

# True Vision Foundation

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Update – June 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010

## **There is great news from Zimbabwe (for once!)**

When the film went out, Sharon Thompson, who was born and brought up in Zimbabwe and now lives in the UK, got in touch with us to say she wanted to help in any way she could – including the possibility of going out to Zimbabwe herself. After meeting her and discussing all the work that needed to be done - visiting all the children who were featured in the film, setting up a



watertight distribution network so that the money donated by viewers could be securely spent and distributed, taking food and supplies to the children, sorting out their schooling and living conditions, having their health checked, etc - Sharon agreed to fly to Zimbabwe and spend five weeks of her own time (taking her small son with her!) and using minimal expenses to act on behalf of the True Vision Foundation. She has just returned from the trip, and her update below shows what an enormous amount she's achieved.

### **Esther & Tino**

My first stop when I arrived was to visit Esther and her sister Tino and deliver the food, clean water and supplies our local partner (and fantastic interpreter) Sekuru and I had bought in Harare for them. I'd also brought a bag of warm clothing kindly donated from friends in the UK, which they were extremely happy to receive. Both girls seemed to be in reasonable health, though had bad coughs and obviously needed a medical check-up.

Someone that the film-makers had left money with had already made arrangements for Esther to attend a school a bus ride away. However, this meant giving Esther's uncle the money for her daily bus fare, and there were

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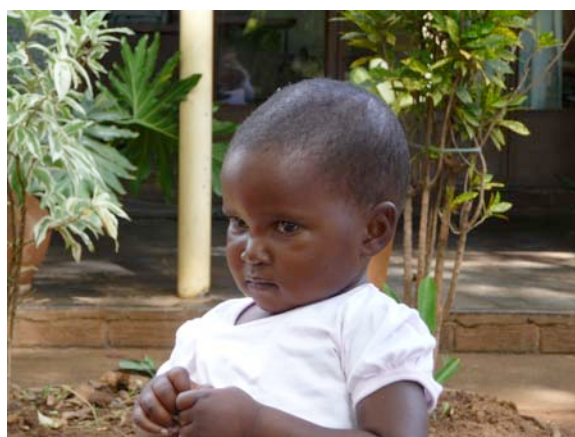
concerns about whether or not he would actually pass this onto her – if not, she would have no way of getting to school. On reflection, myself and Sekuru agreed that finding a home for the girls where they would be cared for properly would be the best thing for them; this was something we clearly needed to discuss with their uncle to see how he felt.



A few days later we went to visit the girls again, and this time brought them some blankets as they'd been sleeping on towels on the floor. Alarm bells rang when we found the two girls locked out of their tent, and not wearing any of their new clothes. When I asked them why, they said their uncle had locked the clothes away. They had also clearly not been given much of the food we'd brought previously. There was no sign of their uncle, who had apparently left

them behind while he went to church. Thankfully some very kind neighbours told us they kept an eye on the girls whenever they were left alone and would give them food and water.

Fortunately, when we visited the girls again a few days later, the uncle was there and agreed that Esther and Tino needed to be taken into a good home. He was struggling to support his own family and could not take on the burden of another two children. We immediately contacted SOS Children's Villages, and after a long process of trying to find space at one of the SOS homes, going through the proper procedures with social services, trying to arrange birth certificates to fulfill the pre-requisites of being accepted (we're madly working on getting this sorted out for all the children!), places were finally found for both Esther and Tino in a fantastic SOS home about two hours out of Harare. They have now been settled there for nearly three weeks! The home is a wonderful place. There are different houses, each run by a "mother" and is considered a 'family'. The premises are large, beautifully kept and include a kindergarten, school that all the children attend, sports fields, playground, gardens, vegetable patches, etc. Thanks to the generous donations of viewers, we were able to say the True Vision Foundation would sponsor them.



