



**UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA
PORT LINCOLN**



*Newsletter No. 24
November / December
2005*

Fiona Dixon-Thompson
Mwandi UCZ OVC Project,
PO Box 70
Mwandi Post Office
via LIVINGSTONE.
ZAMBIA. Africa

Dear Friends,

It's been a week of 39 plus degrees here and by the end of the day you feel very drained. We had one day of promising rains, but it stopped and the heat is set to stay. The insects are squealing all day in trees- it seems they are squealing for more rain. (They are these big fat - saketta insects)

Again it's been a very busy month. I have been waking up each morning at 4.45am to go and open store-rooms to give cement to the builders who are making blocks for the new store room. Then the next group of builders comes at 5.45am for more cement. Then the watchman knocks off at 6hrs and then the day really begins with people bringing the vegetables for the feeding program etc. You can imagine how tired I get by 8.30 pm at night. Thank goodness during the hot hours I can sit and do paperwork, organize projects etc. Each day the feeding starts at 1.30 and goes until 3pm.

The **Feeding Program** that has been going well. We have 50 names on the board and about 46 have been coming each day for lunch. We have been visiting the 4 that have not been coming and after visiting the families twice with no luck, we are now putting the Kuta (chiefs' local court) in charge to find out why these children are not coming. They will determine if it is negligence on behalf of the guardian or if the guardians have a genuine excuse. Once we get this problem sorted then we can increase the amount to 60. We have visited the Kuta twice this week so we are hoping it's sorted by the end of next week. Things take time when you are dealing with sensitive issues.

The children are so much stronger and healthier. Their eyes are bright and their skin is shining. The other day one of the volunteers said how noisy the kids were when playing and that they have so much energy now. We all laughed and said what a difference food can make to a child. We have weighed them all and they have all put on weight. It's wonderful to see. Even the kids that were so quiet and shy are now so open and their personalities are beginning to grow.

The volunteer's have been very good and we have a group leader and 4 volunteers come each day to help set up the tubs for washing hands, serving of food, cleaning of teeth, giving the vitamins, serving water, reading stories and helping supervise with play time. **The volunteers are enjoying this time spent with the children also.**

We built a shade shelter for the kids while they are washing hands and cleaning teeth, **thank you** to the people who gave for this project. It certainly makes a difference when you are out underneath it; it cuts out that direct heat.

Our **water now is becoming clear and drinkable**. The smell has gone away and the children are enjoying good drinking water. I have been saving the water containers from Esther and Darran and soon we shall have enough so the children can take home water each day. I am waiting for some cement double sinks to come from Tanzania, so we can install to make hand washing easier for the kids.

This Sunday members from the community are coming to the Drop in Centre to **plant the fruit trees**, we are making some shade protectors from the used cement bags from the block making. I'm so excited to get these trees in the ground so our orchard can be made a reality. I have had the trees exposed to the sun so they will survive our heat. I have mangoes, guava, banana, orange, lemon, and custard apple, Brazil nut, and Paw Paw trees. We have managed to get about 4 of each variety and next time I got to Lusaka I shall try to get some other nuts and fruit trees that we can try to grow in this area.

Because of the lack of rain last year and this year many people are really starting to find it hard to feed their families.

Care international have recently been giving food to many families here in Mwandu. The last amount they gave was 400 tones of Sorghum, which was given to many families that are struggling. We need to **PRAY for good rains so these families can plant a maize crop for this season**.

We received quite a few boxes of clothes from Australia a few weeks ago and on the weekend we handed them to the OVC of the village. Esther and Darran helped out and spent time playing with the children, whilst the guardians were receiving the clothes. There was a box full of knitted teddies so we have been giving them to the children in the children's ward at the hospital each week. There have been many sick children recently with Malaria so these **teddies have been a real uplift** for the kids' day. At first some of the kids are scared of the new toy, but it doesn't take long for them to realize that it's like a baby and needs to be hugged.

Darran has been working at the hospital and spends a lot of time after and before work playing with kids. He just loves these kids and they love him. It's wonderful to see this man spend time helping the children feel better about them selves and helping them to understand more about love and kindness. Something these kids don't see a lot of.

