community at large.

Thank you...xx