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The Director of SOS is obviously genuine in his determination to create a home environment for each child. He asked for as much information as possible about Esther and Tino's background and explained that they really encourage the children to keep in touch with any relatives they have, so that even though SOS is their 'new family', the children will always know where they came from. The Director asked that Sekuru bring the girls' uncle to the home as soon as possible so that he knows where it is and can visit and spend time with the girls. In fact, Sekuru took the uncle to visit last week, and the home will invite him to regular 'relative days' so he can be involved with Esther and Tino's development; the home will also take the girls to see their uncle and his family during school holidays. The Director is trying to arrange visits for Esther and Tino's older sister Yvette and her baby too, which means they will maintain contact with all their remaining family. During our tour the SOS Youth Worker explained that once the girls reach 18 they will be put forward to complete diplomas of their choice and set-up to become self sufficient in their own homes.

Esther particularly has taken immediately to the home. She couldn't stop smiling when we took her there, and I was amazed at how naturally she slipped into her own role within minutes of being at SOS. She is a very special girl, and there has been a real transformation in her. See the pictures of her smiling happily!



The very sad news, however, is that we took both girls to have full medical checks, and this revealed that Esther is HIV+, but Tino, fortunately, is not. You will remember that their mother died of AIDS, so it was a great fear that both girls would be HIV+ too. We are currently looking into the cost of paying for Esther's medical treatment over the long term. At the moment she is in very good health and showing no signs of illness and we hope that with the right medication she will stay healthy for many, many years to come.

## Grace & Michelle

Next we went to see Grace and Michelle, who are still living with their father Elliot. Grace was attending a non-fee church school for a few lessons each morning as Elliot could not afford to send her to the local high school. Michelle is

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attending the local government primary school, and was desperately in need of a new school uniform. The girls and their father are living in cramped conditions in a house with extended family. Elliot was having trouble paying his share of the rent, and so was in arrears and struggling for money.

Over the next week we sorted out things for Grace and Michelle. I enrolled Grace in Form 1 (the first year of high school) at a good local high school. After speaking to the school Principal I managed to negotiate with each teacher to give her extra lessons so she can catch up on all she's missed, something that will be funded by the donations. Next stop was taking Grace and Michelle to buy new school uniforms, including shoes and sports wear, plus all the books and stationery they need for school. Both girls were so excited about getting their new uniforms, and Grace was really looking forward to getting started in her new school. They finally felt like normal girls again and told me "no one will laugh at us anymore..."



A week or so later I went back to visit the girls, and found that Grace had been doing exceptionally well, considering she'd only been in her new school for a week. She had borrowed books from her classmates and was catching up on notes for the classes she missed in first and second terms. I was so impressed by what she'd managed to do, and the Headmaster was full of praise, saying she's is a very

hard worker. In fact, the Headmaster has taken it upon himself to do some of the extra lessons for her, and is following her progress closely.

I also went to the primary school where Michelle is enrolled to pay her outstanding school fees so she could continue without being afraid they would tell her to go home. The school is very big, with around 2,500 students. The buildings are well maintained, the students behave well and the Deputy Head, who I spoke to, seems determined to keep standards high. Later we met with Michelle's teacher who advised that she is a year behind and her performance was below average. This is mainly due to the hard circumstances she has at home and her mother leaving them. Again, I negotiated extra support and lessons for Michelle each day so she can catch up and achieve the results we

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know she is capable of. When I explain all this to her she had tears in her eyes and told Sekuru how thankful she was for this new opportunity.

After dropping Grace off home one day after school, I noticed she seemed quite depressed and she started crying. She opened up and explained that her father, Elliot, was very ill and not eating and that she was terrified he was going to die and leave them orphans. We went to see him and found him in bed. He said he thought he had TB, and had lost weight. We sent him for medical tests, and sadly it has been confirmed that he is HIV+. We are now in the process of getting him registered so he can receive treatment, something we will help fund, as it is obviously in Grace & Michelle's best interests to do everything we can to help their father.

Everything is now up-to-date with both the girls' schools in terms of payments – fees, extra lessons, uniforms, etc, and we have set up a system (via KPMG) for paying their fees in the future. We also paid for Grace to be included on a long weekend school camping trip recently, with all sorts of lessons on survival outdoors, plus fun treasure hunts, etc. We thought this would be a great way for her to make new friends and get to know some of the older girls in her school too.