We sit at night sharing stories for the day, and Darran says "I don't know how you can live here seeing the sadness we see each day with these kids". Some of these kids yesterday were taking the scraps out of the bin after the feeding program to take home to eat. Some of the kids wear the same clothes each and every day with out being washed, as their guardians just don't care any more. Some of the guardians beat these kids and treat them like slaves. Thank God there isn't a lot, but we have been giving these kids the love and attention they need. These guardians just don't cope with the extended families are so big and it puts a huge burden on the families. It's going to take a long time to deal through a lot of the cultural stuff and psychological problems that HIV/AIDS has caused. But I know that what we are doing is a drop in the ocean, but all the little drops in the ocean can and will make a difference to the children in the areas. It seems that the children are the ones always suffering and we need to stop this.

I tell ya these kids' smiles and laughter is what keeps me going. Only yesterday one of our little girls, who hadn't come for feeding for a week because she and her mum are patients (HIV/ADIS positive) and they had a bad week. But yesterday she came for feeding. Well, she ran up to me and gave me the biggest hug and I nearly cried. It was so good to see her (Malija) and she smiled and smiled and laughed when she saw me. She is a precious little one. She is so small and has a wonderful personality that shines when she is playing with dolls and toys.

The kids who are on the feeding program range in age from 7 months to 15 years. The 15 year olds play with the toys like they have never played before. They have great imagination with Lego and puzzles it's just wonderful. You should see their eyes when they start reading books. Their eyes just get bigger and bigger each page they turn. We have some wonderful books and toys - **thanks to you for your ongoing love and support.**

Darran has been teaching volleyball with the grade 7, 8 and 9 girls during the week and they are doing well. When the girls are playing we have other balls and Frisbees around for the smaller kids to play with.

Esther has been spending time at the **Mwandi Basic School** teaching a few children several days a week one on one lessons. These kids are in grade 2 and have learning difficulties. She also has been spending a lot of time teaching and helping at the **pre-school that is in the drop in centre**. There are 131 kids in the mornings so it's a busy morning. The kids have been painting, learning shapes, colors, alphabet and many activities that Esther has been helping with.

Our **fence is finished** and it's fantastic, no roaming cattle on the land, no stray dogs etc. It's great and at the moment **Dan and Paula's team** are here painting the fence. It will protect the fence and look very nice. Our new project that we are doing at the moment is **building a store-room for construction items and food items**. There are 2 separate buildings and it will be wonderful to have all of our gear at the Drop in Centre instead of over at the hospital. The building should be finished at the end of the month so then we can start buying cement for the community to start making blocks for the bakery. That will take time, but I know how important it is for the community to keep being busy with small projects to support the OVC. It's a hard battle getting people to do voluntary work here, but we shall manage.

We have been visiting all the churches in Mwandi over the past month and all the church members have shown a very good response to the project. We wanted to inform all members on how the project is progressing and what we aim to be doing next year. We have only one Church left to visit and then we are going to hold community meetings. They will be interesting, but the Kuta have said they will help us, so that is encouraging. We have 10 Churches in Mwandi.

Next week 24th Nov we are expecting 2 men from Australia to come and visit us to make a film on Mwandi Mission -OVC project, hospital etc. We are all excited about their arrival and I might have to get my hair cut so I look half decent for the camera. I am sure they will be surprised at how much is here to film in Mwandi. We are going to focus a lot on the preparation and activate set up for **World Aids Day** which is on the **1st December**. A group of us are going to encourage the Churches to hold special services to remember the people that have passed away to Aids and have a candle lighting ceremony. We have started a poster competition at school for what the children understand of the theme for this year "**Keeping the promise**". We shall select a poster from each grade and get the kids to paint their winning poster on a sheet to hang on the new fence so the whole community can see. We are going to be having a march with all the kids and dramas, dancing and poems. It shall be a busy colorful day for all. Please don't forget to wear a red ribbon on World Aids Day 1st December. And **pray for all these people that have Aids or family members that have died from Aids.**

I haven't had a good run of things this past week. The one day it did rain, the roof leaked, so there is me up in the roof at night trying to fix problems and then I hurt my back. Been a bit out of manual work and been trying not to sit for long periods. Some good acupuncture would be great, but I'm afraid not possible out here.

The **vehicle and trailer** are running well and I just don't know what I would do without those wheels. With being so busy with construction over the past few months I just never would have copped with out this **wonderful gift.**

Due to the heat and up and coming rains **I have a small ask for some money to build a shade/rain shelter for pre-school kids** when they stand and wait out the front of the centre for their classes. I wish to build a shelter with Iron sheets that will protect the kids. Cost \$400 - IT would be wonderful if we could get this built real soon, as you can imagine standing on the sand in 40 degree heat is a killer and some of the kids don't have shoes. Please someone help us with this.

