



# Children of Fire

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## Newsletter No.3 2008

### Strawberries ease sad day

18 people lost their homes in Alexandra on 1 November 2008 when a fire broke out in the late morning. A woman had left her child alone in her shack and when she returned, found it ablaze. Luckily nobody was hurt, including the child. But three shacks were destroyed.

Children of Fire was contacted by young UMashesha volunteer Veli Dlodlu and took Disaster Recovery Bags and scores of Woolworth's strawberries to the destitute families.

Small fires like this one are often overlooked by emergency services and not regarded "disastrous" enough for disaster management to step in. Nonetheless, people have lost their homes and belongings and need help to get back on their feet. It is then that the importance of UMashesha volunteers shows, for they help speedily wherever there is a need, regardless of whether two or 2000 people were affected.



*Happy recipients of red Disaster Recovery Bags, 18th Avenue, Alexandra*

### Hope for Central African burn survivors

On a 15-day venture to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), British volunteer Christopher Wilson took the first steps to setting up a base in its capital Kinshasa. From meetings with head surgeons and ministers, to soaking wet rides in tattered kombi taxis that make Joburg's worst "skorokoros" look like luxury vehicles, this trip is not only the foundation for the first help centre for burn survivors in Central Africa, but also worth its very own newsletter.

Look forward to the *Children of Fire—Central Africa Newsletter*, coming soon!

*Top left: Zanele (5) practises her cartwheels in the garden*



### Children of Fire—Africa's first burns charity

**Clean plentiful water is needed to minimise burn injury. And any water is essential to fight fires.**

#### Recommended Reading

**Productive Water Points in Dryland Areas: Guidelines on Integrated Planning for Rural Water Supply.** *By Chris Lovell.* Research in southern Africa has shed light on why conventional wells and boreholes fail. This book examines the potential of groundwater resources to support production through improved siting and selection of more appropriate well designs, and highlights the positive impacts and problems that can emerge at productive water points. The findings are presented in a practical manner to encourage planners and practitioners in rural water supply to consider developing productive water points in drought-prone areas.

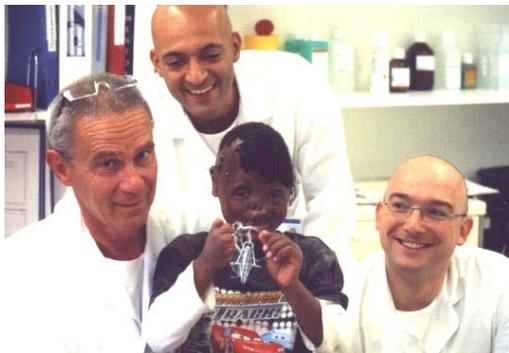
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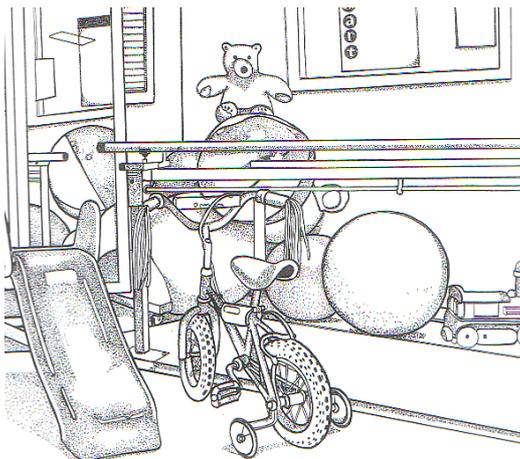
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## Child burns colouring Book and metal bicycles taken to Switzerland

Just a note to let you know that the Canadian colouring book for child burn survivors is still part of what the Director shares with other people as a great idea from another continent—she recently gave a copy of the book to the leading burns surgeons of three cities Bern, Zurich and Geneva in Switzerland, praising the Canadian initiative.



Wire bicycles were given to each doctor who was visited as a thank you for their help.



*Above: One of the pages in the Canadian colouring-in book. Left: Feleng examines a wire bicycle he took to Switzerland, with his medical team.*

## One more child injured by exploding paraffin stove

Thapelo Phore, age 2, was at the wrong place at the wrong time. He was at his home in Etwatwa in the East Rand when a paraffin stove exploded next to him. He was initially treated at a private hospital because his father had medical aid through his job. But then the medical aid ran out—and Thapelo was to be dumped back at home with open wounds on his arm and head.

Gaynor Grace, medical student and part-time researcher for Children of Fire, came across the boy at the hospital, where she was interviewing a surgeon. A few legal hiccoughs later, Thapelo was placed at Children of Fire by Benoni Child Welfare.

Since then he has had Z-plasty to release his elbow and to release his axilla. He will get a hand release in February 2009. He had extensive occupational therapy and physiotherapy during his five months at the charity. We really appreciate the advice received from Janet Fletcher, one of the best occupational therapists specialising in hand injuries, from her base in Milpark Hospital.

This little boy flourished at Children of Fire. He started potty training, attended school, and picked up a lot of conversational English. It was sad to send him back to live in a shack where his parents gave him sugary snacks in preference to fruit and allegedly confined him to a shopping trolley during the day.

