

GONZAGA OVERSEAS AID

ZAMBIA 2018

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To all friends and supporters,

Re: End of year report

As we come towards the end of the year, it is time for me to let you know again what we got up to in Zambia this year, and of the wonderful things which happen when you least expect it.

This year we decided that there is so much going on in terms of libraries and schools and computer labs and micro finance, that it was time to part company with Habitat for Humanity and to go it alone. There was simply no way that we could continue to work on Habitat's building projects, and still keep all of the other projects going. So we decided to put all of our efforts into getting the best we could out of the computers and books and other resources which we had sent out to Zambia last year, and to concentrate on our library, micro-finance and schools projects.

In July 2017, we had delivered a massive 40-foot long steel shipping container full of books to Zambia, and those books were shared out among many schools. We found, however, that many of our Zambian teachers and schools were struggling to work with the books and resources, as they had never really had access to books before. As this was all new, we needed Irish teachers. Like a gift of God, they arrived. Included in our team this year, were four enthusiastic teachers and two educational psychologists .

Together with our Zambian partners, we spent some months planning a conference for the Zambian teachers, to introduce them to modern and novel ways of working with books and literacy. The educational team members devised entirely new teaching materials suitable for Zambia, and planned workshops and training sessions in literacy, learning to read with rhythm and rhyme, the use of flash-cards, classroom behaviour, fun ways to learn maths and even how to organise a small library and an introduction to translating simple books from English to the local language of Bemba. There was serious work done in preparation for the trip.

We planned our educational conference primarily in co-operation with Bornwell and Catherine Daka of Graceland School and with Percy Mwitwa of Youngnak

Christian School, so that when we arrived in Zambia, they had organised approximately 140 teachers from 24 local schools to attend the educational conference. It is perhaps a sign of the trust of these good people, that we were given a key to Youngnak Christian School and the freedom to come and go and to treat it as our own by day and by night, for the duration of our stay.

We were impressed by the enthusiasm of the teachers who came to our conference, giving up their holidays, to learn these new skills. They were all keenly aware of the importance of education for them and for their children and they gave themselves over fully to the course. Many schools had never had books before, so the chance to access books, and to have the training on how to use them and to pass on readings skills to their pupils, was incentive enough for many to make the journey. On top of this, we offered lunch to the teachers every day, which proved to be a major draw. It was, nonetheless, a reminder of the realities of where we were, that when we asked for suggestions as to what could be done to improve the course, many of the participants asked for more food, and so after day two, we also laid on a simple breakfast of bread rolls for the participants. Even as we were concentrating our efforts on literacy and learning, this was a reminder that we were based in a school in which quite a few children have already died of malnutrition.

The overall aim of our teachers' conference was to work with the teachers and librarians, not the school students, so that by the time we left Zambia we would leave behind some trained teachers and librarians who would themselves be well capable of passing on their newly acquired skills, not alone to their pupils, but also to other teachers. Using the classrooms of Youngnak Christian School in Chipulukusu as our base, we conducted intensive lectures, seminars and workshops while working in collaboration with selected Zambian teachers.

A particular development this year was the increased role of some of the Zambian teachers in what we were doing. One of the workshops ("Teaching with the use of Computers") was presented by two of the teachers from Youngnak Christian School, who had themselves only been taught these skills by one of our volunteers (John Keegan) last year, when we had delivered 18 laptop computers to set up a computer lab for the school. Another workshop (on the use of books in the classroom) was taught by some of the teachers from Graceland School, which is the school, which I have been supporting with books and materials the longest. As such, it was very heartening to see that these two schools were able to present top-class professional instruction in books and computers on a par with our Irish teachers, and that the model of training local Zambians the skills to pass on to others is already working.

A further most welcome development is that, the teachers' conference idea has not lapsed, and on the contrary, Youngnak Christian School is continuing to hold workshops and seminars to pass on their skills to other teachers in the area. The workshops which are most in demand, continue to be those dealing with books, and the use of computers in the classroom. Our dialogue with the schools is continuing and I am hoping to hold a further teachers' conference next year, so those who have the skills (or the laptops) to contribute, please get in touch.

