

# Newsletter

No. 1/2010



## **Beka children drum to their own beat: Fun Holiday Activity Weeks**

Twice a year our school holds exciting Holiday Activity Weeks within our longer and more-productive terms, but just after the government schools have closed. Beka provides five more weeks teaching a year than other schools. Any blind and low vision children are invited to apply for a coveted place on the interactive learning sessions



*Joseph (15) can't see but he certainly can hear! He really enjoys drumming.*

about their own country and the rest of the continent. This free-of-charge community service is aimed at pupils aged 4 to 12 but in special circumstances older pupils will be considered.

Activities such as touching animals, arts and craft projects, drumming sessions, visits to the National Children's Theatre

and other exciting events are organised. Around March/April the theme is Africa—My Continent (*see story below*) and around September / October the theme is South African Heritage. The aim of these weeks is to educate the children about African countries and their different cultures, and the beauty of their own land.

## **'Africa - my Continent' - Zambian teaches about Zambia**

In April Beka celebrated 'Africa- My Continent'. During this fun week, each day was dedicated to an African country, so there's lots more countries left for 2010 and 2011's weeks.

On Monday the pupils learned about Zambia. They explored a tactile map of the country, were given an exciting lesson about Zambia's history from Zambian volunteer Opposite Malumbe, coloured the flag of the country and modelled the national bird out of play dough. The children were given a demonstration of how to make beaded animals and then were encouraged to work with beads and make beaded necklaces for themselves and their friends.

On Tuesday an outing to

the National Children's Theatre was organised. The children were excited to watch or listen to the play "A Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett. They tried their own play acting once they returned to school.

Wednesday was dedicated to the country Tanzania. The children learned about Tanzania's wildlife, helped with materials from sister charity Children of Fire. In 2007, burned teenagers climbed Kilimanjaro and they lent their books to the younger children. Our long term friends Drums and Rhythm arrived with a range of percussion instruments and all the children beat out a joyful sound.

On Thursday the children learned about the economy



*Mabontle (9) and Obvious (6) touch a live crocodile*

and history of the Democratic Republic of Congo, prepared by senior primary teacher Mai Claude Tem. His research came to life when Edu-Zoo arrived with snakes, rabbits, a baby crocodile and other animals to touch.

On Friday, the children learned about Ghana and were greatly honoured with a visit from the Acting High Commissioner for Ghana. He was presented with a painted flag by Katrina

Khanye. In the afternoon the children enjoyed African music with Catherine Ma. The week was a great success -thanks to the hard work of junior primary teacher Oztie Mpala, the principal Mortain Dube and the many resources provided by the office.

A special thanks to local shops that helped and short term volunteer Zimbabwean Pardon Mawowa. The next week is from 29 March to 1 April 2010.

## Dicing potatoes for Austrian Potato Goulash, a favourite .....

During 2009 novice teacher Barbara Lechner from Austria started to cook Saturday night supper with those children resident at weekends. While cookery has been part of the syllabus since 2003, Barbara wanted to share her national cuisine with the kids.

The cookery tradition began with Julia Hill of Designer Faire. While no one quite matched Julia's skills,



Karabo: wary of Goulash

Marita Irvine and Louise Barnes were stunning too. Barbara followed in these illustrious footsteps by also involving children in the meal preparation. The children discovered that a meal they cooked themselves, tasted even better than one made for them.

Sizwe (9) soon gained the title "The Singing Chef" and mastered peeling and dicing onions; Seiso (5) loved peeling potatoes and Doreen (12) didn't object too much to washing the dishes after supper. Tapera (4) and Thapelo (3) were good food-borrowers, quickly learning what tasted good raw and what did not. New experiences like when they first cracked an egg and saw what was inside, were memorable. Dr Mick Muianga and two visiting Tai-



Sizwe has a rugby player's hearty appetite

wanese students once cooked a mouth-watering Chinese meal so the children were already curious about new flavours. Recipe variations were necessitated when some ingredients were hard to find. They cooked meals like Mexican Chilli Con Carne, Italian pasta and also Austrian "Schinkenfleckerln" (macaroni and cheese with

ham). One much-enjoyed dish was Austrian Potato Goulash.

