

Post three and we are about half way through... again it has continued to be a full on time. Thursday saw us at St Josephs finishing putting together some new beds for some of the boys, painting the bed bases, continuing to clean out the storage room we intend to turn into a study area, and doing some maths home work.

Friday saw us along with our ACTS staffer Carmen and her brother Greg take a three and a half hour road trip East to Mutare, near the Mozambique border (Carmen and her brother have grandparents in Mature, so Greg was paying a visit). We were here for Friday and Saturday to visit an organisation called HOPE for AIDS, and it was really a fabulous time. The organisation is staffed by less than a dozen people, but has thousands of volunteers across Zimbabwe. The HOPE is an acronym for: Home based care, Orphans and vulnerable children, Prevention and Enabling.

The first project we visited was at a school where they run weekly classes to the school children aimed at the understanding and prevention of AIDS, but it is much more... and aims to build children of character. They have class lessons, sporting activities, and given each child a nutrition drink (as they were finding many of them underfeed). They invited us into two class lessons and the kids were great about it, and excited to see and hear white people. The class lessons where called "today for tomorrow" and are now run by the HOPE for AIDS volunteers in several hundred schools, with interest from some surrounding countries in running the program. This was quite a large primary school with 1800 students (in two sittings during the day). When we joined them outside after the classes, they gathered around to get their nutrition drink, and they would gather around us and were quite excited to shake our hands.... most having never touched a white person before. It was funny to see some of the reactions... as if we were somehow famous... One of the classes even had Emma embarrassed as they kept saying her name as they wanted to hear her speak. It was all great fun, but we seen the great benefit it was having for the kids.. and the school headmaster told us what positive impact they were having in the school.

After leaving the school we visited a local church about two minutes drive away where we met with one of numerous support groups that has been set up for those living with AIDS. There was around 20 to 25 people, mainly women. In many cases the men will die from AIDS because they will not go and get tested and then receive treatment. Firstly the group sang a few songs, as many Africans seem to love to do, then we all introduced ourselves and several shared the testimonies of living with AIDS. Many of them are now living on ARV drugs and managing a fairly normal life. The group helps with the sharing of commons struggles the people have; managing their conditions, educates them on their drug administration, educates them on if, when and how to tell others they have the condition, helps them get the drugs they need, helps them start projects to generate income (e.g. raising chickens, making peanut butter, knitting, sewing).

Carmen, then Anne felt lead to pray for a lady with an eye condition.. which then lead Anne into offering a loving hug to every person in the support group.

Back at the Hope for AIDS office (most agency offices we have visited are converted houses, this likewise) that afternoon we meet with each of the heads of the areas and they ran through what their areas were doing. Though they have a small number of paid staff they do an enormous amount of work through volunteers, mainly from local Churches. We then looked at their garden, and herb garden at the back of the office. They encourage the sick people to utilise the benefits offered by particular herbs. And some of those with AIDS manage their conditions with herbs,

particularly if they can not get the ARV drugs. Some international countries (including Australia) sponsor the ARV drugs for countries in Africa, and the only cost is a small fee (small to us) levied by the hospitals distributing them. But there is not enough for all those suffering.

That night we had the choice of accommodation.. A two star motel just outside town for around \$70 a room, or the guest house in town for between \$20 to \$30 a room. So the Utopia guest house in town it was. The manager ensured we had good rooms, apart from one we elected because it was close to the others (he was a little concern it was not one of the better rooms). They all had two beds and one working light... what more could you ask for. Meals were \$5 a plate at the guest house, and were probably just fine, but the kids insisted we eat elsewhere, so we opted to buy Pizza in town... where I think we meet the only two other white people in town. The guest house was perfectly safe.. I'm sure, because an armed guard was just outside in the car park all night.

Saturday morning was an early start, on the road by 6:30am, with a bit of travel to see a few rural projects. We travelled out past the turn off to some diamond mines, so I think we went through around five police road blocks on our way out. Firstly we visited an 11 month old girl who lives with her grandmother and father. She lost her mother when she was only several weeks old. Hope for AIDS were originally suppling infant formula, but this is quite expensive. So it was found that watered down goat milk was a good substitute. So leading on from this projects are being set up where goats milk is a recommended option, and Hope for AIDS will often supply a pair of goats in these situations. Breeding of the goats can also become an income source.

We continued on up into the mountains. Certainly Nissan Patrol territory, no Ford Territories here. We eventually meet a group of people on the side of the road, they lead us down beside a small river, the up into a large garden project. They explained that there were around 20 people who tended the vegetable and herb garden. They had to cart water up from the river and try to maintain and rock and bracken fence around the garden to stop the animals eating the plants. They used the plants to feed those in their community, particularly the elderly and the orphans. Again the group sang for us, and presented us with mats they had made for us.

We continued on through the mountains, stopping at a set of shops, to meet a volunteer support worker with two orphaned boys, to give them a quick bite of lunch and some clothing that had been donated. Both of these boys live with a very elderly grandparent and have very little to support them. We are quickly back on the road, but in about 10 minutes stop at a place where a support group of around 10 ladies is meeting and have started up a project of raising chickens. While we hear from some of the ladies, and have a look at the chicken coups, they have prepared lunch for us all. Sudza, vegetables and some chicken. Traditional style, and no utensils... and Tyler and Emma who probably should have been the most use to this, where the most surprised.

Unfortunately it was a rushed lunch, as we had to get back to the office, then head the 3 ½ hours back to Harare before it got to dark. It was a full on 2 days, but well worth it, in just having a small glimpse at the great work Hope for AIDS and God is doing in the lives of many people.

Sunday was a little more relaxed. The Church service was great and we had a relaxing lunch out, with Carmen taking us to one of her regular Sunday lunch spots.

Monday morning we spent time getting items we needed for projects we were working on in the orphanages. We particularly went to pick up some timber; a door for one place, some timber to

make some study desks, and some timber to make black boards. We met a guy that we had befriended from the timber place last year and he remembered us and cut up our timber for free. His name was Charles, and he asked how Australia was going.... colder than here.. and I think our Prime Minister is Ms Gillard??

There was indication that we would not get to visit Beatrice Farm, run by and for orphans, later in the week. There had been reported land invasions.. and they would need to get clarification on whether we should attend. We suggested that maybe we could just visit one day for lunch. Reports have since come back that the Prime Minister is visiting, and it best that we do not visit. {Speaking of which, yesterday, Thursday 16th, we had to pull over for the presidential cavalcade. About 5 motorbikes, then about 8 or 9 other vehicles including a ute with armoured personnel an ambulance at the rear, and cars three abreast with "ZIM1" in the middle. No wonder you have to pull over, there is no space left on the road}

The fact not the visit to Beatrice was put off was good in a sense as it allow us to finish off some items we had started in the Harare orphanages.

Time is running short for me to get ready for our last busy day in the orphanages here in Harare... so I will have to cut it here... and hopefully we will get more chances to get back to you after we leave Harare on Sunday morning... on our journey heading south.

Lots of love

Glenn Anne Tyler and Emma