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Hullo Friends

I can't believe that I am already writing the first newsletter of 2008. However, so much has taken place in the past couple of months, that I have a tremendous amount to report. Please forgive me if I bore you.

Firstly, let me start by giving you the follow-on from our trip to the UK. We received a very generous donation from a benefactor in the UK to erect awnings around two thirds of our school buildings to give our precious buildings protection from the elements, as well as to enable the children to move comfortably from play area to play area when we are experiencing inclement weather. These were completed within the first two weeks of school starting and have proven to be a wonderful blessing – not only serving the purpose for which they were intended, but also providing us with much cooler indoor conditions in the awful heat of our summer. For that reason alone, I am now considering erecting the awnings along the non-weather facing side of the buildings to give the other two classes on that side the same shelter. We would like to extend a very heartfelt "Thank you" to our friend in the UK.

The Governing Body agreed that we could use the funds raised from all collections taken while we were in the UK to erect a new junglegym as well as to do repairs to our old one. Our new junglegym is rather more of an obstacle course which helps to develop the children's balance, centre of gravity, gross motor co-ordination and peripheral visual skills – to mention but a few. The children spent a while watching the staff do the first few laps around it – the principal insisted so that the staff would appreciate just how accomplished the children are when they achieve the various physical challenges set out for them. That day, there was no interest in any other play area of the school. The old junglegym had a number of stabilising repairs done to it as well as the addition of some innovative ideas to improve its attraction. It also has new swings. So, all in all, the play areas of the school are of top quality and we are very privileged indeed to have the funds made available to us for these innovations.

Soon after school started, we also received a parcel or two or three, shipped over from the UK – from the Archway Methodist Church in London – containing the most beautiful clothing for the children (they all went home with great big smiles on their faces that day), books for the school and also fluffy toys which were shared between the school for birthday treats for the children and the Crisis Centre at Addington Hospital for children who have been traumatised.

Then, not too long into our new term, RSA Market Agents entered our lives and are very kindly supporting us by providing our fresh produce needs for the preparation of meals for the children. It has been a wonderful blessing to have them come on board and it was an even greater blessing to, one day, hear them refer to us as "Our school".

We have also extended our kitchen premises to include a pantry and a three plate gas cooker. We still have to lay ceramic floors, install two extractor fans and give it all a new coat of paint. All this is thanks to the Methodist Church Millennium Fund again. We are so grateful for their ongoing support of our project.

We need to make special mention of the Alice Baumann Trust who have once again blessed us with a substantial donation in support of the work we are doing amongst the children of our community. Without sponsorship such as this, we would never be able to continue doing what we do.

Then...just in case there are those who still have not seen it.... Nedbank very graciously have advertised our school on one of their freeway billboards as one of several local heroes. We would like to thank them most sincerely for the honour of their recognition and acknowledgement. It certainly took us by surprise, but gave us such a wonderful sense of affirmation and determination to keep on keeping on. Thank you Nedbank.

We have also experienced some major turnover with regard to our staff. As reported in our last newsletter of 2007, Thobeka and Kayleigh left to move on to new opportunities. This term, due to some very unfortunate circumstances, both Gail and Veronique left our school. However, God replaced them before I had time to blink my eyes. We now have Jessica Croukamp and Amos Teuro on our staff. Jessica is Cindy's assistant and Amos has taken over as the teacher of our combined class. New staff members also include Sindisiwe, assistant to Amos, Roxanne, assistant to Mirriam, Lumka, assistant to Liz in the kitchen and Nokuvela, teacher for classroom number 5. Themba has joined the staff on a part-time basis as our maintenance man.

Our school is now full to capacity – 100 children!!! In just four short years. I would never have dreamt that it would all happen so quickly. And my word.....the admin that goes along with it!!! From sorting the classlists out to parent interviews, to bookwork, to the orientation of a new parent body and I could go on and on.....please feel ever so sorry for me!!!! However, it is wonderful to have a full school and to see our work reaching so many little souls within our community. It was quite overwhelming to have our first parents' meeting this term and to address a sea of faces. This school is alive with the sound of children. We were very encouraged when visitors to the school last week commented on how happy and well-behaved the children of our school are. We have two sets of twins this year – Prudery and Gladwell – who are extremely protective of each other, and Thobani and Thobeka. Thobeka is a nurturer and makes sure her brother has everything he should have – especially a piece of birthday cake!!!!!!

Community involvement with our school this year includes Kiddy Gymnastics, Kiddy Music, and Kiddy Ballroom and Latin Dancing. We would like to thank Caryn, Theresa and Musa for the time they give up in their schedules to share their skills with the staff and the children. Once again we have two girls from Durban Girls' High School doing their Community Service with us and they have jumped in, most enthusiastically, to doing all the jobs that take up time in the teachers' schedules. We also have two students from KZN Coastal College, who come in every Friday to do their practical assignments.

Professional development this term includes Cindy starting her road to becoming a qualified teacher, Daria and Amos doing specialised courses in the three learning areas of Early Childhood Development and Jessica has also started her studies towards becoming a qualified teacher. All of these teachers are doing their courses with the Caversham Education Trust. Vasia is doing a bookkeeping course through Damelin and feels very officious now because she too, will be able to display a framed certificate above her desk. Colleen is living out a life-long dream of learning sign language. So, all in all, the staff are very busy at the moment!