### Here is the recipe:

Finely cut some onions and fry them gently in cooking oil, until they are soft. Add some flour, then add a small tin of tomato puree, paprika powder and a lot of water. Add some beef or vegetable stock cubes.

Peel and dice potatoes, then add them to the "soup". Leave the Goulash cooking on the stove until the potatoes are soft.

In the meantime cut good quality "Vienna" sausages into chunks and add them to the Goulash when the potatoes are soft. Let the Goulash cook for another five minutes, then serve it with a slice of thick fresh bread. Enjoy !

## Tshepi—keeps us on our toes

Tshepisang Kobeli, age 7, was born with a visual impairment and lack of oxygen (birth asphyxia).



Tshepi is camera-shy

She also suffered a bilateral occipital stroke. As a result, her motor and speech milestones are delayed. She was referred to Beka in January 2009. Tshepi learned in the first few months at Beka to express her needs (for exam-

ple 'dijo' or 'eat Tshepi' when she is hungry). Tshepi can see light and recognise objects that are fairly close to her. She is a very active child and keeps the teachers on their toes. Her parents were overjoyed at her progress and how much calmer she became without the use of any medicine. She learned to control her tantrums. Tshepi likes all kinds of music from radio, instruments or toys. She has made very good progress since she arrived but cannot feed herself properly, still wears nappies and has concentration issues.

**Her parents urgently need transport help.**



Thapelo (3) Feleng (8) Tapera (4) and teacher Mortain in group including Simamkele and Sizwe as well.

## Joseph struck by HIV-induced meningitis, went blind at 13

Joseph, age 15, turned blind at 13 due to meningitis caused by HIV-Aids. He spent four months in hospital and started attending Beka in February 2009. Joseph was a day pupil and then became a weekly boarder. While kind volunteers made a transport plan

so that he could attend school regularly; his mother's employer was sadly unsympathetic. In the beginning Joseph was still very weak because of his illness, but as his strength improved he could participate actively in all lessons. Joseph is very happy at

school and has found a lot of new friends. He says that he was very bored when he turned blind and he thought he would never go to school again. He has learned a lot about himself since he started attending Beka and enjoys music and swimming lessons most.

Before he turned blind, Joseph wanted to become a soldier but now he plans to become a musician. He says it was hard in the beginning to learn to read and write in Braille, but he can read all the Braille books at school. He needs his ARVs marked in Braille now.

## Make (mah-kay) makes tremendous academic improvement

Make is a nine-year-old girl who has been struggling with her academic achievement. Her parents believe that her bad health during her infancy has contributed to her academic problems. When she was very young she suffered from severe fits and was admitted to hospital several times.

When she was five years old she started Grade One at Thobeka Lower Primary school but she was not

ready for formal learning. She was transferred to Hlabangane Primary school in Meadowlands. Make did not make progress at this school and arrived at Beka with very few skills. She could not communicate with the other children and did not want to play with them. The Beka teachers designed an individualised educational programme for her and surprisingly, within two weeks Make

could identify the alphabet letters from A to M and numbers from 1 to 13. She could say polite words like 'please' and 'thank you' when talking to others. To date tremendous progress has been made in almost all the subjects. Make can now count from 0 to 50, making few mistakes. She works very well with her addition and simple subtraction using different counting methods. Her English communi-

cation has improved and she can now talk to other children freely, sharing jokes in English.

Make is happy and she socialises with almost everyone at school, including the teachers. She is inquisitive and wants to learn more from everyone. The teachers are confident that Make can become a capable child who can prosper in life, especially if her parents support her equally.

## Shredded paper is tactile learning and provides lots of fun!



*Tshepi discovers shredded paper feels almost slippery*

The main aim of art for blind and low vision children, with or without multiple disabilities, is for the children to experience different materials, and not to always have an end product. The pupils use all their senses: they hear the rustle of paper and its tickle on their skin. They can even taste and smell it if

they want. Throwing shredded paper all over their classroom assistant and rolling in the shavings was



*Tapera loves art lessons*

great fun and made a good photo shoot! Since 2003 we have explored materials with pupils, floating objects

in water, seeing which object sinks, tasting and smelling a variety of safe everyday materials. It's material science at primary

level. Teachers also take children on nature walks at Delta Park or Zoo Lake to find feathers, leaves and seed pods for art.