## Obert & Gogo



When we arrived, Obert was out at school but his grandmother Gogo was home, and she was so happy to see us. We gave her food, clean water, other supplies such as blankets and warm clothes. She was so happy and thankful that she cried.

Our plan had been to then go to see Obert at school, but when we went back through the village we were stopped by some officials and told that we had to get permission from them to be there. Sekuru and I thought it best we did not put Gogo, Obert or the community at any risk of trouble so we ended the visit early and headed back to Harare. Fortunately, Sekuru's wonderful character meant he could easily talk to the men (it was obvious that my presence provoked them) so we decided Sekuru would return the following week to sort things out for Obert and Gogo.

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After considering the possible ways we could help Obert, Gogo and their loyal community, the best solution seemed to be to improve his school (which he loves) as much as possible. We thought that supplying the school with much needed stationery would be a big help, but also giving the school fertilizer and seeds meant they could have their own food growing program – so each child would then be getting at least one good meal a day while at school.



So, Sekuru and I spent a day collecting all sorts of books and stationary supplies for the school (including chalk and blackboard dusters, which were in very short supply), plus lots of fertilizer and seeds. We also bought new uniforms for Obert and his friend Jonah. Sekuru went to the school last week and had a very successful trip. They were thrilled with everything we brought for them, and the headmaster has written us a

lovely thank you letter. He has also flagged up other things the schools need, such as new buildings, a borehole and urgent assistance with school fees, so these are things we may be able to fund in future if we are able to keep donations coming in.

Obert was very excited to get his new school uniform and, like everyone else, was extremely grateful for all the books and stationery we provided.

We are also looking into the possibility of sending Obert to a good boarding school to develop his unique intellectual gift – which is something he has said he would love to do. We have yet to establish whether this is something Gogo would be happy with, and if so, we could look into the possibility of moving her to a home near the school. We will update on this situation as soon as possible.



## How donations are being distributed

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Before Sharon left for Zimbabwe we had been in contact with KPMG accountants in Harare. We needed to set up an absolutely secure network via which we could send donations from the UK to Zimbabwe, which would then be distributed directly to pay school fees and medical expenses, and to buy supplies like food and clothes and other necessities for the children and their families.

Sharon met with representatives from KPMG while she was there and managed to work out a good deal so that they will manage a bank account for us, and (under instruction from the Trustees of the True Vision Foundation) will make these payments for us and keep detailed accounts. Sekuru will check on all the children for us regularly.



New rooves for some of the classrooms at Obert's school have already been constructed

## Ongoing donations

Thank you so much to everyone who has donated money to our Zimbabwe's Forgotten Children account. We have had such a big response and the money

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raised has paid for everything that Sharon and Sekuru have achieved so far, and there is still enough to enable us to carry on supporting the children for a little while longer.

However, we really want to be able to support these wonderful kids until they reach adulthood, and for that we really need your long term commitment... So, if you have not already done so, please sign up to donate to the fund regularly. Any money that is raised over and above what we need to help Esther, Tino, Grace Michelle and Obert will be used to help other children in their area (for example by supporting Obert's school). Our aims are:

- To support all the children until they finish school (pay school fees, medical expenses, buy food, clothing and other necessities, and to keep sponsoring Esther and Tino in their home
- Continue to pay for the development of Obert's school, which may including building new classrooms, paying for a borehole, more fertilizer, seeds etc
- Pay medical expenses where necessary for other members of the children's families

To give you an idea of what your donation could achieve:-

- £2 A month pays for Computer lessons for Grace
- £3 A month pays for extra lessons for Obert
- £4 A month puts a 10 children child through School at Obert's primary School
- £5 A month over a year pays for a pit latrine
- £5 A month pays for a term for Michelle at her Primary School
- £8 A month pays for extra lessons for Michelle
- £10 A month over a year will roof a classroom
- £15 A month pays the fees for Grace at her secondary school
- £15 a month pays for a year pays for a borehole for the school
- £20 A month covers Esther at SOS children's village
- £30 A month pays for stationery supplies needed by Obert's School
- £30 A month pays for anti-retrovirals for Esther

If you would like to make a donation, or set up a standing order, please go the [Donation](#) page