

April 5th 2018

Greetings from the Zimbabwean soil!

It is with much gratitude that I write this second field report. Your generosity is amazing. Many thanks to those who felt connected to donating for the solar system. We will be able to replace the deep cycle battery in time for camp, as well as get the smaller unit if we can locate the seller right away. The plan is to replace the old battery, thereby lighting up the large building being used as an annex and then putting the smaller unit that comes with multiple lights at the preschool. This is for both inside and outside so the girls can find the toilets (pit-style) on the perimeter. Rumor has it that Friday even more girls will come to camp than came to our meeting! We are now prepared. Thank you, thank you, thank you. What an incredible help!

Here is the short version for those of you on the run:

- ❖ *Mhandara* Monthly Care MEETING – 107 Nhimbe girls up from 74, Rwizi, Gavaza, Rukuma – 101!
- ❖ SATURDAY, SUNDAY & CRAFTS – embroidery, bracelets, purses, and hosho help tell a story.
- ❖ THE ECONOMY – A CONTINUING PLIGHT
- ❖ WELL BUILDING & REPAIR
- ❖ OUR INCREDIBLE LIBRARY

Mhandara Monthly Care MEETING

We returned from town late on Thursday. It was the 4-day Easter weekend and so there were traffic jams and grocery store lines that moved extremely slowly. We came back with supplies to keep us going for a week to include food, embroidery items, and MMC sample packages. We really wanted to demonstrate to the girls at Friday's meeting how to use the unique MMC Program items. *Mhandara* is a Shona word meaning "women's days".

Patricia had purchased the underwear, buckets and soap at the shops and our seamstresses had finished one batch of pads, which supplies 15 girls. We had delivered more of the donated fabrics to the seamstresses so they could begin batch #2. There were some minor adjustments that were like hiccups in converting from the donated yardage widths to metrics, and we all ended up learning. What an amazing process to see all the pieces coming together.

We are always in between a snail's pace and clockwork, and vigilantly paying attention to never make assumptions about what will happen next, or how things might flow. An old friend and board member, Mary Ann, used to advise me to "relinquish expectations" and I always loved being reminded of that and continue to hold the adage close to my heart. We learn to live with an expectancy of wonder but without expectations.

Friday, we headed to the Community Center to see many girls had arrived by noon for the weekly Girl Guides meeting. They had walked 2 hours from afar to be there on time. Girls continued to come for an hour. When we finally took a headcount we had 208 girls, coming from the 5 new schools (Gavaza primary and secondary, Rukuma primary and secondary, Rwizi Community college), as well as coming from our regular 5 schools in the Nhimbe villages' area. Holy cow... we did not expect such a turnout, but everyone began working together to hold the vision and implement the expanding ideas.

Starting with huge circle we spread across the grassy space where normally preschool children play. We sang welcoming songs to embrace the new children so that everyone felt more at home. To address the girls with the presentation, we changed the arrangement to sitting semicircle, but within minutes the rains began dropping. Quickly they began moving into the preschool building, but of course there wasn't enough room. So we had the

oldest girls stay first inside while the youngest, ranging from 8 and not yet in puberty up through grade 7, were organized to go into another building.

Demonstrating the use of the reusable washable pads went very well. Since we had so many children, and two groups to manage, we didn't get to do boy-talk, but promised them camp-time next weekend when we delve into all the favored topics. We explained how the MMC and Hurukuro Na Tete are designed to work for them, and that we are all one ... we were girl's once too, and became women through the same transforming process that they are now navigating.

Then we introduced the guest speaker, our Lillian, whom we have learned is far beyond just a sweetheart and huge help. I had asked Lillian if she might talk to the girls because she knows intimately the what-and-how of female experiences here in Zimbabwe. She agreed and promptly came back the following day with the attached presentation, which she had written on her phone in the night, asking, "Is this okay, mum?"

Okay? Are you kidding me? It was fantastic and just what the doctor ordered! So when it came to offering it to these young ones sitting at her feet, she spoke eloquently and directly to the girls, who were entranced by her passion and directness, speaking to the heart of the matter. She didn't read it as a speech, but is clearly a well-zealed public speaker, using just a few bullet points to help stay on track. I'm including her talk in our report as a second document, so you can gain new vision and hope for Zimbabwe's future and female children.