*Thapelo and Tapera have fun with the teacher*

## French flair and unusual hair a hit with children

Charlène Darblade (20) from Bordeaux, France, volunteered for three months at Beka. She initially translated in the sister charity's offices but could not keep pace with the work expected there. She was better occupied playing with children.

At Beka she took an interest in working with children with disabilities. "The children are amazing! They all

have their own character - funny, energetic, very friendly and naughty, just like all other kids. The school is small so I can interact with every child. And the atmosphere is warm and friendly."

Famous for her often unusual hairstyles, she helped in the life skills class, especially with Dorah Mokoena, and typed letters and reports for teachers.



Charlene, Sizwe, Feleng

### Volunteering

*New volunteers are welcome if they first provide a curriculum vitae with contactable references.*

*They must guarantee to be regular and to keep their commitments.*

*As a sign of good faith, they donate R50. A police clearance check may be required. Children are upset at people with whom they bond, who stop coming for no reason.*

## Umfundo Thuto even in the spinach leaves of the garden

The garden is a favourite places in the school for the children. It is divided into three vegetable beds. A number of lessons are conducted in and around the garden. The garden can be used in all learning areas such as:

### 1.) English language:

The children communicate in English as they work in the garden. They ask questions and they learn the names of the vegetables they plant. They write short

sentences and reports about what they have learned.



Tshepi waters the garden

### 2.) Life Skills:

The children learn to maintain the garden by cultivating and watering the

vegetables. They learn that the garden is a good source of nutritious food as they observe the harvesting of some vegetables which are then brought to the kitchen for their next meal.

### 3.) Numeracy:

The children measure the size of the vegetable beds as they prepare them. They record the date of planting and how long they must wait for germination. They measure the spaces for the plants as they transplant

the seedlings. The older children even calculate the number of plants they will put in each bed. This puts their mathematics skills to good use.



Tapera counts how many spinach plants there are

## Braille training for teachers, volunteers and child carers

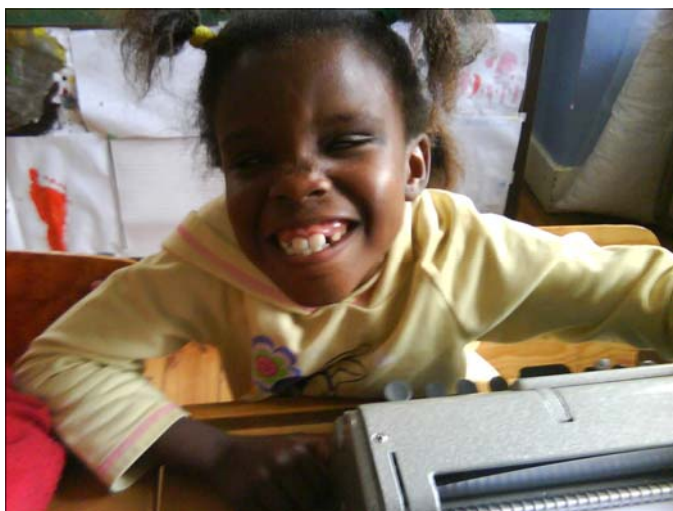


Teachers (rear) in training

All the teachers at Beka are Braille literate, thanks to courses run by Tracy Smith of Blind South Africa, an organisation that trains users in Braille. Thursday afternoon is set aside for Braille in-service training as

part of on-going teacher education. Tracy is blind herself and can answer all the teachers' questions. Braille contractions were revised and typing Braille sentences was practiced. Beka staff are up-to-date with all the changes as specified in the Unified Braille code.

Every teacher wrote an examination in Braille competency at the end of the 2009. Even the housekeeper knows Braille.



Mabontle loves reading Braille with her fingers

## Geerlande Homburg returned to help with mobility

Beka has been unable to secure the services of a qualified mobility trainer as there is a shortage of such trainers and a shortage of money. Fortunately Geerlande Homburg from Bartimeus School in the Netherlands took time to refresh the knowledge of our existing staff when she visited in 2009. Geerlande worked at Beka in 2006 and has supplied us with some canes. The teachers take turns to go out with the blind and low vision

children for mobility training. Children are taken through orientation of the immediate environment at the school. Activities include sighted guiding techniques, walking in and out of the school building, negotiating steps and identifying all the rooms and places in the school.