We were also requested by our Zambian colleagues in the micro-finance project (where we make small loans to widows to start or expand a small business) to provide them with advice and training in "*financial literacy*". For this part of the venture, one of our volunteers (who has an accountancy degree) devised a simple training programme to introduce the basic precepts of financial planning, profit & loss, saving v borrowing, record-keeping, budgeting and money management.

The financial literacy seminars were run in conjunction with Rev. Pastor Francis Feruka and his Ubusomboshi Royal Ministries Church, who hosted us in his church hall, also in Chipulukusu. Using a programme of instruction devised by Anna, we spent a week with approximately 50 local business people, many of whom are beneficiaries of our micro finance scheme, and many more of whom hope to apply for a loan. An unexpected outcome of the course was that the business people shared experiences and ideas and formed groups and alliances to assist each other into the future. The presentation of the course encouraged discussion and the sharing of ideas and inventiveness among the group, so that by the end of the course, not alone did many of business people know new concepts and business skills, but they had also learnt new ways of thinking and of problem solving. As one lady said when thanking us at the end of the seminar "*Before you came to us we were struggling as if we were blind, but you have opened our minds*".

Since August, several of the participants in the financial literacy seminars have gone on to form new groups and to improve their businesses. Among the more innovative groups is the CARYM group who have come together to improve the skills and businesses of young men involved in trades such as carpentry and welding. They have been approved for a small loan to purchase an electric spindle machine, to be used for the manufacture of doors to a high standard, which will then be sold in the area with the aim of improving standards of construction, while at the same time providing training and work and income to young men. As this money was provided as a loan, it is anticipated that the money will be paid back within six months, so that it can be lent out again to the next group with a good business idea, but who just do not have access to the money to get it off the ground.

In addition to all of this, we also further developed our community library in Chipulukusu, which is located in the shipping container which we shipped out in 2017. We worked with the three volunteer librarians to improve the management and tracking of books in the library, and we bought some chairs locally for the library. The three volunteer librarians also participated in the teachers conference so that they, too, would become experts in books, teaching and literacy. To increase public awareness of the library services, we also arranged a joyous ceremony of thanks and celebration for having a library in the community, which involved music and traditional dancers and public announcements, and which attracted a large crowd.

Our second 40-foot shipping container of books left Ireland in June 2018, but did not in fact arrive in Zambia until after we had come home. While in Zambia we were able to arrange for the arrival of the container and the sharing out of the tons of books and school materials which it contained. We also arranged the site works and preparation of the plot of ground on which it now stands, where it will form another community library, this time in George Community. Here again, three volunteer librarians were identified and participated in the teachers' conference, in order to give them the skills to run the container community library in George. The transport of this container to Zambia was paid for by one very generous Irish supporter and the import of the container into Zambia was arranged by the kind and unstinting support of the Irish Ambassador to Zambia, Seamus O'Grady, who is an invaluable help in getting things done.

On Saturday 29th September 2018, the second container was delivered, and it is now sited in George Community, where it is shortly due to open as a second library. The tons of books and teaching materials which were delivered, are being shared out by Bornwell and Catherine Daka of Graceland School, as the second instalment of the Sister Grace Library. Now, this time, we have also trained and willing teachers waiting to accept those books and to show their students what they can do with books.

As the books and community libraries are so badly needed, one kind sponsor here in Dublin has bought a third shipping container, which is now sitting beside our warehouse in Glasnevin (also donated by a kind supporter) where we have started to fill it again with books. We need as many school books and children's books as we can get, so anyone who knows of a school or a library which is clearing out old books, please get in touch. I would hope that in a year or so, we can send this third container also out to Zambia, to add to the network of small libraries.