Emotionally, the staff have had a very difficult time this term. Just before school started, Mirriam had a break in into her home and all her belongings that could be carried away were stolen. Amos has had to leave his family in Zimbabwe and seek refuge in South Africa to try and provide for them – his teacher's salary was not even enough to pay his rent in Zimbabwe. Jennifer was mugged at gunpoint and robbed of her cellphone and the meagre contents of her purse while on her way to the shop to purchase her week's groceries. Cindy was traumatised by some "gentleman" who took it upon himself to follow her around the city centre bellowing out for all to hear that he would not go near her because she is dying of AIDS – this because she chose to ignore him when he bumped into her in passing. The brave girl had him arrested and is now going through the process of court cases and insisting on seeing some sort of justice being done even though the public prosecutor has suggested that she is over reacting since one can hardly call that an insult – talk about a red rag to bull..... She has also experienced very bad flood damage to her home during the recent storms. Colleen also had her home broken into and her precious belongings taken. Sindisiwe's daughter, Khwezi (one of our graduates of 2007), lost her father very suddenly to AIDS related illnesses. Nokuvela's mother and daughter were involved in a taxi accident and both have bad injuries. Liz lost both her parents-in-law within a week of each other. Kathy has had to part from both her boys as they have gone on to find life for themselves. Vasia has had a grandchild born into her home which has brought its own form of pressure into her life. And lastly, Jessica has been traumatised by a "gentleman" who has decided that she is an easy target for harassment at the bus stop.

Then, of course, there was the loss of Gail and Veronique. So, there has been a lot of counselling and support therapy taking place amongst us. What has been wonderful to see though, is the way all the staff have pulled together for each other and held each other up through the difficult times.

Family visitations have started again and I would like to thank Jean Hall for the incredible job she is doing and the time she is offering up in making the effort to visit each of our local families to establish their needs and to see whether there is any way in which the school or the church can be of greater assistance to them. My staff members who live in Umlazi will be doing home visitations to our Umlazi families during the school holidays. It was very encouraging at the beginning of the year, when one of the parents came in to see me and specially to thank the visitation team for the way they cared, not only for her throughout last year, but also her neighbour. The tears of gratitude that were shed were very humbling – but it was very touching to know that in some way our small gestures of caring were big gestures of kindness to the recipients.

Once again we had our sponsored Scooter Race and combined it with a mini sports day in order to bring in funds to assist our teachers towards paying for their qualifications. The children really outdid themselves in their fundraising efforts and we really are grateful to our parent body for their efforts on our behalf. The day was blessed with glorious, hot Durban sunshine and the children and parents involved themselves with loud enthusiasm in all the events.

We are seeking the assistance of any of our sponsors and/or supporters. After a number of unpleasant incidents and ongoing difficulties experienced by our children within the various means of transportation available to them, we have been looking into the purchase of at least one mini-bus type vehicle for the school, so that we can offer the parents a safe, reliable and less expensive form of transportation for their children. We have been offered a very generous contribution towards the purchase of such a vehicle by sponsors in the UK, but we have been unable to find a second-hand vehicle suitable for such use. If anyone has access to such a vehicle or to anyone who can assist us, please could you contact us. Better still, if anyone would be prepared to assist us by sponsoring a new vehicle (or two, or more) we would most certainly be eternally grateful to them for their generous support and kindness – it goes without saying that company logos will be splashed across the vehicle to let the entire community know who our supporters are. Please assist us by keeping ears and eyes open.

We also have our golf day coming up in July at Mt. Egdecombe Golf course and would appreciate any support of this event – either in prizes, sponsorship of a hole, or players. Please contact Sonja Carlyle at 083 779 8019 for more information.

I close with some quotes and quips from this term:

Thanks very much for everything that you done to my son – for caring, educating, helpful during the sickness, trying to understand his behaviour, changing his life, giving love and support. I am very satisfied and happy for his progress. The standard is very high. I can't believe within a few months he is speaking English, asking questions, understanding. YOU DONE A LOT TO MY KIDS!

I'm short of words to say. I don't know where to begin. After what you and staff did on Friday. Thank you very much. May God bless you. You're the angels sent from above.

Thank you for the birthday cake and teddy bear. It was very nice and Th..... liked it and he said he will always come to school because they arrange his birth last year AND this year. Thank you so much.

Thank you for being patient to my daughter. She told me that she loved the food you gave her, and thank you for giving the children well balanced diet food and fruits. My twins love the school, they always come home happy and talk nice about the teachers and other childrens.

I would like to thank you for an amazing job you did to my son. You are truly are amazing teachers which I've never seen. Before my son couldn't do anything, he couldn't even draw a round but now he is loving his drawing he can even colour in and count. So thank you so much.

Our new jungle-gym/obstacle course



Our scooter race – cum – sports day



Some of our new awnings



Until next time – Always Fishing

KATHY MERCER
PRINCIPAL