Another small thing **we would love to build is a shower cubical**. Some of the kids come for the feeding program very dirty. We need to wash these kids before sending them home, but have nowhere to do this. We can build a shower cubical and have taps not shower as no one has showers in the village. So it's a private place to wash themselves. This will cost \$300

IT WOULD BE AWESOME IF WE COULD GET SOME HELP WITH THESE SMALL PROJECTS.
IT WOULD MAKE LIFE AT THE DROP IN CENTRE AND PRE -SCHOOL A BIT EASIER FOR THE KIDS.

A project that maybe a youth group/bible study might like to get involved with next year could be **Mosquito nets for the OVC program**. They are selling them at a very good price at the hospital. This is due to support from Rotary international. They are K6,000 = USD \$2 each . We have 1300 OVC on our Data base - so it would be great to be able to supply each child a net to stop them getting Malaria - The highest killer of children in Zambia.

On a light note:

Charles is my dear friend who comes and waters the garden and does odd jobs for me each morning for a few hours and in the afternoon for a few hours. I am teaching him many different things that he would of never dreamed of learning. The other day I said I would print him a picture off on the computer. So he came in the house to pick the picture off the laptop. The laptop blew his mind. You should have seen his eyes - it was so precious. When I hooked up the printer to the laptop and it printed out the photo, he nearly died. He looked at the setup for a while and then said "but how did the picture get from the black box to the silver box?" I said "Charles there are many things in life that you don't even try to understand why or how it works - I just say it's magic", and he laughed... So the other day we were cleaning the car and recently the central locking was installed on the vehicle. Well, Charles locked the doors. I showed him that I could open them all with one lock on one door. He was amazed with this concept, and just looked at all the doors for ages and then said to me "the key in one door opens all the doors". I said "yes" then he looked at the doors then at me and said "Magic right?" I just lost it. We both laughed and laughed.

My friend Esther has written a paragraph below telling you all about her time here in Mwandu.

I hope and pray that you keep well and continue to pray for us all here in Mwandu.

Actually as I write this it has started to pour down with rain. It's just blowing and now it's hailing. It's bucketing it's wonderful.

Please pray for someone to support us with the small projects I have mentioned.
Please continue to pray for a husband for me and for my health.
I thank you for your support. Please never stop.

Till next month
Fred (Fiona).



Christmas Greetings from Mwandu
Village to you All

Hi everyone,

It is Esther here. I'm one of Fiona's friends from Port Lincoln. Fiona asked me to write a short paragraph about my time here in Mwandia. Well time flies- I guess we've been here for 5 weeks. I have another 3 to go. In some ways it feels like I've been here forever – I'm in denial about ever leaving. Wandering to the village markets there are always kids yelling "Hi Esther" and of course "where's Darran" (he always has a soccer ball/ or a net ball/ or a volley ball and loads of energy to organize activities and play games with them).

So much to write – don't know where to start. I teach at the preschool (even though I'm a speech pathologist) most mornings from 8am – 12.30pm. We have approximately 120 children but we break them into three groups. They are very, very cute. Actually- very, very, very cute.

Three mornings a week I go to the "big school" for an hour to help with 4 of the grade 2 students. They do not know their alphabet so I am working on that. Kids start school at a older age here – I think they are about 7 when they go to grade 1. I have a big break at lunch – which suits me because it is sooo hot. Then there is silent reading twice a week and tutoring two older children in the late afternoon.

If I get bored I can always help with the feeding program. It is so well organized that I don't feel I should help but its lovely playing with the kids after they have finished lunch. They are really sweet kids. I have a particular soft spot for one of the teenage girls as she has just lost her mum to AIDs (her Dad died years ago). She has two younger brothers who also come to have lunch everyday. It seems so many people have sad stories. The teacher I work with is a double orphan and tells how he lived with one uncle who was wonderful but he died of AIDs too, and then he lived with another uncle who used to beat him all the time. The other guy I work with is just lovely – he was orphaned as a child too. Seeing the breakdown of the family here due to AIDS is very scary – what will happen to these kids??. It makes it a lovely place to visit though – the kids just love any attention you give them.