We also arranged for the final phase of the upgrading works to Niba Uwafye School, where last year we had replaced the leaking roof of the school and provided doors and windows. This year, we arranged for improvements in the walls (which had holes in them) increased security bars on the windows and doors and the provided additional toilets, so that this school now has a very basic infrastructure, which can support the children who rely on it as their only hope of education. With proper and safe structures now in place, this school will be able to fully participate in the book-sharing endeavours of our Sister Grace Library.

While in Chipulukusu, we also had many opportunities to catch up with old friends, but, in truth, it was simply not possible to meet up with everyone. Betina Mwansa's (2014) health is still improving, but she is still struggling to feed herself and her grandchildren. Moira Moloshi and Adam Baraka (2014) and her family continue to thrive. Adam Katubile, unfortunately, died within the last year. I visited Clara Chikasa in Kawama (2009) and found her to have qualified as an electrical engineer, which is a huge personal achievement. Her daughter, Mwai (who I knew as an infant, but who does not remember me at all) is now at school and doing well. Helen and Douglas (2015) are comfortable in their

Habitat house, and further good news is that Douglas has managed to get back to school.

Many of the former Habitat for Humanity staff called by to assist and support as they could, and it was great to meet up with Joyce Mbimbi, the social worker who has such a deep knowledge and understanding of the area. Michael Mubanga, the former driver for Habitat, was an invaluable help with his minibus. More than anyone else, Emmanuel Phiri has become an invaluable advisor and assistant in organising our microfinance endeavour (Zambian Development Support Foundation) on the ground, and he has also has taken charge of administering the community libraries and co-ordinating the building works in the schools. Emmanuel has become the first link we have with the community on the ground. He has become almost indispensable for nearly all that we do. And, of course, we still have Voster Tembo in Lusaka, whose experience and wise advice keeps the whole show on the road.

The story of 2018 could not be told without acknowledging again the selfless contribution of the volunteers who travelled to Zambia. These are the people with the skills, who made the whole programme work this year. They flew from Dublin through Ethiopia to the small local airport in Ndola, Zambia, only a few miles from Chipulukusu, where we stayed for two weeks. As always, we rented one of the local houses in Chipulukusu, where we lived for the time we were in Zambia, as the Zambians live, without water or electricity, showers, kitchens or toilets, but having the comfort of simple shelter and a space on the floor to sleep. Living like this, among our neighbours, is always a direct way to integrate and to show solidarity with those among whom we are working, even if it is not always easy to adapt. These are the people who gave up their summer and their time and who made the personal sacrifices to make a difference. What they have done has made a permanent improvement in many lives.

There is so much to tell, and so much more to plan for next year, that it is impossible to put all in a letter. However, for anyone who can assist in any way, (and particularly for anyone who might consider volunteering to come out to Zambia next year) with teaching teachers, with computers or even in vocational education of carpenters, plumbers or welders, or with business - we need your help. In materials, we need laptop computers, bookshelves for our libraries and of course money. All help and all assistance is very welcome.

The final thanks must go to all of you, to whom this letter is addressed and to my family and my friends here in Ireland, without whom, there would be nothing to tell in this letter. Without the support of you here in Ireland, there would be no library, no computers, no books, containers or a roof on Niba Uwafye School. Thanks to all of you, you have lifted hopes and lives in Zambia, and you have given me, a story to tell.

Yours Sincerely,

Michael Nugent.