*Thanks to Jo'burg Gen and to Netcare Rehab for doing Thapelo's occupational therapy for free.*



*Thapelo has gone through several ingenious splints to improve his right arm and hand.*



*Thapelo gets an armful of love from Oscar.*

## Stormy Cape Town hosts child injury conference

Did you know that one million children die each year world-wide as a result of trauma, and that traffic accidents kill more people than wars and terrorists?

These and other startling figures came to light when the International Society for Violence and Injury Prevention and the Child Accident Prevention Foundation of South Africa (CAPFSA) held a conference at which experts shared their experiences and scientific findings in different fields of child injury and violence.

Burn injuries are a leading cause of hospitalised injury in South Africa and several presentations addressed this topic. Children of Fire researcher Marietta Neumann told of her findings on record-keeping at Johannesburg Academic Hospital and the dire need for it to improve in order to draw up relevant statistics from which prevention strategies can be developed. She also outlined some of the main causes of accidental and intentional burn injuries in children in South Africa.\*

Key note speakers included Margie Peden from the World Health Organisation who, eloquently and passionately, outlined the severity of the worldwide burden of disease in this era. She told several children's stories of how they were badly injured, including that of Vusi Mathibela, a young burns survivor who scaled Mount Kilimanjaro with Children of Fire in June 2007.

Professor Heinz Rode, head of the burns unit at Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town, had much to say on childhood burn injuries and prevention. Dr Louis Reynolds gave an eye-opening presentation on injury and death incurred by so-called "motor vehicle accidents" (although nowadays the official word to be used is "incident" not "accident", as accidents denote something unpredictable and unpreventable—which traffic *incidents* aren't). Dr Reynolds pointed how the dictionary definition of '*weapon*' described much of what a car could do too, and was of the opinion that pavements should be widened and roads narrowed to promote walking and cycling.

Speakers from South Africa and beyond tackled topics such as drowning, pesticide poisoning, Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, and homicide among adolescents. Some had

investigated ways of counselling children and young mothers, e.g. by letting them express their feelings through art.

The conference was a hub for medical professionals, charity workers, government officials as well as private entities to exchange knowledge and experience and to find solutions together. Despite some major and minor hiccoughs from the organisational side of the conference committee, it was a productive and worthwhile event.

The Paraffin Safety Association of South Africa (Pasasa) is an organisation funded by oil companies. It held a one-day pre-conference on burns and poisoning through paraffin. In group discussion, different topics were workshopped in terms of prevention, e.g. education, policies or research.

Colin Vale, inventor of the Parasafe stove, was among the meeting's delegates. Even though Pasasa had never officially acknowledged that Parasafe was the safest stove on the market, several presentations throughout the entire conference mentioned it, and some called it "the way ahead". Endless legal setbacks have delayed putting the stove onto the market ethically, as Mr Vale and another inventor George Long have been beset by rogues trying to steal their patent in South Africa and beyond. We live in hope.

In the mean time, Cape Town showed off its most spectacular stormy weather. The Atlantic Ocean went berserk with restaurants flooded and streets covered in thick, yellow foam, beaten up from the wild waves crashing into the shore.

It was a memorable visit.

\* see occasional research paper series, on our website [www.firechildren.org](http://www.firechildren.org)



*Seapoint in Cape Town was flooded in one of the most vicious storms the city has seen in months.*

## Paediatric casualty in the evening

One evening in October, Sizwe had had his supper and was playing with Vincent and Samkelo in the yard. He swung and swung and swung until clunk, he fell, banging his head, arm and the side of his face against a metal palisade fence.

Oh the tears... Head injuries tend to bleed quite a lot and add end-of-day tiredness on top of that and it seemed maybe more severe than it was.

Principal Mortain Dube put his recently-gained First Aid skills to good use but we decided nonetheless to take the little one to casualty. While Helen Joseph hospital is closer, it normally refuses to assist children. So off we went to Jo'burg Gen.

The very uncaring officious female security guard refused to allow us to drive down to the casualty entrance and said "go to level three". At night? I don't think so. I parked on the top road and carried the heavy seven year old down the slope. In addition to plenty of place in front of the casualty entrance, there were five empty parking bays. But no, the heavy patient with a head injury has to be carried by an fairly unfit middle-aged woman.

Inside casualty, two windows are open at 7pm. I was directed to the Paeds window (which is not manned at night...) then into Paeds casualty, then back to the original two windows. No smiles for customers but smiles for the friends they are gossiping with. Three paramedics from Jo'burg EMS lean against the windows, chatting.

As South Africa continues its transition from apartheid into a less racial society, the colours of a hospital queue still infer economic status.

The clerk insists that Sizwe is H2 and wants R195. I insist that he is indigent. I win through. At 19h28 I go into paediatric casualty.

There are two women in their mid twenties with a boy aged about five, lying over their laps.

One coloured woman with long black hair and her baby on her lap.

A white couple with two barefoot healthy-looking girls—a toddler and an eight-year-old. The toddler has a grubby bandage over her chest and upper arm on one side.

A father with his son aged about ten.

A mother breastfeeding her baby with a bandaged right hand.

A couple with a little boy aged about four years old.