For older children, their training includes finding directions to useful places outside the school such as the shops or public



*First feel, then step*

telephones. They also learn road crossing techniques, such as listening for any vehicle sound from the lefthand-side and the righthand-side and then crossing the road. During

the mobility walks the children are encouraged to engage in a wide range of conversations.

They talk about physical features as they walk past different buildings.

They talk about trees and flowers around them and they talk to people they meet on the way. They also learn how to handle and use the white cane to their advantage. Now we just need to teach the cars to behave!

## Even blind toddlers can start Orientation and Mobility

Movement is a building block for learning. As a child explores his world and has physical contact with it, learning takes place. Children with visual impairments typically need encouragement to explore their surroundings. To them the world may be a startling and unpredictable place. Orientation and Mo-

bility training (O & M) helps a blind or visually impaired child know where she is in space and where she wants to go (orientation). It also helps her to plan to get where she wants to go (mobility).

O & M skills should be developed in infancy starting with basic body awareness and movement, and con-

tinuing on into adulthood as the individual learns skills that allow her to navigate her world efficiently, effectively, and safely. Formal O & M training began after World War II when techniques were developed to help veterans who had been blinded. In the 1960s universities started training programmes for O & M spe-

cialists who worked with adults and school-going children.

In the 1980s the O & M field recognised the benefit of providing services to pre-school children. Today, orientation and mobility specialists have even developed methods to help infants and toddlers to find their way around.

When planning an O & M programme for children, the focus of training should include such things as:

- sensory awareness: gaining information about the world through hearing, smell, touch and feel
- spatial concepts: realising that objects exist even if not heard or felt, and understanding the relationships which exist between objects in the environment
- searching skills: locating items or places efficiently
- independent movement: which includes crawling, rolling and walking
- sighted guide: using another person to aid in travel
- protective techniques: specific skills which provide added protection in unfamiliar areas
- cane skills: use of various cane techniques to clear one's path or to locate objects along the way



*Thapelo and Tapera take a nap*

### Blindness myths

It is not true that...

- ⇒ All blind people love music
- ⇒ All blind people have good hearing
- ⇒ All blind people have a good memory
- ⇒ All blind people have no sight



*Nhlanhla is a happy child*

## Mama Esther—Cook, cleaner, childcare worker

Esther is called Mama Esther out of politeness for her age and because of her various duties she does at school. Coming under the supervision of main house-keeper Abegail Ximba, she acts as a mother in this school, because she assists almost everybody.

Esther listens to pupils' problems and acts accordingly. Her duties include: sweeping the school premises, and putting all the litter into the bins; restoring order to the furniture and desks so that each morning everything is spick and span; cleaning and tidying the bedrooms. She encourages older pupils like Doreen and Katrina to

make their own beds and to pick up their clothes from the floor. So she helps pupils to learn neatness and good hygiene. She also helps those who are blind, like Obvious and Nhlanhla to tidy up after themselves, in so doing improving their life skills and teaching them to be independent.

Esther washes blankets, sheets and all the clothes for the children. She can often be seen walking very fast from room to room as she cleans and tidies.

All the children like Mama Esther because she cooks them delicious meals using a variety of food. She makes breakfast for them, and prepares sandwiches for

those who have hospital visits. She cooks lunch and sometimes supper for the children. Sometimes she asks the older pupils to help wash dishes, thus ensuring that they learn some daily living skills

Esther helps teachers during lesson times to accompany a child to the bathroom. She helps to feed multiple disabled children if they don't have eating prosthesis.

All the visitors who come to Beka are given a warm welcome by Esther.

She keeps an eye out for strangers at the school gate and makes sure that the gate is securely locked.



*Esther cheerfully at work in the kitchen*

Esther loves the children at the school, and they love her. To keep them safe, we sent her on a St John Ambulance First Aid course and, like all the teachers, she passed it well.

*Oztie helps Obvious with his Braille lessons*



*Maké loves school*

## Our unique multi-lingual multi-talented staff

**Mai Claude Tem** initially came to Beka as an occasional volunteer. While he is a trained high school teacher, he has adapted well to teaching senior primary pupils.

