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29 March 2007

To all our faithful friends

Well, newsletter no. 1 of 2007 has arrived, and, there is so much to tell.

Let me begin by thanking everyone who supported our gift-wrapping fundraiser at Toys-R-Us in the three weeks before Christmas '06. The success of that fundraiser surpassed all our expectations and ended our year on a very good note indeed. Thank you especially to our 100+ volunteers who so graciously gave of their time to work the leg and back breaking shifts in order to achieve our goal. And once again a very big thank you goes to Toys-R-Us Pavilion for their kind and generous support.

We opened a fourth classroom this year and thought we would be spending much of January doing parent interviews, but no such thing. We had a full complement of 80 children before even opening our doors on the first day of school. What a difference this has made to the ambience of our school and the admin in our office. Our grounds are truly ALIVE with sound and activity all day, everyday. Once again, it has been wonderful to watch the progress of the children in the first three months of the year. We have also had such encouraging feedback from the parents as they have expressed their joy and gratitude for what their children are experiencing and learning.

This, of course, meant more staff members. So, Gail McGee (our volunteer of 2006) came onto the staff as the student-teacher of the bridging class and her assistant is Jennifer Mtshali. Daria and Cindy are now caring for and educating our combined class – a mixture of the oldest bridging children and the youngest Grade R children. The Grade R classes remain the same, except that Kayleigh Anderson is now employed as Mirriam Gugushe's assistant, in place of Gail.

A new volunteer joined our ranks very early in the term. One of our mom's, Lumka Mahlangeni, joined us as a volunteer in the mornings and as the chieftain of aftercare in the afternoons. She has fitted into our environment with ease and proved herself to be an enthusiastic and very capable worker. And so we continue to grow.....

We have been hit by flash floods twice in close succession: Firstly in November, which saw us all running around, with our trousers rolled up to our knees, in ankle-deep water over the cycle track and into the fantasy and cognitive rooms. We saved our "floating" carpets and furniture and brought them out to dry. Then, the storms that hit our coastline caused havoc this March. The rain that accompanied them, once again, found its way into the fantasy and cognitive rooms. This time, alas, we have had to get rid of the carpets – they were so heavy with water (besides being old, worn and 2nd hand) that they fell apart when we tried to lift them. So, we have decided to use other means of floor cover in those rooms since they are so vulnerable to being flooded. Carpets just are not an option! Of course, the computers did not remain unaffected, but then that is par for the course on this property, which is positionally, vulnerable to electric storms. Wasn't the heavenly fireworks display something to be marvelled at though?

This year we have seen 2 groups of girls from local high schools joining us on weekends to carry out their community service obligations. Two girls from Mowat Park High School join us on Friday afternoons and 6 girls from Durban Girls' High School have been working for us on Saturdays. We are so grateful to these girls for their willingness and enthusiasm to do tasks that are not always very attractive or stimulating, but are necessary for the maintenance and smooth running of our programme. They have also assisted with aftercare, fundraising functions as well as outings. We would also like to commend these schools for encouraging their girls to become involved in work that supports the community.

Miriam and I are planning a promotional trip to the UK in September under the sponsorship of the Norton Methodist Church (and associated churches) in Letchworth Garden City, Hertfordshire. The parents and children have been outstanding in their support of our fundraisers to bring in the money to pay for our tickets. Our first fundraiser, a sponsored scooter race (photographs attached) brought in sufficient funds to cover the first aeroplane ticket. One child brought in over R250 and two children brought in over R350. Each of these children was individually rewarded for their sterling efforts.

Udobo also got involved in a local community clean up on Saturday 17 March. Fifteen of the children joined teacher Gail with litter bags and marched off to the sports field opposite the Montclair Mall, while twelve teams (totalling 100 volunteers) moved off into other earmarked areas of the Montclair surrounds. Two hundred bags of litter were collected that day and twenty of those were collected by the Udobo children. They really outdid themselves. An article was published in the Southlands Sun and, our ward councillor and the chairman of the Rate Payers' Assoc have acknowledged and thanked us for our efforts. This is to become a regular community action, until we have victory over this destructive phenomenon, and the Udobo children will be there, en force, each time.

We have, this year, introduced a financial management service to our parents who are finding it difficult to work within their means. Peter and Robyn Love have made themselves available to work alongside these parents and to guide them, while teaching them financial management skills. We would like to thank Robyn and Peter for caring enough for their fellowman to volunteer their services in this way. The parents have expressed heartfelt gratitude for this service, and it serves to ease the burden of my heart for "my" people.

Another development, which has been very well received by our parent body, is the visitation programme initiated by concerned folk of MMC. Groups of MMC members have visited the parents of children who live in the Montwoodpark area. The parents have all expressed how gratifying it was to have someone show that they care, to be able to share their burdens and to receive helpful advice. So, from the bottom of my heart, I say thank you to everyone who made the effort and sacrificed their time to reach into the lives of these needy, and often lonely, families.

A spin-off of this has been the realisation of the huge need that exists in our community. MMC have now decided to send monthly grocery parcels to the families who are in desperate need. I am so excited to see how the community is getting involved, so positively and generously, in the lives of others. On behalf of our parents, thank you and God bless you most abundantly for your love and concern expressed in such a practical way.

The birthday cakes are just going from best to bestest! These children and their families are so overawed at the gorgeous cakes that are being shared at school and at home. I wish with all my heart that our bakers could see the lights switch on in little eyes, as it dawns on the individual that the cake is for him/her. It is such a joy and blessing. Thank you again to everyone who blesses a child in this way.

I would also like, in closing, to thank all other folk within our community who have brought gifts of groceries, toys, equipment, clothing, blankets, etc. for the school and our families. Your generosity is what makes this all worthwhile and keeps us fuelled to keep marching forward in our plight to provide **true** equal opportunity to the children of our community.

The Udobo School is funded through the Udobo ED-U Foundation, a Charitable Trust established for this purpose.

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OUR SCOOTER RACE – 3 March 2007



The catchers at the bottom of the slope



Being sorted into our teams



Ready, steady... (Abigail was wearing Kathy's shoes)



Family and friends come to enjoy the fun



And they're off!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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Some needed help to get back up the hill



Well padded – just in case...



Teachers Mirriam and Daria ready for the teachers' race



Teacher Colleen wobbling to win



After-race picnic in our lovely gardens



Scrabble for Udobo!!!!

God bless you all.
Always fishing KATHY

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