



Swazi Kids Newsletter 2015

March 2015 Trip to Build Community Center #3

In March of this year, ten Canadians (plus three Americans and one Nicaraguan) traveled to Swaziland for another community center build for the women of Gone Rural, this one in the Edlangwene region. As reported in the 2014 newsletter, these buildings are erected in partnership with Gone Rural boMake to become economic, cultural and social centers for communities. Gone Rural is a women's cooperative that coordinates and markets woven goods high-end table ware, pounded metal artifacts and ceramics from 16 groups of working women. These products are sold across the world, providing much needed employment and income in Swaziland. This was our third community center, and we have found that these buildings have a significant role beyond being a workplace for Gone Rural (www.goneruralswazi.com).



Gone Rural women at the community center construction site in Edlangwene. Photo: K. Burgess.

They are used firstly for the women working within the Gone Rural model, they train, work, transact and socialize in the spaces. Additionally, they are meeting places for other education offered by NGO's in the country, such as our WORTH program, HIV education, any new law changes, women's rights and for weddings. Indeed the only event not allowed in them is funerals.

In the 2015 trip, the volunteer group was taught by a local "eco-building-design" group the local technique and merits of using native soil and cement to create a brick that lasts lifetime. Then it was up the Tea Road again working on the foundation of community center #3. As we have emphasized over the past few years, these structures are proving to be of incredible value in so many ways for our families and their communities.



Gone Rural women in Edlangwene. Photo: K. Burgess.

Swazi Kids Sponsors Travel Reflections

We asked some of the participants on the 2015 trip to share their thoughts with us on their experience. Here's what they said:

The trip to Swaziland is easily the most worthwhile adventure that I've ever been a part of. Working side by side the Swazi women and seeing their standard of living, but also their spirit was eye opening and uplifting. We had a really great group of people and I will always be grateful that I had this opportunity. Thanks for including my sister and me this year and good luck to you in the future!

Bob Brown

The thoughts that stick with me most: For a suppressed female society, I've been amazed at the women's strength. Emotionally, and physically strong women who have taken the steps with help, to rise above poverty for themselves, and for their children. Swazi kids and Gone Rural has provided the women a means to help themselves. Their dignity remains intact as their work provides them with a self worth that is indispensable. These are women like you and me, with hopes and dreams, willing to work for it. They just needed a direction, and Swazi kids and Gone Rural has provided that for them.

Thanks for the opportunity to join your group,

Carol Morrisette

We traveled to Swaziland with several other sponsors of Swazi Kids this past March. This trip was almost a year and a half in the making for us, as we had jumped on board fairly early with Pam for this particular build and visit. We had followed the work of Swazi Kids for a few years and the trip seemed like an incredible opportunity to learn more about it and have a once in a lifetime travel experience all at once. Our impression upon arriving in Swaziland was extremely different than what we had expected - far from the desert of Africa that we had been picturing, the landscape was lush and green, with rolling hills and amazing views. We helped a group of local women to build a community centre, although their skill with a pickaxe, often with a baby strapped to their back, put most of us to shame. The women sang for us on our first day, and on our last, when they dressed up and performed a ceremony for us after learning of our engagement a few days earlier. The people of Swazi seem to face an endless supply of challenges. HIV/AIDS, poverty, hunger, orphaned children; we witnessed all of these things and more within the city, the villages, and the halfway house we visited. It was easy to become overwhelmed and disheartened, but we also witnessed many people doing so much good, and were so grateful to get to be a part of it. In this environment, we saw firsthand how difficult it can be to ensure that a donated dollar is put to work effectively. One thing that struck us was Pam's network and on the ground

A Word from Zethu

As reported in the 2014 newsletter, Zethu Shabangu has been attending Brentwood College on Vancouver Island since September on a Swazi Kids scholarship. She will complete her high school diploma in 2016. Here is a letter describing her experience in Canada.

First Experience at Brentwood

Being at Brentwood is a great privilege to me and even to my family. There is a lot I learn each and every day, physically and emotionally. It is hard to be away from home, friends and family but Brentwood helped me to withstand and overcome each and every circumstance that might bring any destruction on my mission. I remember my first term wasn't easy at all: coming from a developing country with limited knowledge was the only thing that made my first term difficult. The use of technology on each class was completely new and the teaching style too but I never gave up, instead I told myself that I can do it, because I believe that once you have a positive attitude you won't regret. With the help of the faculty, students, Mr. and Mrs. Patel, the Johnston family and not forgetting Pam and her family, I gained strength and eager to do better than I think. I don't remember myself crying or being homesick while in Brentwood, but all I find is joy, peace and happiness around me. That's why even today I'm able to do well in my classes. It is indeed hard to believe all the transitions that I came across in order to adapt to Brentwood and even to Canada. I appreciate the love I get from each and everyone especially the Carlson's family who never let me down and are always there and ready for whatever I need. I'm sure my results will be a reference as to prove how comfortable I am to be in Brentwood.