A young couple with an infant sleeping in the mother's lap.

A mother with a toddler girl and a boy aged about nine years old.

There were nine cases and no doctor in sight. 19h38 no one had been seen.

A baby cried in an adjacent room. A couple came in with a baby in their arms and an older boy aged about eight years old.

There was a messily-handwritten notice pasted over a children's blackboard drawing area on one wall:

*Do not feed injured children*

*Leseke la fa bana ditso ba lemetseng*

*Ningadlisi izingane ezilemele*

*Vha songo lisa vhana vho huvhalaho zwiliwa*

*By order ward 161*

Tough if you're illiterate. And two babies were being breastfed. Did that count?

19h40 no movement in the queue.

At 19h45 a woman with long black hair tied in a ponytail walked in. The stethoscope around her neck, not her actions, revealed her to be a doctor.

19h47 Another female doctor in a light blue headscarf, jeans and crocs appeared. Somehow the jeans seem inappropriate. She wandered away, not even casting a glance at the waiting patients.

A nurse in a pink wrap-around overtunic talks extensively on the phone. It doesn't sound like work.

They seem to notice, with the child's bandaged head on my lap, that I am taking notes.

19h52 A nurse glances under Sizwe's bandage on his head.

19h57 He goes to the weighing room. All the time in casualty I don't see any other child weighed.

20h02 He is 24.8kg.

They took his temperature under his arm.

He went back to the main room.

Two parents wait for their baby who needs oxygen (they don't know or understand why). They have been waiting since 5pm for an ambulance to take them to Selby. Why? She's very sick. But not sick enough for Jo'burg Gen. I think of the three para-

medics gossiping by the windows in the next room.

Why is there no ambulance? Because it's Monday?!

A father waits with his young son. What's the problem? It's a rash and he wants to know if it is serious.

The 18 month old Afrikaans girl comes into casualty for a dressing changed every two days. The mother says that the child had a heart problem last year and that she knows how to put a bandage on, but that they won't give her the materials to change the dressings. I look at the overall state of the child and think that it is maybe just as well that the dressing changes are supervised.

They come in at night because the father is working so that's the only way they can manage the time and transport. They have been waiting an hour so far. As it is only a second degree burn, I wonder (silently) if a nurse couldn't do the dressing change without a doctor. The little girl had pulled a cup of hot tea over her upper chest.

20h10 Three children aged about eight (mostly waiting for younger injured siblings to be seen to) play

"London Bridge"—the part of the singing and action rhyme where they raise arms up and down for chopping off the head. Seems right for casualty.

Sizwe whimpers, complaining of the pain to the left of his left eye. It is swelling. No doctor has even cast an eye over the waiting children.

An older male doctor appears. He seems fairly unfriendly towards the Afrikaans couple; seems to be telling them off.

Then he looks at Sizwe. The doctor is from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Sizwe goes for X-rays of the head and the forearm. There are flowery wrapping paper covered information boxes in the X-ray section. They are empty of information.

After X-rays and back with the doctor. He notices the hole in Sizwe's skull bone but I explain that that is a historic injury from bone reabsorption post-burns. Eventually we go home with some anti-inflammatory Ibuprofen tablets and topical antibiotic cream. Most of the queue remains and it is approaching 10pm.

## Open wide!

Zanele Jeza (5), who has gone through numerous facial contracture releases as well as an appeal to the Department of Housing for providing her family with a brick-built RDP house, now had to open wide for examination by Prof Sid Setzer of the Wits Dental Clinic. Because her mouth is still significantly contracted and hardly opens wide enough to fit a small spoon, Zanele had to undergo general anaesthesia for a simple check-up on the state of her teeth. So far no further procedures will be necessary, and Prof Setzer even commended her and Children of Fire on the level of tooth hygiene she seems to be keeping.

*Right: Facial contractures still prevent little Zanele from opening her mouth fully.*



## Children of Fire—a free legal and medical advice centre to many

[A sample of phone calls or visitors seeking help or advice:](#)

The Teddy Bear Clinic asked us to help with Dillon, a boy from Westbury whose house was set alight by an aunt. His immediately family died in the fire.

Dillon has since been caught in a family struggle between the late mother's side and the late father's side. The family knows of Children of Fire and the child has visited here briefly, but we cannot help him effectively until the family sorts out who should be his legal guardian. One side of the family

used the media, allegedly in an attempt to get money for the child. But Dillon has had surgery at Johannesburg Academic Hospital and will largely continue his treatment there.

Alice Mbanga from the Joe Slovo squatter camp in Coronationville called when her grandson Welile (19) was allegedly arrested for theft and she maintained that he was innocent. Welile apparently told the authorities that he was 17 years old and so he was held in juvenile detention in Krugersdorp (where the rate of sexual assault is a lot lower than for a 19 year old put in an awaiting-trial holding cell

with adults). We have no knowledge of the boy's innocence or not—we gave advice on due process. But we do know Welile is from a good family with a strong work ethic and good moral standards. If he has been falsely charged it is very sad indeed. And if he did commit a crime, what went wrong? The bail was set at R3500 – for a family that survives on the income from selling cooked half sheep heads (“Smileys”) for R20 each.