He learned Braille from scratch and he has shared his many other skills. Mai Claude has translated for the courts, especially for refugee children from Francophone Africa.

He has learned counseling with the Teddy Bear Clinic.

And he has helped with a preliminary investigation for our sister charity, of the medical facilities in Cameroon, his home country.

At weekends he helps to run a hair salon in Yeoville but we haven't yet persuaded him to give us all free hair styles.

In addition to preparing lots of lessons for older pupils, he runs a once-a-week French language class for interested adults at Beka and at ChiFi.

Ask **Oztie Mpala** and **Mortain Dube** about their home language and they might at first tell you that they are Ndebele speakers. Well, they *can* speak Ndebele and also a little Shona, and some Zulu and a smattering of Sotho. But really their language is Kalanga. This unique tribe has its roots partly in Zimbabwe and partly in Botswana.

All these linguistic skills are great for "Africa my Continent" weeks because we have a microcosm of southern Africa in one school... and over the years have had teachers, pupils and volunteers from Tunisia, the DRC, Mozambique and even further afield.



*Mai Claude Tem at Beka*

# Pearls and Pimples

## Pearls to:

- ◆ Dr Kerry Alberto for fundraising
- ◆ Crawford Prep, Lonehill, for fundraising and Debbie Tarrant for encouraging them.
- ◆ Eileen Fisher for teaching piano to Katrina and Sizwe last year.
- ◆ Helen and Lee for extra reading classes
- ◆ Kate for Friday supper and Jarryd for alternating Friday suppers
- ◆ Jakki Bates for Sunday evening cooking
- ◆ Lindiwe Ngwenya for battling for registration

## Pimples to:

- ◆ Passers-by who continuously give sweets to the children despite the sign asking them not to do so.
- ◆ Neighbours with the dangerous collapsing wall that they won't fix and plants that they won't trim.
- ◆ South African Council of Educators for being so slow in processing teachers' documentation
- ◆ Neotel and contractors for not warning us that they were going to excavate the pavement and leaving dangerous open and very muddy trenches for weeks.

## Thanks to:

*Trustees Margaret and Allan Hirsch, Amelia Tandy, Dr Helene van Rhyn, Cathy Donaldson, Dr Marietjie Richter, Dr Kerry Alberto, Prakash Naidoo, Peter Harris, Lisa Mulley and Bronwen Jones*

Craig Pretorius of Urban Terrain for helping with school planning issues

Children of Fire Trust for lending us so much administrative help.

DisChem Foundation for funding our School Principal

Melissa Banks, Moynene and friends for cooking supper on Wednesdays

Catherine Ma for Kindermusik lessons

Marlene Thomas for swimming lessons last year

Michelle Harten for doing Aromatherapy last year

Vivienne Stokes for cakes once in a while

Tarryn Leslie for supervising children some weekends

Richard Walls for transporting children who wish to attend church on Sundays

Bernie Fillis of Bee Sting Tours for transport help and yoghurt

Louis Rutstein of GT Trading for advice on furniture repairs

*The future depends on what we do in the present. Mahatma Gandhi*

## Founder on call, every day.

It is so hard running a school with no money from government at all, and most parents unable or unwilling to pay fees. It is also hard to run a school where one is on call every day and every hour of the day.

While our founder Bronwen Jones is based at the Children of Fire site, she picks up the slack whenever anyone is sick, when a parent doesn't collect their child, when a pupil has an unscheduled trip to hospital.

A 24/7 "Mama" to all the kids, she makes a great working team with Principal Mortain Dube, checking and double-checking the children's academic progress, their medical needs, their social circumstances.

Many evenings their work continues until late, either face-to-face or phone and SMS exchange of information about what needs to be done the next day.

New pupils' parents ask for meetings at weekends and the Founder is always available for them. Only by being available so constantly, has the school achieved its great standard of schooling and overall child care. There are not enough words to thank her for keeping the school afloat, unsalaried, and against all the odds.

## Donations can be made to:

**JHB School Blind, Low Vision**

**First National Bank, Melville**

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**Acc.-no.: 620 502 081 59**

Phone: 011 726 6529

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*We see your child's potential.*



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