

Hi there.

So, yeah, I had these grand ideals of being the most feedback proficient missionary the world has ever known! I had decided to send out a newsletter at least once a week!! Yeah right!! I'm coming to the end of my first month with CCMP and it's time you got some news.

Incidentally, a weekly update is still my goal.

There is so much work to be done. The need really is great and it can feel overwhelming at times.

Every day of the week we collect excess food from various stores around PE, Don still does a lot of this himself as he has the bakkie and his garage is used as a temporary store. This food is then distributed between the soup kitchen and food parcel programme at our Centre in kwaZakhele, a soup kitchen in a shack are between Malabar and Gelvandale and a feeding programme in the Greenbushes area. There must be more than 1000 people who are fed through these places!

Out at the uBomi Obutchu Ministry Centre, where most of our work happens, Nondimiso Langa runs the show. She is from the community and really has a heart to make a difference there. She has been involved with the ministry since the Centre was established 5 years ago and is generally responsible for opening and closing the building. She has a team of volunteers from the area who help sort out donated food and keep the place clean etc. She is an invaluable source of advice and insight regarding understanding the area and the people.

Monday afternoons a volunteer from Zwide, Vuyani, runs a CEF (Child Evangelism Fellowship) club for 6 to 12 year old children from the community. He has 40-50 kids coming each Monday. They play games and have a Bible lesson, etc.

Tuesdays and Thursdays we prepare a nutrient packed soup for hungry kids who come around after school to be fed. It would be great to be able to do this more often as it is the only decent meal some of them get at certain times of the month. It's a time too when informal relationships can be developed with them and you can earn the right to build into their lives.

Wednesday afternoons a volunteer from the Restoration Church, Sylvester, runs a youth group for the teens with lots of activity and relevant Bible teaching. He gets about 50 to 80 teens each Wednesday.

Friday is just a general cleaning day and nothing really happens on Saturdays unless it's a special programme or someone has a pressing need.

Sunday morning is Sunday School. Normally anything between 80 and 120 kids pack the hall for some singing before they divide into 3 age groups for a Bible lesson. The numbers have actually become too large to handle practically and we are looking at how to best deal with it.

Extra food, clothing, blankets, are distributed as the needs arise - flooding, shack fires, abject poverty etc.

I am busy putting together a count of all the kids and people who are somehow blessed by and part of the work done from the Centre. It looks as though there are around 300+ children who regularly attend the different programmes! If they all had to come to a meeting at the same time, we would have a real problem!

Talking to Nondo, some of the other leaders and the kids themselves, I have identified these pressing needs:

1. Love, affection and a positive, constructive adult influence.
2. Instruction in life-skills on all levels.
3. Purpose and motivation in life.
4. Textbooks !!! - and help with their schooling.

5. Exposure to the rest of the world and how it works.
6. Real opportunities.
7. Respect as real people.

One little girl, Sihle, is two years old and ever since she was an infant, her mother would literally leave her on Nondo's doorstep and disappear for days or weeks on a drinking binge before returning for her! When this happened again at the beginning of December, Nondo refused to take Sihle unless her mother was willing to give her full custody. And without hesitating, she agreed! Before I even knew this story I, for some reason, used to pick her up a lot and carry her around and give her some of the love I felt she needed. And now most times she comes looking for me for a hug and some affection before running off to play! As simple as that!

Yes we can raise the objection that these kids are not our responsibility, but their parents' and they should just get it together. But, honestly, the adults are generally so disillusioned by the economics of life, the crushing blow of apartheid and the slow delivery of change that they have given up, and many just don't care anymore. Lets not judge before we've been their and had nothing ourselves. And as God's children, these people and their kids are our responsibility.

Not every kid has it as bad as Sihle though, some live with their grandmother who supports them with her government pension, some live with their parents who do all they can with what little they have to give their kids the best chance in life they can.

There are also the big chancers. They demand, get loud, get rude and can be very threatening. There is even room for them in God's love though, but we do not accommodate their demands and attitudes, especially not at the expense of those who have sincere needs and show some responsibility regarding their lives.

This first month has actually been pretty much as I expected: getting into the motions of the ministry; getting accustomed to a different culture and way of life and allowing the Lord to open my eyes to what he would have me do and how to go about doing it. While Don and Judy are still here, keeping things going as they are, I hope to be able to put most of my energy into growing the ministry in the new areas we feel it should be going. More news on that as it happens though.

Some of the needs we are looking at, or will be looking at soon, include:

1. People to help teach Sunday School.
2. Paint, painters and some equipment.
3. Kitchen counter tops and melamine pressboard to refit the kitchen.
4. A spare small gas cylinder. (Handigas)

There are many more needs but I think we'll do better tackling them just a few at a time. There are also other constant needs like tinned food, clothing, etc and blankets will become a big need over the next few months.

Your prayers and any contribution you can give, or find for us, regarding the points above will be hugely appreciated. And thank you so much to those of you who are helping us to meet our financial needs. We pray the "pressed down, shaken together and running over" (Lk 6:38) scripture finds you well! Bless you all. We are still somewhat short of where we need to be regarding our income though and so your prayers that others will be able to get involved in this way will be appreciated. This work of God comes as much through everyone who contributes, even in the smallest way, as it does through us.



Sihle

The Lord bless and keep you all.
M a r k