THE TEACHERS' CONFERENCE IN CHIPULUKUSU 2018



Teachers' workshop on reading books to children



Group session with teachers in Youngnak Christian School Church

THE ZDSF FINANCIAL LITERACY SEMINAR IN CHIPULUKUSU 2018



Business people attending the financial literacy seminar



Graduate photograph of the Financial Literacy seminar

WORKS AT NIBA UWAFYE SCHOOL IN CHIPULUKUSU 2018



Works continuing inside Niba Uwafye School

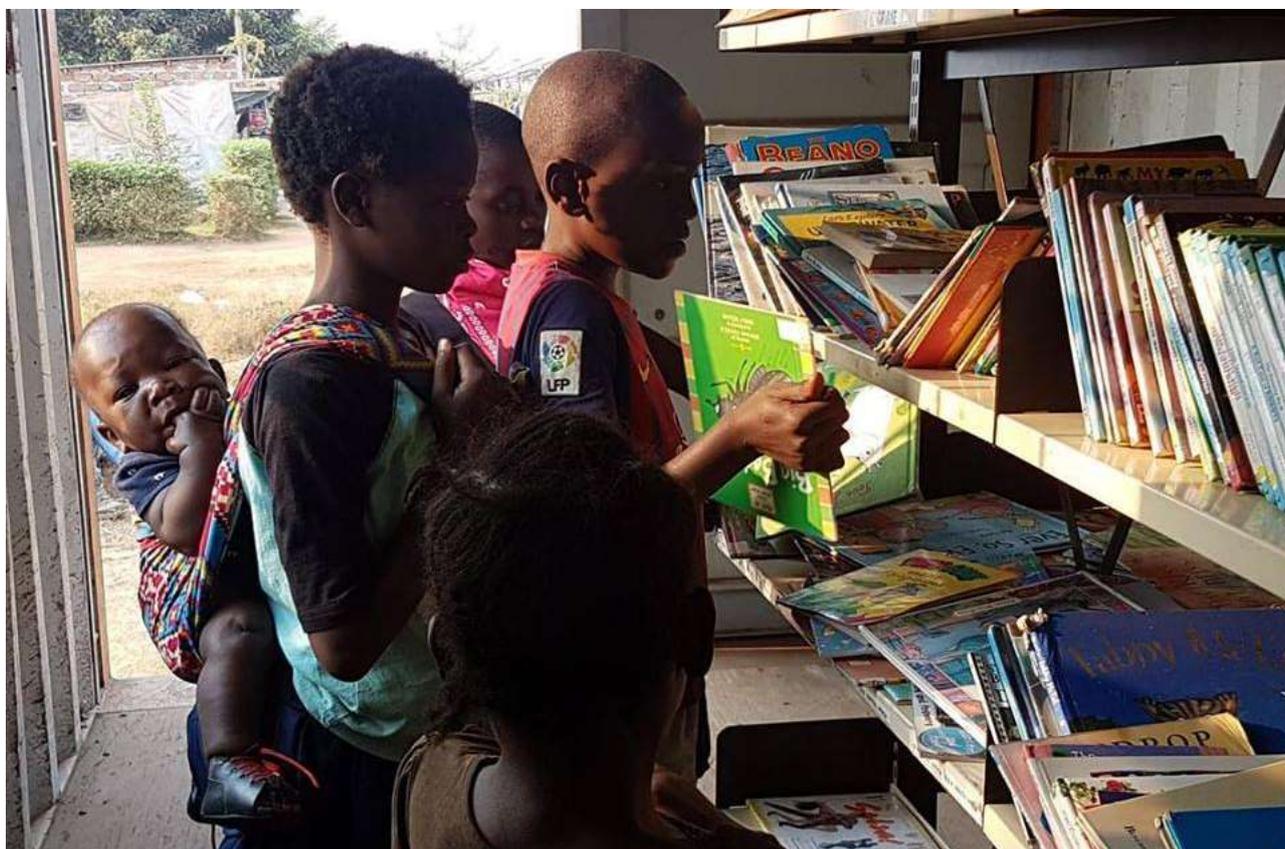


With Edward and Grace Chilekua and Emmanuel Phiri (ZDSF) and two teachers of Niba Uwafye School

THE CONTAINER COMMUNITY LIBRARY IN CHIPULUKUSU 2018



Celebrations outside the Chipulukusu container community library



Choosing a book inside the Chipulukusu container community library

OLD FRIENDS IN ZAMBIA 2018



Clara Chikasa (2009) and her daughter Mwai, show her qualification as an electrical engineer.



Helen and Douglas with Mapalo and Natasha and friends, proudly outside their Habitat (2015) house