Charlotte Dimi from the Republique du Congo (Congo Brazzaville) arrived at our offices on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> August 2008, wanting advice on hot water burns incurred in June 2004. She was brought by Peter Harris, trustee of our sister charity the school. The 41-year-old accountant thought that if she had a vest-shaped pressure garment sewn, that the scars might decrease. We explained to her that her scars were not on her face or her hands (the key areas of social interaction), that they were not actually that bad, and that four years after the injury there was not a lot of improvement likely. A pretty faced woman with a 24 year old daughter, her self esteem was low. But we think that when

she left, after seeing the severe level of injury that we usually deal with, she had changed her perspective and felt more positive about life. *Bon Chance*, Charlotte.

And in late October Busi Mbanga from the Joe Slovo squatter camp called for help for her uncle who had to be taken to Helen Joseph Hospital. They had called an ambulance the day before but it never arrived.



*Joe Slovo squatter camp residents help their neighbour, who can barely walk, into the Children of Fire car. Maybe poverty comes with compassion—on arrival at the hospital, not even a wheelchair was provided for the elderly man and only reluctantly a security guard agreed to help.*

## Do you ever read what you write? Plain speaking is best.

Have you ever tried listening to someone reading one of your articles aloud? Do you use five syllables where two syllables would do? Dear NGO-land and government gobbledegookers (yes that is five syllables and the computer, which has absolutely no sense of humour, has underlined it in red)...just try for a month to avoid using these words and phrases:

- reclaiming the resources
- the fight against poverty
- dialogues, debates, forum
- engage civil society actors or key actors
- critically engage with
- develop good practice
- reinforce the vision
- combat poverty / inequality
- social change
- sustainability
- whilst (and other archaic English, e.g. amongst)
- utilise (“use” will do)
- build on their strengths
- confront their own challenges
- address issues
- shared concerns
- the nature of government
- the donor community

- donor fatigue
- play an effective role
- promoting change
- facilitate a dialogue (just try not to “facilitate” anything)
- development challenges
- poverty alleviation
- capacity building
- universal access
- good governance
- platform
- stakeholders
- come together
- social dialogue
- render services
- umbrella body

Also try to write without using one single acronym and to put apostrophes in the correct places.

You will find that your articles are much easier to read; that English is a language with more words than any other, with which you can express feelings and ideas.

That the ordinary person can then understand what you are trying to say.

Try a R2 fine for charity for every NGO-land word or phrase that you use. And send it our way! ©

## When curiosity turns ugly, stares cut like a thousand knives

What some organisations consider fun, becomes the worst nightmare for Children of Fire kids and caregivers. Sometimes we get invitations to so-called “fun days”—big events where several hundred underprivileged children come together, enjoy free food and some type of on-stage entertainment or games. For normal-looking children this may be fun enough.

But the experience has been that at *every* such event both children and caregivers from other organisations are exceptionally rude to our children.

They stare blatantly. As we sit down on the ground to eat, children around us turn and look at Dorah. Seconds pass, and we wait for them to turn back; the stares are getting uncomfortable. But they don't turn around. Minutes pass, and there are more and more wide-eyed faces looking at us. Children and adults crowd around Dorah and the other children. It is not just a glance while walking past. They *stop* to stare. They even come over from where they were seated. They seem to have no sense of politeness or empathy. They don't seem to feel embarrassed. There is a clown on stage, but they are more interested in looking at our children.

Bongani, age 15, waves at them; he has only one hand and a scarred face. They are startled and momentarily look at Bongani. Some wave back and smile sheepishly. Then they look at Dorah again. Bongani says “Ufunani?” (“*What do you want?*”). They don't reply. Bongani eventually stands up, shoos the crowd away and sits down in front of Dorah, to shield her from view. But more and more people come to look.

Sizwe wants to get a small bag of water from the tub outside the tent. Another boy, about the same age, approaches the tub at the same time. The boy turns to look at Sizwe, and leaps backwards, then

runs a few metres away, stops, and turns, grinning stupidly. Sizwe looks bewildered. He had been promised a ‘fun day’, but he feels miserable.

Children who don't have manners may be forgiven. A sense of morals and politeness is rarely developed at a young age. But their adults caregivers were no better. While maybe one or two scolded their charges for being rude, and talked to us and our children, most did not interfere with the staring, and even joined in. And this does not only happen at ‘fun days’, but also at hospitals, in shops, on the streets, in fact at all public places.

It is a strain to the children and their self-esteem, and for the people looking after them. If the child you are holding by the hand is being stared at, it feels like they are staring at you, and the stares feel like a thousand knives through your body. You are not sure what to do— whether to ignore it, in case the child didn't even notice. Or maybe you should shout at them, tell them they are being rude so the child feels protected. Or should you smile at them, involve them in a conversation to make them understand? But sometimes this backfires, and they start talking about the child as if he or she was not there, or go “ag shame, ag shame”.

