

LESEDI SCHOOLS & CLINIC

NEWS & UPDATE

JUNE 2024



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INTRODUCTION

"Do you know Julia?" asked a rather earnest Form 2 lad from under his big Lesedi hat. The kids often ask about their sponsors and after a bit of mental juggling I worked out which Julia and gave a "yes, sort of" response. He was clutching her last letter which had obviously been read and re-read many times. It talked about a UK Christmas and so I asked about his Christmas, which prompted an outpouring of teary-eyed sadness – his father had been in an accident and lost his livelihood, so he had no Christmas. The family were now buying food on credit and life had become very difficult.

His next question threw me a bit - "Who's your favourite superhero?" We then had a spirited debate on Batman vs Superman. Batman won.

It really struck me that behind every smiling face at Lesedi there is a story. Some happy, but most tinged with hardship. Life can be incredibly tough for these kids, but they are still kids. They are curious. They still want to be a superhero. They still dream – the lad I was chatting to has ambitions to be a scientist.

The resilience the kids show in the face of adversity is inspirational. Kuda, one of our Form 2 girls, asked to interview some of her fellow students in order to share their stories. She was in tears after a few of the children opened up to her. Kuda wanted to use her \$7 of life savings to buy a bag of maize to give to one of the families. Now I was also in tears! We convinced her instead to share the stories and through that encourage you, our supporters, to do

more. The stories she gathered are shown in coloured boxes at the bottom of these pages. The words are all Kuda's – she loves "collecting" unfamiliar English words and aspires to be a writer one day.

We established Lesedi to provide education and health to an impoverished community, but when you look a little closer we are actually educating 458 individual children with their own unique life stories (458 is our current enrolment). We do have a few kids who are as "comfortable" as you can be in Zimbabwe, but the vast majority are living a precarious existence and their smiles often hide considerable hardship.

For some reason this latest trip to Lesedi was full of raw emotion. Perhaps as the children get older we are starting to hear more of their voices. From hardship stories to listening to the school choir, we seemed to be permanently fighting back tears.

On one joyous day, with Lesedi hosting inter-school sports competitions, I found Fiona sobbing at the netball court after watching our girls' team totally thrash their opposition. A huge rush of pride in our girls had triggered this outpouring of emotion. She was absolutely blown away by their skill, teamwork and determination. Also by the supporters - learners and teachers from both the primary and secondary schools - who were cheering every point and singing and dancing in support. The kids who excel in sport are not necessarily the most academic, but it showed that success is much more than a final report card.

I was 5 years old when I lost my mother. I became an orphan at such a tender age and since I did not know my father my society deemed me illegitimate. After my mother's demise I had to move from Gweru to Victoria Falls to look after my blind grandmother. Living with my grandmother was not easy since she is blind and we had to beg for money by the taxi ranks. After some time, I got enrolled at Lesedi. Lesedi provides food, stationery, and we have the best teachers. Lesedi has changed my life because I now have a sponsor and it has changed the mindset of people my age and the community. At Lesedi we are making a difference.

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This pride, joy (and tears!) spilt again a few days later. We had a mesmerising session of marimba, mbira, singing, dancing and poetry from the Secondary kids. That made the heart sing. All the girls were asked to stay behind afterwards for a "girl talk" but were kept waiting after the teacher was delayed – so they occupied themselves by bursting into spontaneous song. One girl would start a song then the others would enthusiastically join in. Lesedi is a sanctuary for our girls, where they can learn, be fed, grow, sing, and be teenagers in a safe space. These girls were loud, proud and confident and it was a privilege to witness (again through teary eyes!).

Lesedi means light. And it is now blazing like the sun. We need your help to keep Lesedi going. In the 6 months since our last visit, two nearby charity-funded schools have closed as they couldn't cover their ongoing costs. Sponsorship is amazing and generates \$12,000 of income per month but our costs are now \$20,000-\$25,000 a month. That's before helping the kids survive a severe drought. And before investing in our dynamo new Secondary Headteacher, Lucy Chimbani, so that the Lesedi sun can shine even brighter.

We need your help:

- ✚ **Famine/Drought Appeal:** We are launching a **\$20,000** appeal to fund daily breakfast at Secondary (currently we only provide lunch) and to feed all learners through the school holidays for the duration of the drought. Children and their families face hunger and risk of starvation. The more funds we can raise, the more we can help.
- ✚ **Child Sponsorship:** If possible, please consider increasing your sponsorship above the \$360 pa minimum rate (it costs the charity \$700+ to feed, educate and care for each child).
- ✚ **Sponsor a teacher:** Our dedicated teachers are the beating heart of Lesedi. What better way to donate funds than to sponsor a teacher for a year. The annual cost is around \$5,000-\$6,000.

