



APRIL
2021



COVID-19
UPDATE

Greetings to all of our amazing and faithful supporters, new and old. I don't need to revisit our shared experiences of past year, except to say that we at Swazi Kids are still in there swinging, still trying, still being grateful for our ability to reach out and touch some lives far away. In this newsletter, which is long, I try to bring you up close to the tough stuff and to some of our wins. As always in crisis, there are some who remain afloat and even rise to the top. We do have a few of those, please read on.

I reported last fall that the economic impact of C-19 was greater than the health impact. This caught up to them in the form of the second wave in Jan '21. The wave occurred after the Christmas holidays when the border with South Africa allowed people to move in and out. It was an absolute crisis, with medical facilities simply turning people away to die at home. They ran short of beds, they ran out of oxygen and they had conflicting methods of treating. The morgues were full and they mandated people to get their deceased buried by any means within three days. It was really awful. Thankfully, it was fairly short lived, about a month. Borders were slammed shut again.

Vaccines are slowly arriving now. There are now 20,000 doses available for front line workers and the geriatrics get them next.

OTHER SIDE EFFECTS FROM COVID



As you know, there is no economic back-up plan, there is no social safety net, except for some international food aid. For those of you who helped us with our emergency Covid relief, you should know that the feedback from the families was that our aid arrived much faster than the large international NGO's. Our food packages were much more comprehensive, including dried beans for protein, dried veggies, oil, sugar, salt and soap in addition to the base of maize (corn) which is the only thing many other NGO's delivered. We also had re-usable cloth face masks sewn and distributed.

Our people did not feel lost, but instead they felt seen and cared for. Critically, they felt some hope. In total, our aid has gone out to 331 families. About 250 of those are rural families, many of whom we help with school aid for their children. The balance are young adults, most with children, who had jobs in the urban areas and were abruptly unemployed.

We have delivered flatbed loads to the rural areas four times. We grossly exceeded our budget, so any of you who are still inclined to support these families, your donations to this program are still very much appreciated.

1 family is fed for 3 months for \$35,
2 families for \$70 and
10 families for \$350.

You will see links for these options on our website:

www.swazikids.org

MARVELLOUS

Worldometer tells me that they are running a case/million count similar to Canada of 14kcases/1M population. Their death rate is surprisingly similar also at 571 deaths/M pop. However, they are only testing at $\frac{1}{4}$ the rate of Canada, so it is hard to interpret these numbers, really.

Anecdotally, I can tell you that things have calmed since the 2nd wave. The borders are open, sort of, with testing required at such an expense that in practical terms they are open only to the rich and for emergencies, such as to see a medical specialist or dentist. They are adhering to the other measures in a manner similar to Canada. Of course, most people are still forced to travel in crowded vans, if they are lucky enough to have maintained their jobs.



Many, many small businesses have shut down. There is zero tourism, naturally. Most of my personal friends there had businesses based in tourism and they are suffering the most. For some there has been a bit of a glow of renewed local tourism, perhaps enough to keep the doors open, but layoffs for staffing are everywhere.

COVID & SCHOOLING



Schools re-opened this week for the first time in over a YEAR. It is a very partial opening with students attending one or two days per week. Teachers are attempting to send homework for the balance of the week. During the past year, they did offer partial classes to only the grades who were writing external exams, grades 7, 10 and 12. For all the others, there was just radio lessons, which I believe were very poorly attended. Private schools with much bigger budgets could offer online schooling, but only a very few of our students attend these schools.



Overall, it has been a learning disaster. There are so many children who are hanging on by the barest of threads, I fear that these students will be lost from schooling forever. Their extended families may have already sent them out to tend the goats, and that will be the end of education for them.

A Few Bright Lights

However, there are always a few bright lights who make it. We will have 10 high school graduates and 12 tertiary students in 2020, those results are still rolling in. Finishing exams were written, amazingly. Our employee, Joseph, is furiously searching for post-secondary options for as many as possible.

Universities and colleges are open, with a blend of safe-in-person and online. The situation for uni and college grads is dire, as you can imagine, there are NO new jobs. A few of our recent grads are, out of necessity, re-purposing themselves. One young man has a business plan to us for a piggery. Another young woman who is a graduate teacher is volunteering with children with learning disabilities. Yet another is getting into layer chickens.