As an aside I'm mentioning here: She wants to continue to attend the last year at University but it is \$1,000, of which she has saved \$200. She has come out of the poorest townships, worked many very small jobs for the last 7 years, as well as gratefully received a gift for some classes. If you would like to invest in Lillian's future (she is 27 and most times it takes a long time to pursue education here), and potentially also in Nhimbe's future (as there is a huge place for her on our team), please feel free to go to www.ancient-ways.org and write me at windgatherer@ancient-ways.org so I know you are interested. You can see she is gifted, and is daily seeking how to be part of the solution!

We managed to reach all the girls in the meeting and then took them in groups of 10-15 on a tour through our ever growing library hut. This was particularly for the new girls (101 of them), who had never been to our Community Center before. Jess, with a tremendous love of books and writing, stepped in and took over sharing what the library is for and how English can be fun, as well as important to make new friends (like us), and not just for passing exams. This freed me up to move onto the next puzzle piece.

The teachers who had accompanied the girls on this long hike, 3 in all, shared their concern for the girl's ability to come to the camp because of the long distance. With some discussion, we sorted out that we could use the truck to go to the schools and pick up the children's gear (bedroll, etc.), then they would come on foot next Friday. It all sounds like a plausible plan. The petrol required should not cost a huge amount and this could open the doors for the children to attend. We shall see next week how it all works.

We also discussed that with some thought, we really will want to prepare some trainings for the leaders so that they can potentially hold regular meetings in their areas. At this point it's all voluntary for them. We do pay our Nhimbe leaders to hold camp and weekly meetings, but financially we are not prepared to expand services of this nature far and wide. So as long as these teachers want to help their girls, just taking it along with their teaching duties, we should be able to offer them the MMC supplies.

We wrapped up the long day by giving each girl a permission slip. We had actually thought ahead and photocopied 5 per page, but didn't have enough, so our oldest Girl Guides got paper and pen and proceeded to make sheets by hand until we completed distribution. I got the impression that hand writing notes to parents is a normal thing. We only gave them to the 101 new girls and then made sure everyone was all on the same page.

If their parents give permission, they bring 1 cup of mealie meal (maize flour), a blanket for a bed roll, a change of clothes, and a towel to their individual schools on next Friday at 10 a.m. They will load the truck and then leave at 11 to arrive at 1. We will start camp at 2 p.m. They must confirm by Wednesday since we will buy food for the camp next Thursday when we go to town. Everyone exchanged phone numbers.

The final piece was realizing that the day had grown long and the girls were getting hungry, having another 2 hours to walk to their school and then home from there. We normally don't budget to feed girls at the weekly meetings, but under these circumstances I knew we had to find food quickly. Lucky indeed, the donated fabrics were giving us breathing room in the budget. The money allocated for buying flannel was now being diverted to the truck petrol purchase for camp, and also to give these kids a small something for their bellies. There is a snack here called *maputi*, which is a traditional popcorn. We were able to buy each child as well as our leaders a little bag for 10 cents each at Patricia's store, covering everyone for less than \$21. What a lovely end to a beautiful day!

SATURDAY, SUNDAY & CRAFTS

With the embroidery women well on their way to sewing the animal blocks, we hooked up with the 5 Nhimbe female staff that didn't have previous embroidery experience. They too needed to make some money. This included our librarian who was my main translator for this group, the groundkeeper, the two cooks and the janitor. My cousin from Arizona had donated some semi-precious stone beads that we began making bracelets in two sizes for. In two hours' time they earned \$55 amongst them, which left very happy faces.

Additionally, we also had a small purse project that they worked on as well, all sewn by hand, of course. We had also bought some *hosho* (the rattle that we use with the mbira or marimba music) from a local maker and mbira player named Friday Chamunorwa. It was perfect timing for him as his wife was ill and really needing medical attention. With us bringing just a few items back home for Zimfest and some other smaller venues, we can share more of the story of these men and women. Thank you for your continued support on this regard. I have tried to reduce being a merchant since it always entails inventorying etc., but I guess it's in my blood. Also, seeing and hearing about the difference these little projects make, impels, compels, and propels me every time.

THE ECONOMY – A CONTINUING PLIGHT

Sold by the liter here, the average cost by the gallon is diesel at \$4.65 and petrol for all other vehicles at \$5.11. Prices for food are all over the board. We bought a very nice brown seed bread for \$1.49, clearly mainly purchased by the upper crust of Shona who actually have a job. White and cheap brown bread are about \$1 per loaf. There are more expensive stores in the wealthiest neighborhoods, but most township residents would not afford to buy the brown bread. Some of the food prices were shockingly the same as US stores. We are hoping to eat on \$10 a day for the two of us, and that is with bringing some comfort food from home... can't wait to see how we do with our allowance.