- ✚ **Support our feeding program:** Regardless of the drought, we need to raise around \$5,000 each month during term time to keep the feeding program going. This year we will be serving over 150,000 meals. Please help us with a monthly contribution.
- ✚ **Regular or One-off Donation:** Please consider supporting our work with a one-off or recurring donation. Every donation makes a difference, no matter how large or small. Regular monthly donations are particularly important as they help us to cover our operational costs and to plan our work.
- ✚ **Spread the sponsorship message:** We still have 45 children waiting to be allocated a sponsor.

If you have spare funds to do some good and wish to leave a lasting legacy, Lesedi provides a unique opportunity to really make a difference. Our 10-year track record of progress, along with the fact that all funds we receive are spent in full where they are needed most - with no deductions for overheads - makes Lesedi a great legacy option. Please invest in Lesedi and the kids. And their kids.

Thank you for any additional donations that you can provide. And for all the donations that you have already given. Everyone at Lesedi thanks you with all their hearts and we hope that some of the light we generate warms your hearts as well.



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SOUTHERN AFRICA DROUGHT

Zimbabwe has just had its driest February since 1938 and the summer "rainy season" was the driest Benson has ever experienced. The impact is being felt across all of Southern Africa:

[CNN Article: Southern Africa Drought](#)

The water situation is extremely concerning. Lesedi has four boreholes, and the water tanks are linked up around the schools and clinic. Water can be diverted across the whole complex should one or more boreholes dry up. Longer term we could invest in more water storage but for this drought we will have to manage as best as we can and hope that the water table replenishes with new rains in late 2024.

The most pressing concern is food. Most families in the local community rely on subsistence farming to survive, and depend on the rain for irrigation. The lack of rainfall meant that no crops grew over the summer, yet people need to survive until the next harvest in March-April 2025. Some families have small quantities of grain reserves from previous years that have kept them going so far, but others are already selling any cows, goats and other livestock they have to earn dollars to buy food. With such a widespread famine, food prices for staples such as maize are rising and will inevitably increase further. Food relief may come from Government, aid agencies and NGOs, but it is haphazard and uncertain.

Lesedi is very unusual in providing food for our learners – porridge and lunch for Primary learners and lunch for the Secondary plus the staff. We provide well over **150,000 meals a year** at approximately 30c a meal. The cost is a major stretch on our finances, but we get told time and time again by the learners and their families how critical our feeding program is.

The drought means that the meals we provide at school may become the only reliable food some of the kids have. We need to expand our feeding to cover school holidays, and also introduce breakfast porridge at Secondary. On Monday this week one of our students fainted during assembly, which we suspect was caused by lack of food over the weekend. If the crisis develops as badly as we fear, we may have to introduce feeding at weekends – subject to having funds to do so.

We are launching a Famine Appeal to raise \$20,000 to:

- ✚ Advance purchase maize and beans to secure key staples;
- ✚ Provide meals for those who need it during the August and December holidays;
- ✚ Introduce breakfast porridge at Secondary.

If you can help, please please donate now stating the purpose as Famine Relief 2024. This money will make a potentially life-saving difference to our children and take a little pressure off their families. Thank you.

I am a boy aged 14 and life has not been fair on my side. My dad was involved in an accident, and we haven't been getting proper meals at home because my dad's not working. My siblings and I depend on the food we get at school. Nowadays I sleep on an empty stomach and go to school on an empty stomach. My parents borrow money for us to get food and toiletry supplies. I am grateful to God that I am at Lesedi, at least my siblings and I don't spend the day hungry because the school provides. The situation at home would have destroyed my academic future and thanks to Lesedi sponsors I am still at school and I have a bright future ahead of me.

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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Regardless of the impact of the drought, we must also remain focussed on developing the schools to be the best they can be. Lesedi Secondary has made substantial progress in the last few months:

- ✚ After detailed reviews and inspections we are delighted that Lesedi Secondary School has now received official school **registration** from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education;
- ✚ We are thrilled to announce the appointment of Lucy Chimbani as our first Secondary **Headteacher**. Lucy is a very experienced teacher and leader, brimming full of energy and ideas. We will distribute a separate update from Lucy at the end of this term;
- ✚ One of Lucy's first actions as Head was to introduce **remedial** lessons for learners three afternoons a week. With covid lockdowns and often a lack of educational support at home, many of our learners require remedial help in English and Maths as well as other subjects. A big thank you to all our teachers for their dedication in providing this extra support;
- ✚ Lucy has also started a **social register** to help us become familiar with the individual circumstances of each of our learners. It will ensure we don't miss any warning signs and can ideally do a bit more to help those in most desperate need;
- ✚ We are in the process of finalising our Secondary **teacher plan** for next year, to ensure we have the best combination of teachers for Forms 1-4. Having started with just 4 teachers in 2021, we now employ 12. Several more will be needed from January to ensure we have enough resources to provide high quality teaching up to Form 4.
- ✚ We are in the early days of developing our thoughts on what happens beyond Form 4 for those who want to continue **further education**

through 'A' levels or vocational training. Given the high-quality facilities and resources we now have, the likely number of learners who will want to continue and the lack of any other further education options in the area, offering 'A' levels is a clear next step for Lesedi if we can secure funding to do so.

- ✚ We continue to broaden our learning offering where possible. We now have 6 **kindle e-readers** which are being devoured by 170 kids. We would welcome further donations of kindles or suitable paperback books for the library. On the kindles the girls were totally absorbed with "I am Malala" and outraged that girls in Afghanistan can't go to school.



Lucy Chimbani - Secondary Head

Lesedi Primary continues to thrive. In recent visits we have spent much of our time at the Secondary, but it is always a joy to wander through the bush, past the chickens and the dining hall, to reach the shady, laughing, grubby hands of the primary school.

Mrs Mutori and team continue to strive to improve the Primary. Our Grade 7 results last year were disappointing after a stellar year the year before and there is a constant challenge of teaching mainly local children who don't speak or use English at home, often with family who didn't complete their own schooling. Remedial classes have also started in the afternoons at Primary to help those kids who have fallen behind.

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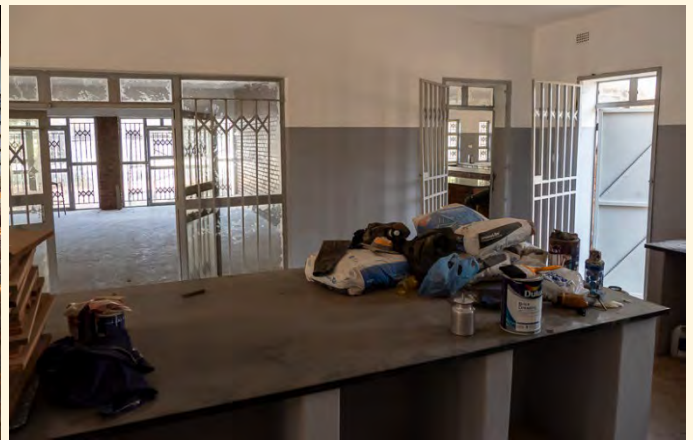
SCIENCE BLOCK

In the 6 months since our last report, we received funding for a new Science Block at Lesedi Secondary (thank you Volker) and this has already been designed and built (thank you Benson and his building team)! We don't hang around – you want to make a difference, you donate, we deliver, children benefit.

The Science Block consists of two teaching classrooms for chemistry and biology, a large prep room with adjacent chemical storeroom, toilet/shower room and office, and an additional workspace/waiting area. The facilities include solar power (which also provides back-up power to the computer lab), granite worktops, sinks, gas-taps, emergency shower, storage etc. The rooms are lovely, light and airy. Benson has done his usual embellishments with spare granite black and white

love hearts decorating the outside and locally hand-crafted teak cupboards and drawers. The funding we received also covers the science equipment and support for some of the ongoing operational costs.

We were privileged to witness the first couple of "demonstration" lessons in the chemistry lab, just as the builders were finishing up. These were led by Patricia Sibanda our science teacher. The learners were super excited and came in wide eyed and in total awe, not quite believing such a place could exist in a dusty, rural village in Zimbabwe. It truly is a marvel, and we feel humbled to have such an amazing facility at Lesedi. Our job now is to ensure that we get the best out of it and start creating future scientists and a broader understanding of the sciences which is so important.



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CHILDREN'S WELFARE

The drought and likely famine exacerbate a very challenging economic situation in Zimbabwe. There was some gallows humour circulating on WhatsApp recently with Zimbabwe being declared the best in the world at something – sadly, inflation. Running at 561% pa Zim easily beat the likes of Sudan (145%) and Venezuela (100%).

Rural Zimbabwe is a tough place to be a child. The home situation often doesn't help with too many examples of child-headed families, absent parents, kids caring for elderly grandparents and limited food. As with so many other countries around the world, there are issues with abuse and sexual violence, which often go unreported. Heartbreakingly we are aware of several brave survivors of sexual abuse amongst our learners. For some learners, Lesedi is their safe space... somewhere they can still be a child.