Very sadly there has been a dramatic increase in teenage pregnancies during this pandemic. Girls who should have been in school are now with-child. It is reported that up to 25-30% of the girls in some areas won't be returning to school due to being teen mothers. There have also been jumps in reported cases of rape and domestic abuse. The overall health of people in the rural areas is tumbling. Routinely there are community workers who visit homesteads

to support the villagers in their health measures. This might be diet and diabetes, staying on a medication regime with HIV or TB. Sadly, a few of these community workers fell ill with Covid and died, and the program has been discontinued for now and as such, the health, beyond Covid, of these people has further suffered.

I AM PARTICULARLY PROUD of one young man in our program, let's call him Xola. He is from the Hlatikulu region and has been HIV positive since birth. Xola's eyes are the main thing affected by his HIV. He has such corneal damage from chronic irritation and no medical treatment that he is sight impaired and probably clinically blind. We did not get onto really helping him until his eyesight was already very poor. I regret not acting on this sooner, we have a lot of kids in the program and he slipped through the cracks. This was before we hired Joe to be more on top of such things. Anyway, Xola is getting very good ophthalmology care now at a great eye clinic with a fabulous South African doctor. He is medicated and has very strong eye glasses, that are even transitional to protect his eyes from UV. They walk great distances in strong sun. He is in his twenties and he has just now graduated from high school. That is how long his journey has been. Joe and I set to the task of finding him a trade that he could do with his eyesight. Xola is now enrolled in a trade-school that is specialized for students with various impairments. I will keep you updated on him.

We do a lot of great work in eSwatini, but it is these individuals who are so well and

truly left behind and often kicked to the curb by this inadequate social system who really make my heart sing. He is such a hard worker and he never gave up on himself, we just came along to give him a really needed leg up or two!

ZETHU UPDATE



For those of you in Zethu's back story (Goepels, Wheelers, all of Brentwood College, the Patels and the Robinsons) she is doing fabulous. Covid hit and they were evacuated out of Ashesi University in Ghana. She had to finish her 4th year of university online. There was no grad ceremony for her! No fanfare whatsoever. But in true Zethu style, she took all of that with a smile and continued gratitude for the education that she did receive.

She is now employed with Old Mutual Insurance, where she did her internship. I believe that she was their first hire during Covid. She works remotely most of the time and is thrilled to be home, safe and employed.

Marvellous

This is a young man who we have supported for four years (thank you to Wil and Judy Tranter.) He is the last of five children and his mother lost both of her arms in a car accident about 10 years ago. She is a remarkable woman and she has poured all she has into raising her kids in spite of this tragedy. He is a bright young man and we took him on, in hopes that he can be the bread winner for his family. He is now entered into university, the first in his family to do so, and he is studying Agriculture and Biosystems Engineering. Find inserted here, a recent letter of thanks and a photo from a cell phone (thus poor quality.)



ONTO OTHER PROJECTS

The Hlandze family is in our program at Matjana Primary, a fire destroyed their main shelter and cook house. The matriarch is a single grandmother to about 11 children. No one was hurt, but they lost everything. See pics of Joe arriving with aid as supplied by Swazi Kids, food, clothing, toilet paper and other essentials. They have since rebuilt with community support and we then bought them a new door to complete the structure.



BANELE MBONANE



Banele Mbonane is a recent Agriculture graduate, (thank you Wheeler Foundation). Banele has submitted a business proposal to us and we are considering backing his fledgling piggery business. We are very proud of Banele's initiative.

can imagine my heart dropping to hear that she was unsafe in her front-line work position as a nurse in a mid-sized town. We sent her funds to go and buy PPE; masks, gloves and gowns for herself, as they were being asked to re-use in a clinic setting while treating actual Covid cases.



PHINDY & PPE



Any of our regular sponsors will recall Phindile (thank you Wheelers and R. Osler and S. Alexander). She is one of our real high water marks in our program. She has been with us since she was 10 years old. Phindy, now 29 years old, has been a graduated nurse now about five years. She has a darling son as seen in this picture. So, you

SEAMSTRESS BUSINESS PROPOSAL BEING CONSIDERED



We are looking into supporting four young female artisans with the purchase of sewing and button hole machines, an automatic cutter and materials to begin a small business. These machines may also

be used to make needed sanitary napkins for girls in the rural areas. There are already local NGOs distributing and teaching the girls about sexual health and the use of this product, but they could use many more pads.

OUR FIRST FEMALE CIVIL ENGINEER



I am excited to see women entering into traditionally male fields of interest in eSwatini. Seen in this pic, as she receives her laptop from Swazi Kids, is Thabani Tsabedze. She is in her 2nd year of a 3 years and will graduate as a civil engineer.

