

Thusananga Quarterly Newsletter – April 2007

'A Visitors Perspective' by Emma Weatherstone

Dear friends and supporters of Thusananga HBCA & Khaya Lokukhanya (KL)

Clare has asked me to write the latest newsletter to give a visitors perspective on the 2 projects, here is Barkly East. I will have been in residence for a total of 6 weeks in May experiencing a very different way of life, in this rural area in the Eastern Cape from my home in London. I have been spending time with the children at KL and learning more about the HIV epidemic in Southern Africa.

There has been a lot of support and fundraising activities over the last few months and we would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone that has helped Thusananga with donations and the children of KL through the 'Sponsor a Child' scheme.

In February 2007 we were able to employ a professional fundraiser, based in Cape Town to raise money for both projects, thanks to a private sponsor in the UK. They are busy preparing the necessary paperwork from the Thusananga & KL business plans and the first submissions will be made to the South African National Lottery next month.

We now have a London based bank account and a secure web based donations facility through [paypal](#) which makes receiving donations from the UK much easier. We would like to thank Liane Groves for all her time and effort spent with NatWest making this happen. The bank also donated £500 to the projects and we would like to thank Adam at the Wimbledon branch for this kind gesture.

To support the 'Sponsor a Child' initiative we have some excellent new colour leaflets that have been designed and printed thanks to Faye and Liane at Amicus the union in London. A copy of this is available as a PDF on our website.

Some of the money raised through the 'Sponsor a Child' scheme is paying for extra tutoring after school to help the children in a number of subjects (including Maths & English) for when they come to sit their matriculation exams (School leaving & university entrance exams) KL has some desk top computers that have been donated by Shell (Cape Town) and the children are having regular IT lessons with Elizabeth Couveras. She is a teacher and author of a number of educational books from Barkly East.

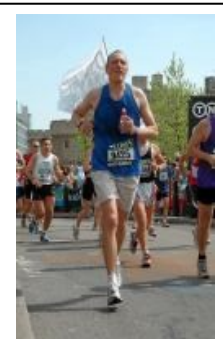


Colin,
triumphant at
the finish line!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ragu Jha in the UK for his IT expertise designing the [Thusananga web site](#) and providing continued technical support. Ragu has been donating all of his time for free and this is very much appreciated.

Colin Blythe a friend of Ian Rozario's, from the UK ran the London Marathon this year raising over £1300 for Thusananga & KL. This is a fantastic effort and this amount of money will certainly go a very long way here in Barkly East, helping those who need it most!

Well done Colin and a big thank you from everyone at Thusananga & KL!!



Making running
26 miles look
effortless!!

Future fundraising events include my husband and brother in-law (Chaz & Jim Weatherstone) climbing to the peak of Mt Blanc (the largest mountain in Western Europe!!) in July 2007 to raise money for the projects.

If you would like to sponsor this activity and help the boys achieve their goal of £3000 please email Chaz at c.weatherstone@googlemail.com for further details of how you can make a donation.

This trip has been booked & paid for by Chaz & Jim personally and **all money** raised goes to Thusananga & KL.

Thusananga (HBCA) 'Helping All'



Lydia one of the Thusananga caregivers

The work at [Thusananga Home Based Care Association](http://www.thusananga.org) is very busy with new clients with HIV and related illness's presenting at the clinic all the time.

Thusananga HBCA currently cares for over 70 patients and their families in Barkly East and the surrounding rural areas and over 15% of these patients are children. Thusananga HBCA is training up 2 new caregivers to support the growing number of HIV + clients. The caregivers are supervised by Maggie Thethelwa who is also Clare's right hand women in the clinic, interpreting the 2 local languages, Sesotho & Xhosa. The caregivers work with Clare visiting the patients in their homes and are supported by an essential checklist for gathering important information about the individual's personal circumstances. This is everything from the patient's general health and well being, the family support network including cooking and sanitary facilities and ensuring there is a true understanding in the family home about HIV and its transmission. Most of the caregivers are living with HIV and are on anti-retrovirals (ARVS) so they have a genuine understanding of what the patients are going through.

I have attended a number of consultations & home visits with the consent of the patients to understand the reality of situation in Barkly East. One of my first experiences in the clinic was a 23 year old girl, the daughter of one of the HIV+ caregivers at Thusananga, presenting with a bad case of shingles. Clare wanted to test her for HIV & diabetes as shingles is very unusual for girls of this age. Two different types of test are used and they are very quick and easy, with the results showing in 5 minutes (Rapid Tests). The HIV test was positive and this was very shocking for me to witness. Maggie was translating Clare's advice into Xhosa, asking her to her to speak to her Mother, as she would understand (she is also HIV+ and taking ARVS) and for her partner to get tested as soon as possible.