We are fiercely protective of all our Lesedi kids, although unable to protect them once they depart school each day. We would love to introduce a boarding facility for vulnerable girls but don't yet have resources to do so. In the meantime, we are focussing on improving the support we provide. We have a trained guidance councillor at Primary and another will soon be joining the team at Secondary. We are also looking at options for empowerment and self-defence classes along with weekly support meetings. Specialist organisations will be invited to provide additional help. We will do all we can to protect our kids.

LESEDI CLINIC

Having the clinic next door to the schools has been a huge boon for the learners, providing immediate help for health and broader welfare issues. We still support some children with long term health issues, providing medicines and specialist support, but with 500+ children from next year - and limited resources - we are being forced to review some of this ongoing help and consider cutting back on what we provide.

We have one girl with diabetes who our early supporters will remember would have died without our intervention 6 years ago. We continue to provide her with insulin, testing strips and special food at a cost to the charity of over \$2,500 a year as her parents are unable to contribute. In addition, we are now spending a further \$3,000 per year on medical costs for our kids, making sure they receive treatment when parents cannot afford to pay.

We recently provided prescription glasses and eye treatment to all kids who needed them. Even at the discounted rates kindly provided by EyePod Clinic the cost to date is over \$1,300. There are other children with long term health conditions we would like to help more, but our priority must be on funding the basic operational expenses of the two schools and clinic first and foremost.

If you can provide any long-term support to help us cover medical/welfare costs, we would be most grateful.

I was thirteen when my uncle died. He was epileptic and since he was the breadwinner at home we had to relocate. At that time my aunt was pregnant so she couldn't handle the household. I have a condition where I have difficulty breathing and not many schools enrol kids with health conditions. At Lesedi I was accepted the way I was, and I was given a sponsorship. I am grateful to have been given a second chance to embrace education.

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AGRICULTURE

The agriculture project lead by the whirlwind of energy and smiles that is Mr Nyere is continuing to grow from strength to strength:

- ✚ The **vegetable garden** had a good selection of tomatoes, spinach and cabbages growing for eventual use in school meals with some also sold locally. The shade netting had blown off in a storm so that needs replacing by October. Any future crops in the next 9 months will be dependent on water prioritisation requirements.
- ✚ The **chicken broiler** project now has two batches of c100 chickens being raised and sold in a 6-week cycle. This is raising \$500+ per month which is currently buying feed for ...
- ✚ **Rosie's Piggery**. 16 pigs are now being raised and with most of the sows now pregnant and likely to produce 10-15 piglets each we are soon going to reach the 240-pig capacity of the site.

We have one male boar, which the kids have named Benson. Enough said. He looked very happy.

- ✚ Our new Head has a refreshing attitude to school fees. You don't have money for fees? What can you give us? One such conversation ended with the school being given a **goat**. Another milestone in Lesedi's journey! On his second night in the piggery, the goat managed to slip his rope and jump the wall, but he was later found and now looks a lot happier after Benson donated four female goats to distract him from further escape attempts. A breeding program will supply meat for school meals and generate income.

Subject to the water/food situation, Mr Nyere is confident that by next year the chicken, pig and goat projects will reach a steady cycle with seed money repaid to the charity, additional income coming to the school and what an education for our learners!!



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SPORTS DAY

During our trip, Lesedi hosted seven other schools in a Sports Day covering girls' and boys' football (soccer), netball and volleyball. It was one of the most joyous spectacles we have ever witnessed and expertly hosted by our teachers amongst all their other duties.

We used the local community football pitch for the boys' football, with a load of villagers cheering them on (although the "pitch" was like playing in the middle of the Sahara, with the occasional stump resulting in a beautiful cross field pass suddenly ricocheting off at 90 degrees!!). Benson's personal truck - that Lesedi construction has totally wrecked - ferried brightly coloured players and supporters between the sites.

Zimbabwe schoolkids are super competitive, so every game was intensely fought, every point cheered, songs were sung, new friends made, and every win resulted in celebrations more effusive than winning the World Cup. The tuck shop did some very brisk business.

Our teams did amazingly, especially since we don't have a Form 4 yet. The Lesedi girls' football team

came first, qualifying to compete at District level! Our girls' netball team played phenomenally, just losing out to Mosi-oa-Tunya High School in the final (which has over 1,600 students up to 'A' level). The opposing netball team was much older and stronger than our girls, but the game was fiercely competitive. The boys' soccer team was also amazing, coming second after a penalty shoot out!

A few days later, the Elite Football Tournament was held in Victoria Falls town. Our boys not only won against the Mosi-oa-Tunya team, but also beat a select team formed from all teams competing. Four of our boys were selected for trials which will take place in Bulawayo.