- Zethu



Zethu's family with Bruce Carlson in Marsh 2015 (above), and Zethu and Thula on the slopes near Kelowna this past winter. (Photos by K. Burgess, P. Carlson)

PLANS FOR 2016: BRENTWOOD COLLEGE TO BUILD A SECONDARY SCHOOL

On the strength of Zethu's success and a developing relationship with Swazi Kids, Brentwood College School has decided to take a group of 16 service oriented senior students to Swaziland in 2016. Pam has been shown a build location for a needed secondary school.

This school is to be in a small community, in a dry and very poor region, adjacent to one of the country's largest big game conservation parks. Mkhaya houses a "secret number" of the most endangered species of rhino in the world. The park manager, Mick Reilly, with whom we have done several projects and, indeed, have become friends, is having ongoing problems with the members of this community poaching animals from his park. Mick was approached for help with the fundraising for this project. He has asked Swazi Kids if we could come to his aid. So you see, this project will have at least a three-fold impact. The local students and community get a school. The Brentwood students will raise funds for a school and then physically do the labour. AND Mick feels this will go some way towards gaining the allegiance of the local community with



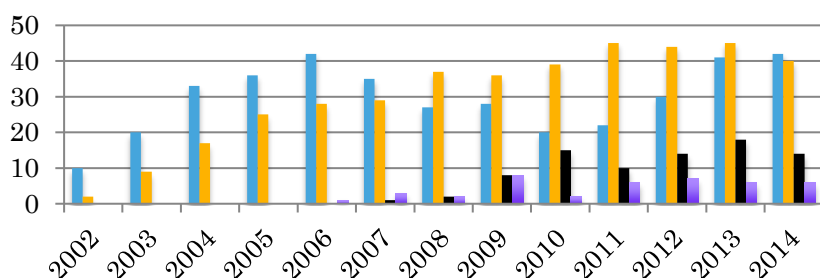
Pam, local community leaders, the local MP and Mick Reilly (of Big Game Parks) discussing plans for the new secondary school construction. Photo: K. Burgess.

the benefit of improved relations with Mkyaha and the black rhinos.

The animals are worth more to them alive, then poached. We are excited about this two-year project. Phase I, which we have already agreed to fund in '15, is a 3 room block composed of 1 office and 2 school rooms. Phase II will be funded and constructed by the group for Brentwood in '16. Anyone interested in helping us to build a school (our first!) is welcome to direct their donations accordingly.

Student Support Program

In 2014, Swazi Kids raised \$115,000, allowing us to support 42 elementary school students, 40 high school students, and 14 post secondary students. We saw 6 high school graduates in 2014, maintained school food programs and built one community center.



Pam in her Swazi office in March 2015. Photo: K. Burgess.

■ Elementary
 ■ Secondary
 ■ Post-Secondary
 ■ High School Grads

Student Updates

In the interests of not having this letter become a book, I will summarize our students this year. In a word, everyone is AWESOME! I am humbled by the progress of these young people. Our junior school kids, at Matjana, are getting fed, uniformed, guided and educated. They all are graduating into the local high schools. With few exceptions (and there always are a few) our high school kids are completing. The education system is tough enough that not all graduate with grades strong enough for post secondary education, this is a Swazi-wide reality, but plenty do. And a few choice ones are stars. We have three students this year, waiting to hear about government scholarships.

Our post-secondary students, this year number ten. We had four young adults complete and graduate from their courses in 2014. I am thrilled to report that 3 of them are well employed and the 4th continues his job search. At this point, Joseph and I support them with professional skills development including resume writing, interview skills, a contacts list, help this personal presentation and dress, etc. I am confident that all will be earning an income within

this year.



Swazi Kids student Qondile. Photo: K. Burgess.

Phindile

She has now completed all 4 years of her nursing plus a diploma in midwifery. She is a full time nurse at the Good Shepherd Hospital in Siteki. She is renting a lovely apartment and living on her own. She has begun to invest in a pension and is dating a lovely young man! Who could ask for anything more? I love this girl for who she is and for how she has set the bar high for our other students to follow. She has never veered off her course.

An Update on Joseph

Joe works for Swazi Kids, is a father of 3, a devoted husband, a full time teacher and the pastor at his own church. On TOP of that!! (pause for affect) during the last 3 years, Joe has completed his Masters Degree in Public Health through an American University, online. Joe, you amaze me! I note he now seems to have quite a few colds and flus so the rigours of the past few years are catching up to him. He is working on switching careers from teaching to this work with NGO's in the country. This would more than double his annual salary, be very interesting work for him and vastly broaden his horizons. Thank you John and Susie McIntyre for



At the government half-way house in Manzini. Photo: K. Burgess.



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2015



Swazi Kids photographer and long time sponsor, Karin Burgess. (Photo: P. Carlson)

Reach Out

Our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of children in Swaziland require significant funds. We thank all of you who so generously donate to our projects.

Donations to specific projects are welcomed:

- Secondary School Construction Project
- Elementary Student (\$200/year)
- High School Student (\$500/year)
- School Uniform (\$75)
- School Shoes (\$35)
- Playground Structure (\$5,000)
- Community Centre (\$15,000)

Send a cheque/e-transfer (preferable as there are no transaction costs to the charity) payable to Swazi Kids or visit www.swazikids.org to donate online via PayPal.

swazikids@shaw.ca

***Swazi Kids Society
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