Another patient came to the farm with her brother to see Clare and was unable to move unaided. She was very ill and probably had TB related meningitis. Clare referred her to the local community medical officer on call (33 kilometres away) for a lumbar puncture (to examine her cerebro-spinal fluid under a microscope) to confirm diagnosis but unfortunately she died within 24 hours. The lumbar puncture confirmed the diagnosis but the results arrived well after the patient had died. This was a sad case of a patient presenting for treatment just too late. She had HIV and her death could have been avoided if she had been tested earlier and given the correct treatment. She had 2 small children who are now orphans and are now being cared for by a distant relative in another town. Her boyfriend came to the clinic 2 weeks after her death and also tested HIV+. At least now he has sought treatment, he has a chance of living with HIV and remaining healthy for some years to come.

Unfortunately this is a common situation but the availability of affordable generic ARVS from India is giving these patients some hope for the future. Clare believes that the stigma has to be removed from having a HIV test and it should be as routine as having a chest X-ray or other diagnostic intervention. It should not be left to patient choice to test if they show signs of an HIV related illness, as appropriate testing will stop further transmission of the virus. Many people in this community live in denial and only come to Clare when they are really sick with TB, diabetes and other infections. This is when the patient gets the HIV test, usually a positive result and it is often too late to start ARVS treatment as the CD4 counts are too low. Also when people are tested and are negative, it is a huge relief and they need counselling to ensure they stay negative!!



The women that make it happen; Clare & Maggie



Thandiswa & Lydia with the beadwork & basket weaving crafts

Anti retroviral treatments are now available in Barkly East and if HIV is detected early enough they can be very effective. ARVS and other medications such as antibiotics (for TB) and antifungals (for oesophageal and oral fungal infections) are available in most cases for these patients. Many of these medications have been provided free of charge by a charity based in Cape Town, the [Treatment Action Campaign](#) who have championed the human rights of people with HIV and their rights to affordable medical treatment in South Africa.

Much of the work done by [Thusananga HBCA](#) is educating the younger generation about safe sex & HIV transmission. On Easter Sunday we attended the 'Bread of Life' church to do the first in a series of 3 talks to about 25 teenagers and young adults from the local

community. We demonstrated HIV testing and Clare talked extensively about the dangers of unprotected sex if you do not know your partners status. We read out testimonials from patients on ARVS, to give different perspectives from a wide range of people living with HIV. The next of these sessions will be led by Lydia, one of the caregivers who is HIV+, giving her perspective of **living** with HIV. She will be talking about how it has changed her life in a positive way and that it need not be a death sentence. The final session will be extensive counselling and voluntary HIV testing for the youth group members.

The Thusananga income generation project has just completed a large number of bead work items including the popular angel Christmas decorations. The group attended a weaving workshop in April at one of the local farms to learn new skills in basket weaving craftsmanship. All the grasses and reeds used for the weaving grow on the farm and are in large abundance.



The caregivers and clients of Thusananga at the weaving workshop



Many of the beadwork items are already in the UK, ready to be sold at beadwork sales and school fêtes in London. If you would like to purchase any of these items please make a small donation via our [secure paypal facility](#) and email thusananga@gmail.com with your name & postal address.

All of the money goes back to the people living with HIV who made the crafts to help them to support their families.

Health care workers are constantly fighting against the poor science and leadership given by some of the politicians in government and the health system has suffered as a consequence. This has had a huge knock on effect on the citizens understanding of HIV and its treatments in South Africa.

There is still some belief in the myth that some foods will prevent the spread and provide a cure for HIV (beetroot & garlic to name a few). Many people in these rural areas are sceptical of the place of western medicine for HIV and scared of toxicity. The healers and witch doctors in the communities provide alternative remedies (at a price!) and in some cases make the patient worse. These remedies can sometimes interact with the ARVS and reduce their efficacy. All medicines come with a level of toxicity and there is always the risk of side effects, especially with ARVS, however in most cases the benefits certainly out weigh the risks. The patients are carefully monitored by Clare and her team on all HIV treatments and the regimes are altered if the side effects become too unpleasant.

Khaya Lokukhanya 'House of Light' (KL)

Since I have been in South Africa I have spent some fantastic time with the children in KL and out on the farm over the Easter holidays having lots of fun!

There are 12 children now living in KL with the ages ranging from 2 to 19 years old. KL is run by Tersia Gerber, a senior social worker & Mongesi Motleleng, her auxiliary. There are 2 foster mothers Mimi & Olivia who live at KL and provide all the love and care these vulnerable children need.

A new girl called Precious (aged 6) arrived at KL as a place of safety from a nearby town called Rhodes, at the beginning of March. Her mother died in child birth and her father and step mother have both recently died of HIV. She has TB, is small for her age and very shy. We spent a lovely day at KL making face masks with all the children and after a while of spending time with Precious, she became more confident and started coming up to Karen & I for attention and hugs. It is hard to imagine what she has been through over the last few months and now she is living at KL, she will be cared for by the foster mothers, who will be able to give her love and affection required by any 6 year old child.