We are so proud of everyone who took part. Sport gives our learners self-belief, increased well-being, team skills and mental toughness. The competitors - and the whole of Lesedi - ended that day buzzing, with their heads held high. We are keen to keep adding positive experiences to our 458 life stories - whether through sports, chess, music, welding, academic excellence, baking, the list is endless. Let's provide skills and experiences that will help the children grow.



I feel delighted and special to be a student here at this remarkable school, because most schools take in people who are influential kids from wealthy families. I got enrolled in this school because I am a very focussed and talented young lady. I am in the school choir, and I get to display my talent every time we have guests at the school. Lesedi has found a way to boost my self esteem and I am elated to be a student here in this prestigious school.

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HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Our main financial challenge is covering the salaries, food and other operational costs. Sponsorship revenues cover \$12k of the \$20-25k monthly needed to keep Lesedi open. We 100% rely on private donations.

As we have said before, stopping meals is the obvious saving that we could make as they are not provided at any other school and at \$4-5k per month the cost of providing free school meals is a huge drain. However, given some of the children will go hungry and possibly starve without our food, this just isn't morally acceptable to us, especially in such a severe drought year.

We would be hugely grateful if you could:

- ✚ Donate to our \$20,000 Famine Appeal and spread the word on this to your network;
- ✚ Encourage friends and family to sponsor. We still have 45 children with life stories like those we have heard from who need support and love;
- ✚ When you renew your sponsorship donations could you add \$10-20 more per month or pay \$500+ annually? The total costs for educating, feeding and welfare is more like \$700 per child vs the \$360 sponsorship rate;
- ✚ Consider providing funds to support our regular food program or sponsor a teaching post;
- ✚ Set-up a regular monthly donation or make a one-off donation to support our work.

It is frustrating that visitors to Lesedi see the impressive buildings and smiley kids in their nice uniforms and assume that we are financially secure. As proven by the two local schools that closed

recently, the hard bit is finding sufficient funds each and every month to keep the school running. 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 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/lesedi-schoolsandclinic>

United Kingdom

(via CAF)

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

We are looking at options for diversifying our funding sources, so that we don't keep piling pressure on our loyal family of supporters. In the US we have an amazingly generous offer of help with the time consuming process of identifying and approaching suitable foundations and other grant providers to seek support with funding our operational costs base. If you have any contacts with grant giving bodies whose work extends to Zimbabwe please could you contact me graeme@ngoko.com.

In my community I have observed children my age dropping out of school because the environment they live in neglects the right to education. Every child deserves to be in a safe environment where they can practice their academical developments but where I live most people care about parties and fun more than education. Lesedi has managed to change the mindset of people from my area, since the school provides remedial lessons, food and free education. People now see the essentiality of education.



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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 can assure you it would be a most worthwhile legacy.

Bequests should be made to Ngoko Charitable Trust, UK-registered charity no. 1163965. We recommend that you consult your estate planner, solicitor or attorney to get appropriate tax advice.

SUMMARY

10 years on at Lesedi and progress remains relentless. So much has been done but there is still so much to do.

Our 458 life stories continue to be written and we will do all we can to make these happy and not sad stories.

Thank you to the teachers, nurses and support staff who work so hard and are making the Lesedi dream a reality.

Thank you to you our supporters for making all of this possible and believing in us. And thank you in advance for any extra funds you can provide to get us through these challenging drought times.

All our best wishes to you and your loved ones,

Fiona, Graeme and Benson x



A final word from the lovely Kuda, who gathered these powerful stories in order to show the impact your support is making in their lives:

As a student of Lesedi I feel like my whole life on track as many people my age have dropped out of school after finishing their primary school because of financial pressures. My family was worried about how I could continue my education since things were not adding up. I joined Lesedi Secondary, and I now have a sponsor who supports my education. Also, I don't spend the day on an empty stomach as the school provides food for us.



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LESEDI IN PHOTOS



Primary kids preparing for Africa Day



Remedial classes after lunch at Secondary



More learners joining the remedial classes, as the kids start to understand they are helpful



By Africa Day the remedial classes are getting very full!



Wood Tech making shoe racks



A recent extension to our Wood and Metal Tech classrooms to provide additional space

LESEDI IN PHOTOS



Metal Tech class



School sports



Mbira playing



The talented Marimba players



Another netball goal...

LESEDI IN PHOTOS



...and the celebrations



Boys football/soccer team being ferried to the community football pitch



Almost scored...



Lesedi boys football team



Lesedi girls footballers competing



The four boys selected for football trials