Many people continue to be unemployed. We met someone who approached us at the supermarket. He asked if we were paying cash (didn't matter if it was USD or the new Zimbabwean bank notes, which are supposed to be equivalent). When we said yes were using money, he asked if he could buy our groceries using his bank card, and then we pay him cash. This fellow, looking to be maybe in his mid-thirties, was an architect and worked for the government. He explained that although he had a job and was being paid (not always the case in the past years), they paid him by depositing all of his check in the bank. That wouldn't be bad except the bank doesn't allow withdrawals of more than \$20-30 a day. You might have thousands of dollars in there but cannot get it out

in cash. Of course we obliged, but I only felt safe undertaking the whole thing because we had our Shona friends with us buying groceries.

We understand that although it is not supposed to happen, there continues to be various ways that the economy is being altered illegally. One is that there is an illegal parallel market that generates an extra 20-25% if someone has USD to change. The police are working hard to get this under control. Currently it is happening on street corners in public view. The second thing is that shop owners are doubling, tripling and sometimes charging six-fold the value of an item if you only have the new bank notes. Obviously this is hard for the average person who never sees USD.

People who live in the cities often go to town, catching a bus for 50¢-\$1. They spend a good part of the day looking for work, and doing money-making merchant deals. They end up eating the fast-food just like many do in America, mainly because they must leave home early to get a vending space and can't pack a lunch. Often the spot they had yesterday may be gone. Many of the vendors are graduates learning the basics of real-life entrepreneurial enterprise.

WELL BUILDING & REPAIR

We spent some time planning for this year's well building. Requiring a dry season starting in May-June, we will be looking to build 15 wells by November. There are also wells needing repairs, which have been damaged by inclement weather. There will be an evaluation made as to whether any of the wells were built on our watch, and if so why have they failed. If it was the particular builder then he will not be part of our business in the future. If these wells were built unrelated to us, we can still potentially assist with repairs. We are focusing on the elders first, since they have no way to get funds for improvements.

To build a well, the family first must dig a 20 foot hole about 5 feet wide. The younger fellows work together to accomplish this feat, looking much like Spiderman or a monkey climbing up and down. Then we provide 1,000 bricks from local makers and the cement, as well as pay the builders, who have just more than doubled their fee. We haven't kept up with inflation here. It's just been impossible!

Patricia will negotiate a good bulk price in town and have 90-100 cement bags delivered. The paint also is bought in the city and the painter will be putting the donor's name on the well. This reminds them daily that people from afar actually do think of them, and you too get a picture to remind you of the incredible impact you have on an extended family. Pure water for cooking, cleaning, and garden will improve the overall health and prosperity of the entire community often for generations. Thank you so much for your help with our WATER! (Wells And Toilets Everyone's Right) program.

OUR INCREDIBLE LIBRARY

Monday, Jess and I went to the Center and inventoried the approximate 100 new book arrivals by title and author. This freed up Efilida, our inventory control person, to work on her embroidery. We have a couple duplicates but not many at all. I wish I had time (or the typing help) to get the list in the computer so that we can see what's there... there are around 750 books! If anyone has some extra time to do typing, please write me. A list of this type would be useful to check when shopping for future donating. What do you think?

We decided that to increase space in our library as it is the very smallest hut, we moved the littlest bookcase to the large room which is used as the preschool annex. On Tuesday, two teenage boys were at the shops and came to help with the lifting. We took all the preschool books and organized for their reading and story time.

We also agreed to make this larger building available as the library annex during Saturday's 10-2 pm hours have many children are coming to read and be read to.

The librarian, hired during my last trip in 2016 as also a preschool teacher, is in heaven and very happy. Your selections are wonderful, many of which are award winning. There was a perfect distribution between all the age groups, so that everyone, from the most educated to the least, all have choices. Teachers from the nearby schools even come to read, and a local MP made a donation of books as he recognizes the value. This library is a great gift of empowerment for the whole community!

We have a few challenges such as broken chairs and bookcases built without adequate height so books have to lay down, as well as a general lack of experience with managing so many books. However, considering that there are no libraries here to speak of except at universities, we are just so grateful for the opportunity! This is an evolving process like everything else and we all continue to *nhimbe* (work together) for progress.

Thank you again for your continued interest and support. We can't do it without your help. Everyone here sends many thanks!

Jaiaen