



Newsletter - December 2011



Children First

Working Towards a Brighter Future in South Africa

Dear Friends,

I'd like to start by saying thank you to the loyal supporters, individuals, groups, congregations, trusts, businesses and funding organisations for continuing to support Zisize's work in 2011. In these difficult times it is easy to think of saving some money each month by cutting back on charitable donations, so to reassure you that every £, €, \$ or R is both needed and is making a difference I will devote most of this newsletter to the words of staff, stakeholders and beneficiaries so that you know at first hand the difficulties faced in Ingwavuma and how Zisize, thanks to your donations, **is** making a difference. Special thanks to Dave, Menna & Emily for doing fund raisers!

Zisize works closely with 7 primary schools and the communities surrounding them. Next year we add 2 more schools to the maths and literacy training programme. Our projects fall into one of 3 broad categories:- education, welfare and life skills. Spanning all three of these are our mentors, formerly unemployed matriculants (young people who had passed the school leaving exam) from each local area. They act as classroom assistants, helping slow learners and they also supervise classes while teachers work with small groups; they run the feeding schemes, conduct home visits to vulnerable families, help them create food gardens, refer concerns to Zisize's professional team; and they co-run lifeskills clubs with teachers after school.

Imagine as you read the following accounts, how these children's stories would have unfolded had there been no intervention through lack of funds.

"I lived with my oldest sister and other siblings. We were abandoned by my mother. I used to go to school twice a week, sometimes I would stay in the bushes because I didn't have proper school uniform like other kids in my school. My life was very different from other children. When I went to school, I would fall asleep in the classroom, I was always crying and was very sad. The mentor at my school visited my homestead, because I was absent from school so often. I told her that we are struggling at home, we don't have school uniform, children are laughing at us and we are always hungry. The problem was that my sister was very abusive and did not care about us. She used to leave us alone at home to go wherever she wanted to go. My brother tried to commit suicide because of this abusive situation and poverty. One night we were attacked by people trying to rape us, but we managed to run away to the mentor's house, we stayed there for 2 days. The mentor searched for my mother and found her 30km away and asked her to take us to her place and she agreed. The mentor referred our problem to Zisize. We are now getting a food parcel, food garden, blanket, uniform and clothes from Zisize. Zisize's social worker helped my mother apply for the child-support grant (Child benefit equivalent). The child support grant is used to pay for our transport to school. We also received counselling from this mentor. Our lives have changed, we are now happy children, we are going to school everyday, playing with other kids, we have school uniforms, we are not going to school hungry and are performing well at school. I'm the best student at ladies soccer and netball. I'm also in the life skills club and have meals through Zisize's feeding scheme. I was saved by Zisize!!!!" **Ntombi aged 14 Okhayeni Primary School**

Poverty drives people to do almost anything to provide food for their children. In so doing this mother placed her children at risk from unsavoury characters frequenting their tiny home under the influence of alcohol.

"I live at Manyiseni with my mother and three siblings. My mother makes Zulu beer in our small RDP house (Government low cost housing – a 3m x 3m concrete room) and sells it so that she can put food on the table and this is the only the source of income. Different kinds of people used to come to drink in this small house. My mother got sick and she couldn't make Zulu beer and I had to cook and fetch water for my mother. She discovered that she is HIV positive and also has MDR (multi drug resistant TB). She was

admitted to hospital for six months. The situation became even more difficult because we didn't have food, sometimes we would get food from neighbours and sometimes would go to sleep hungry.

I couldn't go to school for days because my clothes were very dirty and I was hungry. The mentor from school came to visit my place and asked why am I not going to school, I told her that I don't have soap to wash my uniform, my mother is admitted to hospital and I don't have food to eat. I was very weak. She encouraged me to go to school next day and she would get us help. The following day I woke up, and went to school with dirty clothes and hungry. Fortunately the life skill group that is under the mentor, donated soap to wash my clothes and also gave food to cook at home from Zisize. The mentor continued visiting, bringing food to eat until my mother came back from hospital. I was very happy to see my mother in a better condition. The social worker also came with the mentor to do another visit. They told us that they will provide us with a food parcel and school uniform. I'm now happy; I go to school everyday with clean uniform and with food in my stomach. The situation is now much better and my mother is no longer making Zulu beer. We are now safe!!! Thanks to Zisize!!” **Vuyisile aged 13 Manyiseni Primary**

Mentors are asked to tell us of cases where they feel they have made a real difference – below are a few examples.

“In our life skills club there's a girl by the name of Phakamile who is HIV+. She came to me and told me that she was worried because her mother was very sick and she was scared that she was going to die. I did a home visit and found that the mother was so ill that she couldn't even wake up. Her knees were swollen and she had a bad cough. I referred her to Zisize's nurse and we organised a car to take her to the clinic. It was discovered that she had TB. Zisize's nurse is now taking care of her and visits her. She can walk now and has agreed to be tested for HIV. I recommended that the family get a food parcel and Zisize has started providing one because the only income they get is R270 (£22) a month for Phakamile's child support grant, so sometimes she was taking her ARVs on an empty stomach. Phakamile's mother thanked Zisize for saving her life.” **Mgedula Mentor**