What we want, is empathy. Some of the operations our children have are for aesthetic reasons, like the insertion of tissue expanders to restore the hairline. They are not essential to leading a healthy life. In fact, they go against our philosophy of creating tolerance and acceptance in society. But burn survivors don't have a choice. However hard we try, it is impossible to make every member of society treat disfigured people like anyone else. But we try, for the children's sake. And you can help by teaching your children, friends, colleagues, employers or even total strangers, about empathy. *MN*

## Sicelo in limbo

Sicelo Maduna is not sure what the future holds for him. After being helped by Children of Fire for more than five years, the 10-year-old boy has not returned from Volksrust for his latest hospital appointment; sadly, his family have been less than obliging when it came to transporting him to Johannesburg on time. While his nose could still do with some surgery for improvement, his most important needs are regular supply of anti-retrovirals and blood tests with the virology clinic.

We hope that his family will become responsible and help us help Sicelo. Until then, we wish him all the best for his future.



*Sicelo needs to take a complicated combination of anti-retrovirals each day. A month's supply just fits into a back pack.*

## Top Billing revamps children's bedroom

We were pleased to have Louise Carver, Brad van den Berg, Nicky Nkabine, Angie Lazaro, Gunther Graeter, Aidan Bennetts, Michael Ntshobode, Henry Rashaka, Pierre van Heerden and Nonku on site in

late October 2008, making a children's bedroom a prettier place to sleep in, and putting pot plants in the yard. Thanks so much for all your help guys.



*Nhlanhla Mpsi (7) contributes creative artwork to the renovated bedroom walls.*



*The "after"-bedroom—a colourful, comfortable and safe haven for burned and blind children.*

## Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery...

... "Usually said ironically when someone tries to gain attention by copying someone else's original ideas. Coined by Charles Caleb Colton in 1820 in his 'Lacon.' First attested in the United States in 'Malice' (1940) by E. Cameron. The adage is found in varying forms." From *Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings* by Gregory Y. Titelman (Random House, New York, 1996).

We were surprised to see an item in *City Press Gauteng* on 21<sup>st</sup> September "Teaching people how to fight deadly shack fires." It was a carbon copy of the programme that Children of Fire began so many years ago, down to the replica shack and the red T-

shirts for volunteers. Ah well, they say that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery." We're flattered. It seems that some of the people we paid and trained over many years are now sharing Children of Fire expertise with the emergency services, which is great. And even better, at long last Jo'burg Disaster Management has recognised the legal obligation placed upon it under the Disaster Management Act to work at grass roots level in this field. Dr Audrey Gule, overall head of EMS, committed to speaking to our UMashesha volunteers some four years ago at a monthly meeting and in October 2008 at last arrived. She is a fascinating woman—more news next time...

## Trial and error gets Jupiter Drawing Room on board for infomercials

We can't say we didn't try. We had the explosives, the smoke machine, the actors and the professional film crew. Maybe it was the lack of time, or experience, but the 'Exploding Paraffin Stove' clip just didn't quite turn out the way we wanted.

So Children of Fire approached The Jupiter Drawing Room, an advertising agency that makes ads for the likes of Sasol and Nike. A fiery presentation to the executive board got them to agree to make three of the ten infomercials by the end of February 2009. We hope for a long-term relationship with The Jupiter Drawing Room, to help make the remaining seven infomercials for us.



*A volunteer actress with fake burn injuries during the filming for the 'Exploding Paraffin Stove'*

## Sweet-talking the surgeons with Continental treats

Once again we felt it was time to express our thanks with more than just words to the doctors that help our children. In late September, chocolates were given to:

34 plastic surgeons and others at Joburg Gen, including Gabriel Doucas, Marissa Venter, Anton Potgieter, Charles Serrurier, Vaneshri Chetty, Ridwan Mia, Charles Furaha, Willem Erasmus, Mark Steinmann, Marshall Murdoch and Elias Ndobe.

And at Wits Dentistry (and maxillo facial) to: Peter Owen, Joe Schmaman, Moreku Mashilo, Luchen

Naidoo, Sid Setzer, Mohammed Moolla. And to paediatric radiographer Thembakazi Qogi and Head of Radiology: Dr Lolo Rapoho, along with Occupational Therapist Vida Yip (as Susan Cummings had relocated to Durban); surgeon Graham Pitcher at Baragwanath; Carla Norval and Lawrence Chait at Park Lane Clinic; Janet Fletcher, Gereth Edwards and Pieter Beddings at Milpark Hospital; Julian Oettle at Helen Joseph Hospital; Cheryl Leong, Des Lines, Martin Kelly, Vernon Ching and Dave Papendorf at Sunninghill Hospital; Roger Nicholson and Vaughan Oerder at Sandton Mediclinic.

## The billet-doux for our dearest doctors

*The letter that accompanied the chocolates:*

Dear colleagues,

It's not Christmas, not Easter, not Divali, not New Year. It's not our birthday and it's not Eid any more. So what's the celebration?

**The celebration is you.**

Without your skills and commitment, where would our kids be? We *think* "Thank You" every time a burned child goes through surgery and comes out a little better equipped to face the world.

Today we are *saying* "Thank You" with this small gift.

Of course we *want* miracles every time. Wouldn't you, if it was your child on the operating table? But we do *know* how hard it is to fix little damaged human beings.

One has non-compliant patients...and non-compliant parents...and overloaded pushy charities that dream too high and take on too much...