MENTORING PROGRAM ON HOLD



Another cost due to Covid-19 has been the temporary suspension of our mentoring program. This has been transformative for many of our rural students. The leadership, guidance, career planning, sexual health education, birth control advice and even

nutritional help that Swazi Kids has provided to these young people has been such an incredible benefit to them. We really hope that in some shape or form, distanced, masked or whatever, that we can resume this program soon. Joe takes most of the credit for his wisdom and commitment to this work. I know that he misses it also!

IN MEMORY OF PETER KOPP



A dear friend died in January of Covid-19. Although he was American, he was in eSwatini when he fell ill. Maybe by now most of us have lost a loved one, or perhaps had a close call. I have to say that losing Peter really rocked my world and certainly shook whatever faith I may have had the good ones will make it. Peter was more than a good one. He and his wife Mary Jean have lived almost all of their married lives on the continent of Africa. They ran an amazing project in the rural areas, called New Life Homes. Our mutual work and projects have had many points of intersection over the years, and we had become close friends in the process. Peter was strong like an ox and could go all day. He was wiry and lean like a teenage boy. He could not walk through their farm without several of the children running and jumping on him or tugging at him or otherwise trying to get a small piece of him on the way by. I genuinely loved Peter, his family, the New Life Homes farm and in fact the world is much poorer without him. He is already deeply missed.

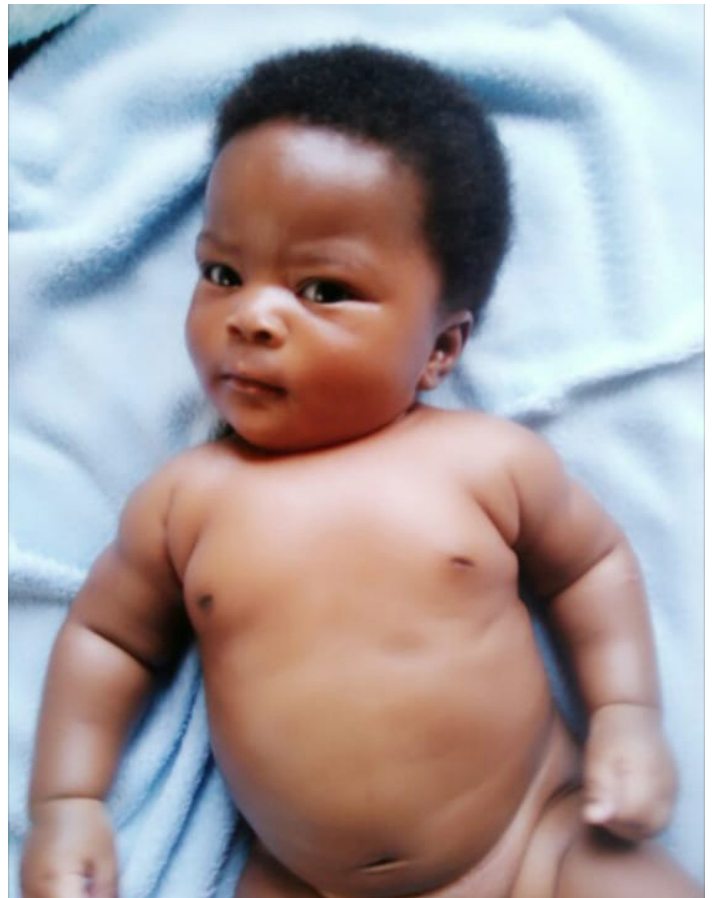
TO END ON A LIGHTER NOTE

Here is the latest of “my grandchildren.” Given became a father this year. His little boy is called Excellent. In keeping with our counselling on parenting and his own love of children, Given is being a responsible Dad and adores his little boy very much. It is interesting that I have been doing this so long, that there are fewer grade ones coming into the program, but our older students are becoming parents themselves.

Click to watch
videos ----->

Nokpiwa
thanks
from BNB

Lugile
thanks
from BNB



HOW YOU CAN HELP?

This is my annual ask newsletter. Those of you who have been with us, in some cases, for years know the drill. For others you are encouraged to continue to help. We are all privately funded, we get no government or corporate support.

Thank you again, each and every one of you,
Pam C

Reach Out!

Our ongoing efforts to improve the lives of children in Swaziland require significant funds. If you wish to make a contribution make sure to fill out our **Ways To Help Swazi Kids 2021** form.

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Any more questions, just ask!

Swazi Kids

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