“I have 4 children in the feeding scheme from a very poor family, their mother is alcoholic. She was getting child support grants (R1080 per month) for the children but she used to spend it all buying alcohol. She is HIV positive. Their house is terrible, walls are falling and not a single day have I seen food in this family, which is why they come to school for food on weekends and holidays. I referred these children to Zisize's social worker. She visited the family and intervened - now the children's mother is no longer getting this money, instead their grandmother gets it. Children had kwashiorkor, they were thin, not performing well in class always isolated themselves but now they are fine, have gained weight and have improved in their school work. Zisize gave back life to these children. Zisize nurse is helping their mother by providing counselling and encouraging her to take treatment regularly. An application has been made for an RDP house”. **Mpontshini Mentor**

“The life skills club members do not have anyone at home to teach them how to cook as their parents died and some are staying with their grandmothers who cannot help them. I have taught them to bake and cook using traditional ways like making a hole in the ground and bake there. They bake very nice cakes and can cook very well.” **Mbalekelwa Mentor**

When I first went to Ingwavuma I was appalled when children, clearly very poor, were singled out in assembly for not having paid school fees or for not wearing uniform. Zisize has changed attitudes dramatically over the past 12 years. At the AGM one principal said:-

“We ask that God forgive us for the way we used to treat orphans and children from very poor homes. Zisize has opened our eyes to their home circumstances and to the need to support them and make school a caring place.” **Manyiseni Principal**

Produce from food gardens created by lifeskills clubs is given not only to members but to vulnerable members of the community - the elderly and sick.

“You must continue doing this, I was very active during my times but because of sickness and old age I cannot help myself. The nurses told us to grow vegetables but I don't have energy to do that, thank you.”

Gogo (Granny) Mathe

The mentor scheme is replicated in 3 High Schools with clubs, home visits and individual support but as the members are older, they are also encouraged to support each other. The project is entitled, “peer educator project”.

“Although I’m HIV positive, I’m positive that I’ll reach my goal. I’ll pass my grade 10 and one day I’ll pass matric and be in the university. I had no one to talk to because my mother doesn’t want even to listen to me because I was rude and not listening to her. The Peer Education Programme has helped me because I talk to my friend who is also positive and we are able to support each other and Zisize nurse’s intervention has helped me to gain confidence and be protected. What I like is that she is talking to my parent and I can see my mother is starting to ask me about my health. Thank you Zisize.”

Sibusiso aged 18 Grade 10 pupil

Our nurse and forum theatre drama group work as a team in running interactive and informative workshops with Grade 7 learners, around topics such as HIV awareness, drug and alcohol abuse, health promotion and peer pressure. As part of the week-long process, learners write down diary entries and give feedback about how the workshop has impacted them.

“One of the learners at Ekuhleleni left comments on her feedback sheet about how she was having a problem, but that she didn’t know what to do about it and that she was scared to talk about it. She left a cell phone number on the form and I rang her. She explained that she had been raped.. I told the social worker and psychologist and together we visited her and then reported it to police. The man was arrested. The psychologist is counselling her.” **Member of Forum Theatre Team**

Zisize has been working in Ingwavuma for 12 years now and our aim is to see children achieve their potential in life as adults. Some are almost adults now. One young man who had help from Zisize to register at university applied himself so well in his first year that he was given a Nedbank bursary and last month graduated and walked into a job with Nedbank. Rebecca who has been a Zisize child since primary school has just completed her social work degree – she also got a bursary in recognition of her high scores in her first year after initial help from Zisize. Last year I related the story of an Ekuhleleni family where three sisters had been left alone without any support after their mother died. After a visit by a mentor, a range of services were provided and their lives were turned around. The middle child had then been offered a provisional place at Rhodes University. She did well at matric (school leaving exam) and has just completed her first year at Rhodes and hopes to be a psychologist. This is part of her account to the funder.

“It was a good experience for me to move from a rural area like Ingwavuma to study in Grahamstown. I realised that I have the potential to make changes in my life regardless of my background. It was difficult during my first weeks to adapt but I remembered Mr Swift from Zisize encouraging us to be independent and strong – to make our own decisions and I told myself that I’m going to cope and I did. However, I know I can turn to Zisize for help if necessary. University has given me the experience of living with different people who speak different languages. This year has really enriched my mind set. As I am one of those privileged 5% of children able to attend university, I just hold this opportunity with both of my hands and do the best I can. I have worked hard and I did very well in most of my tests during the year. Tutorials were also good and finally, my dream came true! There is always that girl in my tutorial that got the highest marks and I told myself that one day I want to beat her and then this term I did, I was the highest as well! All of the achievements I achieved are because of you guys who made it possible for me. Thank you.” **Tholinhlanhla**

Costs of food are constantly rising so I would also ask that you share this newsletter with friends to encourage them to be Zisize supporters too in 2012, even if they can only afford the equivalent of the price of a magazine or pint of beer – every little really does help. All Zisize staff, even our feeding scheme cooks who take home only R600 (£47) a month, all made their contribution by taking a 10% pay cut this year to keep the projects afloat. I’d like to thank them, and you, for making a difference to our children’s lives.

Thank you

Niki

On behalf of the trustees

Email niki@zisize.org.uk

See websites for more information and how to help

www.zisize.org & www.zisize.org.uk

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