But together, patiently, month after month, year after year, we can rebuild Africa's burns survivors and give them a better future.

In June 2006 we held a Thank You party for surgeons, anaesthetists, OTs *et al*. Since then, we've survived defamation on television, a relentless vendetta to close us by a racist neighbour, a mentally-unhinged politician removing a child, but hey, we're still here.

More than just being here, we've taken kids and fire fighters to the top of Kilimanjaro. We lead a daunting trip to the Drakensberg each year. We are pioneering an injury-prevention campaign that will

be on television in 2009. And we're researching a range of facets of burns care from hand-splinting in casualty to optimal repair of bony deficits.

**That's where you come in.** In addition to everything that you already do, if you or a colleague would like to work with us on research, we'd welcome your involvement.

Most people at Children of Fire are paid nothing, or very little. But we *can* seek subsistence grants if that makes research more viable. People who complete peer-reviewed research can be funded to attend international conferences to present their findings.

We have a North African base in Tunisia now and they want South Africa's skills in making maxillo-facial prosthetics; in 2009 we'll be running a course with CPD points on all aspects of this field. Our kids want plastics people to know all the choices that they have if they are missing an ear, an eye, a nose due to burns... so again we'd welcome your involvement. We think that we have the only Burns Psychology guide in the world on the website. But it needs updating and comment.

If you're too overloaded to contemplate research, then think about being involved on the annual outreach—Drakensberg 2009 or Mount Kenya 2010. It's demanding but the other side is you get to see the patients when they are healthy and happy, achieving "heights" that it was hard to imagine when you saw them freshly injured or fresh from surgery, in the hospital bed.

Just remember Thulani. He arrived at Jo'burg Gen late one year. Plastics immediately referred him to Children of Fire (yes, referral goes both ways ☺).

He was dirty, depressed, hunched and his aunt said, had little worms eating skin inside his ears... we got the ear-nose-throat surgeon to check that out. He had not worn shoes since he was burned in a veld fire two years before; his toes were severely contracted. He was not attending school because he could not face the teasing. His mother was dead. The father he did not know and his half-brother, died early in 2007, both due to Aids.

But during that year, Thulani had surgery to his foot in January. We booked him for surgery to the other foot in March and some younger medics resisted... *they* wanted him to wait... *we* wanted his life back on track as soon as possible... because we were dealing with the psychological side of a traumatised adolescent. At the same time we helped Thulani to catch up on three years of schooling by one-to-one tuition throughout the year. He had four operations in 14 months. He still needs more.

Thulani says it was the first year that he was ever loved.

He is not an academic high flier, but now he has a chance in life. A chance to be happy and even a chance to contribute to society—which he wants to.

He'd still like more surgery though his chances of

getting it are slim because of waiting lists and, the need to keep him in high school.

If he had not had two foot operations within three months, he could not have started a physical fitness training programme and succeeded in getting to the top of Kilimanjaro on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007. That gave Thulani a sense of confidence that will help him live long. It is not easy. His great-grandmother grabbed the grant and would not spend anything on Thulani.

Now we are trying to reintegrate him into the rural areas. There is little will from local schools (they are prejudiced about his scars) and his extended family don't really want him.

But together—your surgery and our 365 day a year support system—we have turned his life around.

Thank you.

Thank you for your skills and commitment and for doing the best for every child that we send your way.

Thank you for not emigrating. In most cases, South Africa trained you. South Africa certainly needs you.

And we all appreciate so much what you do.

*From The Team at Children of Fire and all the kids—past, present and future.*

## Fixing printers and other jobs that people don't want to fund

We don't need 100 teddy bears and endless sweets, but money to repair laser printers, pay electricity bills and to fund research grants.

Beggars can't be choosers? Wrong. We appreciate even the tiniest gift, if it comes from somebody who gives because they *care*. But some people use us as free recycling bins—someone tried to give us broken vacuum cleaners!—and expect us to be grateful while their donations require even more time and effort from our side, to make them work or to distribute them. So oddly enough, some donations are more trouble than they're worth. In that case we reserve the right to say "no, thank you".

It also seems that people often just give to charity to clear their conscience; not because they actually want to support the charity's work. Others, especially large companies, help charity for their corporate social responsibility image, and want big media events with oversized plastic cheques and smiling handshakes. Because those

donations then go 'public', people want to fund something glorious, something tangible and pretty, like a jungle-gym or a Christmas party.

So if you want to help by making a donation: we take second-hand clothing, toys, stationery, furniture—anything that is not completely broken or useless. And if you really want to help but are not sure how, ask. You can make a difference. Quite honestly though, money is the most useful.



*A working printer is more essential to Children of Fire's work than sweets and teddy bears.*

## Sharing knowledge internationally

SABC International's *Health Issues*, a programme that covers medical-related news and important health topics, invited Children of Fire to talk about burn injuries on 18 November 2008. In a half hour live interview, long-term volunteer Marietta Neumann and another guest, Dr. Adelin Muganza from the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital burns unit, spoke about first aid at home, complications if burns are untreated, causes and prevention of burns and also psychological effects of disfigurement, especially in children. The show was aired live in parts of Europe, the USA, and in other African countries. In South Africa it was screened at 2am the next morning on SABC2.