We often go into Livingston once a week – Fiona flies around picking up food for the feeding program, hard ware and a million other things – it's always a long day for her. One week we had to borrow a truck and it broke down on the way home – luckily Fiona had friends nearby by who came and picked us up and we stayed at their place. It was nice to meet them. Another week we went to catch the bus (Fiona's vehicle was at the mechanics) but the bus was full so we hopped on the back of a truck. I love transport in Africa – never boring!

I guess the biggest thing for me is seeing the money that is donated actually go directly to the children. In less than a year the OVC building has gone up. The pre-school has moved in. The feeding program is up and running and providing lunch for kids who may not get any other food except what they can scavenge. The handing out of clothes is so organised and run by local volunteers (as is the feeding program). A qualified teacher will be employed for the preschool next year. The playground has been built and the kids love it!! (With a capital "L"). The fence is up to keep out the cows and to allow fruit trees and vegetables to grow in the future without being stolen. The solar water pump was installed since I've been here. Trust me clean water is a real issue here – despite the river – it's just so heavy transporting water – not to mention the crocs! When I go to the grade 2 class so many of the kids have school bags made by the ladies in Pt Lincoln (which means they have been sponsored to go to school via the OVC UZC project ie you guys). It's cool seeing the clothes that were in Pt Lincoln being handed out to the kids here. Some of these kids live in rags – one little boy rocked up and his short were so ripped they were nearly falling off – he got a beanie (there weren't any shorts – by the way t-shirts are the best things to send – everything is good though). Handing out the soft toys at the hospital is always wonderful. It's so nice to see the kids smile and the mums are so appreciate.

The contrast of how people respond to poverty also hits home. One of the guys I work with volunteers at the kindly whenever he isn't working. He always reads the kids books whenever there is a spare moment (to improve his literacy/world knowledge) and is so desperate to get a future education of any sort.

This morning I went for a walk (at 5am!) and saw 3 kids driving an ox cart. On the way back one kid was holding the ox, one was watching and another who looked to be about 10 years of age was shoveling dirt into this huge cart. A man was watching him and telling him what to do (the cynic in me thinks he was probably telling him to dig faster). You here stories of the orphans being treated badly and child labour but it's another thing when it's in your face. On the other hand there are so many other adults who are rallying to the cause – volunteering their time – taking in orphans and treating them like their own. One of Fiona's good friends works all the time – he needs enough money to support his brother's seven children (his brother died last year). He's the nicest person in the world and laughs all the time. Life is an interesting place.

Anyway this is a very long paragraph! I'm loving it here and think I will be very sad when it is time to go. Thanks to everyone at home who have been such a support to me before I left

God bless

Esther

G'day everyone,

This is Darran here. Just a little about what I've been doing in Mwandi.

I'm an optometrist by profession, so hence have been based at the hospital most of the time, trying to help the community with any and all eye problems. This has mostly been with spectacles (second-hand glasses donated from various locations), both reading and distance, as well as the few eye drops that the hospital possess. Basic eye hygiene education has also been a huge part. The expectation is that the "white man's magic" will be able to cure all. This is of course after many have tried the traditional "witchdoctor" method, which hasn't worked and has even made the situation worse. So unfortunately many problems that could have been cured, come in too late and are beyond repair. But all is not lost, and with time I'm sure the situation will improve.

The other side of the coin obviously is the children of the village. Starved of love and affection, they absolutely soak up any attention given to them. Volleyball and netball for the girls to help encourage their self-esteem. Otherwise just kicking a ball or throwing a frisbee around and even just running with the kids. They don't require much, but appreciate any time you spend with them. Nothing beats seeing their beautiful faces light up with a huge smile. You don't need to have any special qualifications to come to Mwandi, just an open mind and lots of love.

Cheers,

Darran



KIDS ENJOYING CLEAN WATER

"For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour which is Christ the Lord

LUKE: 2:11 KJV

If you can help with a donation please transfer to this Australian Account:

Port Lincoln Uniting Church Appeals/Mwandi,
46-48 Liverpool Street,
Port Lincoln SA 5606 Australia
BSB: 735067
Account No: 071222
Swift Code: WPACAU2S

OR

Cheque can be made out to: **Pt. Lincoln Uniting Church Appeals/Mwandi,**

And mailed to: **Fiona/Mwandi Support Team,
PMB 58, Port Lincoln SA 5607**

A RECEIPT WILL BE SUPPLIED ON REQUEST.

FIONA's Email Address: redfred1972@yahoo.com

MWANDI OVC Email Address: mwandiovc@yahoo.com