I took her to the clinic for a check up with Clare and she decided to test her for HIV. The test was negative and this was a huge relief. Clare does not routinely test the KL children for HIV but Precious was so ill she felt it was important to know her status, to ensure she was given the correct treatment.

The children are of various abilities with the English language, depending on their age and we have been doing lots of activities to improve their spoken and written skills. One of the initiatives has been to set up pen pals from the UK for all the children at KL. We are in the process of replying and I would like to thank all the children and their parents from the UK who have written letters. We are still looking for UK pen pals for the older boys, Thandolwakhe (19), Thato (17) & Zolani (17). These guys have good spoken English but it would not do them any harm to have the extra practice with their writing. If you know anyone that would be interested in being a pen pal please [contact us](#).



Left to right: Bulelani and Nkosithandile making masks; Emma, Andiswa & Precious; Zolani helping out the younger boys with some spelling



Left to right: The foster mothers Mimi & Olivia showing off their IT skills; Abongile & Rapelang getting Creative, Karen & Precious painting face masks



The Boys on the Farm!!

Over the Easter school holidays the boys (8 in total) came to stay at the farm for nearly a week giving the foster mothers a well earned break and the opportunity to spend some quality time with the 4 girls at KL.

They all stayed in the guest cottage with the older boys left in charge and came for their main meals at the farm house. It was like one big sleep over for the younger boys, with all of them on sofa beds in sleeping bags, in the living room. The older boys had some privacy from the younger ones having their own bedrooms. In KL all 8 of the boys sleep in bunk beds in one large dormitory.

There were constant games of cricket and football on the lawn, with some of the boys showing lots of talent in both games. We organised a treasure hunt to promote teamwork and cookery classes to encourage some role reversal, making bread and ginger biscuits.

They loved getting stuck in kneading and stirring and could not believe how good the finished products tasted. All of the cooking is done by the foster mothers currently and we are keen to get the children involved creating their meals at KL and it is something they really enjoy.

We made well over 60 biscuits and they were devoured in less than 24 hours! The bread was served with homemade jam all eaten in about 30 minutes for supper!

We took the children horse riding and gave the older boys driving lessons (Clare was very brave with no dual control!!).

The star attraction was the 'slip and slide' a blue plastic sheet set up on a downward gradient attached to a tap providing hours of entertainment. The sun shone all the time so it was perfect for the younger boys to cool down while playing in the garden.



Cookery Master Class with Me!



The Slip and Slide!!!

Saturday 14th April was Thandolwakhe and Zolani's birthday; they are 2 brothers, 19 & 17 respectively. The children and I made 2 birthday cards with photos taken on the farm, drawings and heart felt messages from everyone. We organised a party with a BBQ, 2 huge birthday cakes with candles and lots of funky African music. They also had some dressing up clothes too (which provided lots of entertainment!) and some of the boys looked fantastic in the blonde wigs and pirate hats!

They had a brilliant time dancing on the veranda in the moonlight (when we were not looking as they are a bit self conscious!!) and it was a proper celebration.

It was fantastic having the children to stay at the farm over the Easter break and lots of fun for everyone! We were able to give them space and freedom to run around and play to their hearts content in a safe environment.

They were all open to try new things with real confidence and were very inquisitive!! All of the boys were able to take part in activities that they would not have access to normally while experiencing the beauty of the South African countryside.

Life at KL is a very positive experience and everyone involved is striving to give the children the best start in life possible. They have endured terrible hardship and loss in their young lives and it is hard to comprehend what they have been through. Thusananga & KL provides a supportive, loving environment for these 12 children and also supports child headed household (households where the older children look after the younger family members) in the local township, all who have all been orphaned to HIV and related illness's.

Feeding, clothing, washing, educating and caring for these children is not come cheap and any support is always gratefully received and really makes a difference. Donations to both projects can be made via our [website](#) or by contacting [Clare](#) or [me](#) for further details.



Left to Right: Thandolwakhe & Seamus, Abongile getting very wet! Zolani & Thato chilling



Left to Right: Bulelani & Abongile in the hammock, Bread & Jam for all! Zolani, Rapelang & Nkosithandile with Salsa & Cremora;



Left to Right: Zolani as the pirate queen, Zolani with Jonathan on Festival & Nkosithandile's funky afro

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in South Africa and will cherish the memories and experiences for many years to come. Clare and her team are doing the most amazing work and really making a huge difference to the lives of many people in Barkly East, less fortunate than ourselves. I feel very privileged to have been given this opportunity to spend time here in South Africa with such wonderful, inspiring people and I will definitely be back very soon!

Love and best wishes

Emma xx for comment please contact us at emma.weatherstone@gmail.com and claremurphy@eci.co.za