## Human Rights: A Call to Action for every business

The United Nations Global Compact, Realising Rights: The Ethical Globalisation Initiative and the Global Reporting Initiative are marking the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights by calling on companies to make a commitment to improve at least one aspect of their human rights reporting. The invitation to companies to participate is central to the three organisations' new collaborative project: "Human rights—A call to action", which aims to foster greater integration of human rights principles into corporate sustainability

## New and old donors

The radio advert campaign mentioned in our previous newsletter, James Oatway's photo essay on the *Sunday Times* website and the publicity about Feleng's search for a forehead, encouraged fresh interest in the charity. Thanks for kind help received from existing friends and new ones including: *MP Wilson (Edenvale), P Aitken, Demas, D Geldenhuys, Dr Clive Novis, N1 City, I Myb Rgh, Kevin McMahon, E S Viljoen, A Leal, C & D Liknaitzky, Maslen, Braken, Michelle, Anonymous, N Giurici, B Sinden Piketberg, N Reynders, Carague, Moodley Nam, N Desai Calswald, Tessa van Duuren, the Steyn family, I Care Hal, Camargue, Stone Art, Ingrid Chinn, M Snyders.*

reporting. Mary Robinson, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Global Compact Board member and President of Realising Rights said: "The 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration during 2008 presents a key opportunity for the many companies who still haven't thought seriously about the role of human rights in their business operations." For more information, see:

[www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org)

Source: E-Civics and Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)

## Handing out toys at different hospitals is an ongoing process.

Sometimes we note down all the children's names and ailments, and sometimes we just give with a smile. 18 named children (and a few others) had their minds taken off their troubles and their wounds in ward 275 in Joburg Gen on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2008. They were one year old burned girl Inganathi (hot water facial burns) who got a purple hippo, Nosipho, a girl aged 1 year who had a teddy with red ribbon, Bulelwa, a one year old burned girl who had a black/white whale. Hlengiwe, a girl aged 2 years got a medium-brown hairy teddy. Nokhanyo, a girl of 2 years loved her white teddy. Boitumelo a girl aged 3 years hugged her very big brown teddy. Junior, a boy aged 4 years (hot water burns, facial) enjoyed his long yellow truck. Melvin, a boy of 4 years, played with his short yellow earthmover and tennis ball. Inathi and Fatsego, both aged 5 years, each received a "Things that go together" game as did Ithumeleng, a boy of 8 years. Elvis a boy aged 8 years got a Sky racer, Zamalipi a boy aged 11 years Turtles Puzzle, Daniella a girl aged 13 years had a Winnie



*Abegail Ximba is loaded up with Canadian teddy bears that were given to children in Jo'burg Gen.*

the Pooh puzzle, Thuli a girl of 14 years got a Little Box of Jokes, Moeketsi, Tafagazwa and Thabo, all boys aged 15 years, each received a mini cricket bat and Ludo or Snakes & Ladders.

Thanks to donors who allow us to pass on these gifts. Some 24 children in ward 275 at Johannesburg Hospital received creamy-soft Canadian teddies on 12th November 2008.

## Snippets

**Simamkele** went back to his family after eyelid surgery at Joburg Gen. His father and his aunt both comment about how he no longer wants to leave the charity. Of course he loves them and his home, "but, Dad, it is so much fun here," he says. He returned in November 2008.

All the children went to the **dentistry unit at Wits University** on Friday October 17<sup>th</sup> 2008— thanks for assistance from Prof. Sid Setzer and his colleagues. Zanele was booked for an examination under general anaesthesia in mid November as it is impossible to look inside her mouth under other circumstances, due to the contractures. (see page 5)



*Children of Fire again participated in the African Aid and Disaster Relief Exhibition at Gallagher Estates in early November 2008. Thanks Kezia, Lindiwe, Michelle.*

Christopher Wilson and Mittah Lebaka took part in **International Trauma Day** on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2008 at the request of Tshifhiwa and Jemma Thain of the Ekurhuleni health district rehabilitation service. The event was held at Nyiko Primary school, beyond Tembisa, Gauteng. They demonstrated a bucket run; pulling a person out of a fire on a blanket, and Stop Drop and Roll. Feleng and Sizwe assisted.



**STOP!**



**DROP!**



**ROLL!**

*Sizwe Hlophe and a Nyiko Primary School pupil demonstrate how to "Stop, drop and roll" when your clothes catch fire.*

## By word of mouth

**Volunteer who left (and who didn't get mugged once in the six months he was here!) Pete Jones wrote:** "South Africa changed me for the better. I've gained confidence. I've seen things I never thought I'd see. I've done things I never thought I'd have the chance to do. I've met people who I will remember for the rest of my life. Thanks to Bronwen and Children of Fire. I hope you know how grateful I am for everything you've done for me."

**Volunteer who left a year ago:** "I had a lovely dream about Dorah last night. We were all back at the school and she was playing the African drums, coming up with some catchy rhythms by herself! It certainly made me smile." Debbie Ng, Manchester.

**Medical researcher comment:** "I am glad to be useful—I do feel very inexperienced and ignorant in the medical field, but maybe the positive side to that is the lack of *preconceived ideas and set paradigms* that those who have worked in the field for a long time might have..."

**Congo Corruption or straight as a die?** "Hey Bronwen! I know that sometimes you may think that I tend to exaggerate. But I'm glad that Chris is going to the DRC. I've got no doubt in my mind that trip will be an eye opener not only for him but for the whole Children of Fire." Alain Mvudi

**Newsletter Feedback:** "Thank you so much for the newsletter. I found it enlightening but also so funny! Keep smiling as hard as it may be as you are doing great work!" Saira Khan, Freeplay Foundation.

# Notice Board

Welcome back to volunteer Simon Pike who likes to play with the children.

Welcome back Junius Hughes, documentary producer extraordinaire...who has decided to reverse the emigration trend and leave America to settle in Africa.

Adieu, Mary Forfar the latest bookkeeper who was going to get us shipshape but then said the task must be handed over to someone new—again!

**In the media ::** Feleng Mahamotse (6) was in *Beeld* on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2008 after his journey to Switzerland and in *Tagesanzeiger* in Zürich on 4<sup>th</sup> September 08.

**Bongani the high cost kid...** Broke the door of the washing machine at school, broke the washing tub by jumping on it, got back to his high school and broke his glasses, all in the space of three days. Ah, but we love him...

Welcome **Kezia Samuel**—the 20-year-old burn survivor from Pietermaritzburg moved to Johannesburg in early September 2008 to start a three-month internship at Children of Fire.



From left to right: Samkelo, Thapelo, Kezia, Karabo, Sizwe

**By the way, dear volunteers, it's 364.5 days a year**

If you normally make supper or take the kids for a swimming lesson or help with teaching in some way, don't think that we are closed on Heritage Day or any other public holiday for that matter. Chances are that we need you more than ever that day... The ONLY half day in the year that we try to close the doors is Christmas Day in the afternoon. In the morning we are working, of course, taking presents to every child in Joe Slovo squatter camp.

**November the Birthday Month**

Happy Birthday to Mortain (11th), Michelle (12th), Marietta (17th), Seiso (19th), Chris (24th) and Nhlanhla (27th).



Our children represented Gauteng Province at the **National Children's Day** celebrations in Kimberley, North West Province in early November.

**Gossip ::** Did you know that a leading reconstructive surgeon felt so pi\*\*ed off with the state sector that when the hospital superintendent stole his/her parking space it was the final straw. He/she abandoned the government hospital where he/she felt unloved and became Netcare's gain. Shame on the state Superintendent for losing a treasure.

**Congratulations** to resident psychologist Michelle Daniels for completing her studies on autism and Asperger's Syndrome.

**Welcome** Gill Swain, the British author and journalist, who came to write and observe. Her biography on the charity director might be available in 2009 or 2010.

Gill went to visit Mittah in Dobsonville and travelled around Soweto. She also met with burns survivors Irene Peta, Mfundo Ntamehlo, Musa Zwane and Asanda Dada in Alexandra Township.

**Just a thought:** How can you be sure that chicken-flavoured dog food really tastes of chicken?

Does somebody go round to taste it?



## SPARKLES and Skunks

- Dimitra Chassoulas of VentureWeb for visiting our toddlers Thapelo and Tapera at Joburg Gen regularly, and for sweet potatoes, carrots and play dough in October.
- Slam Pool Care for keeping the pool sparkling blue.
- Jakki Bakes for hand-delivering Kilimanjaro coverage to the Norwegian burns fraternity and cooking yummy Sundry suppers
- The young Indian man "Rafik" who pretended he was from the Baptist church in Mayfair and was going to help the charity and then stole Michelle Daniels' ID, cell phone, bank card and her handbag from the office.
- Monaco night club where several volunteers have been robbed and allege that even the bouncers go off with their cell phones!
- The smash-n-grab man who robbed volunteer Monique Smith on Heritage Day.

## Thank You

**Helene van Rhyn** for passing on her old cellphone to Bongani Madlala.

**Themba Khabazela**, a third year law student, for helping with our children on Sundays.

Similarly **Jean-Paul Mubima**, a medical student, on Saturdays. And **Rosie Chirongoma** of KCS Projects who helps with supper on Saturdays.

**Simon Webb** and colleagues from Lions in Midrand for collecting food for several charities and sharing some with Children of Fire.

**Milan Sulc** for helping with medical links for Feleng Mahamotse.

**Hanna Jäger** from Germany, 93 years old and living on pension, who makes a donation to Children of Fire every three months.

**Swiss Air** for helping with one child's air ticket.

**Joanne Whittaker-Smith, Surita and DHL** for ongoing help.

**The Garden Shop and Keith Kirsten Horticulture** for some Spring plants and **Louis Rutstein** for transporting them.

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**Children of Fire**

**Account number: 614 920 23919**

**Sort code: 25-65-05**

**First National Bank**

**Melville, Gauteng**

**South Africa**

**Children of Fire**

**Account number: 901 033 30**

**Sort code: 20-17-92**

**Barclays Bank**

**Canterbury (East Kent branches)**

**United Kingdom**