

On my recent trip to South Africa to visit my family I couldn't resist travelling back to Zimbabwe to visit all the kids again and make sure all our hard work was progressing as we hoped.

Esther & Tino

During this visit the big difference for me was Esther – she has matured so much! She can understand English now and speaks it very well so communication with her was easier. She is extremely astute and asked clear and honest questions which took Sekuru and I by surprise. It was wonderful to talk directly with her and it became apparent that Esther is much more aware of her history now; as her mind develops she seems to be trying to put pieces of the puzzle together, and I guess our visit brought up all the questions she had been thinking about. Sekuru and I answered her questions as gently and honestly as we could and we believe we left her satisfied, for now, with our response. Esther is wonderfully curious about life outside Zimbabwe and has asked that one day she can visit other countries, like South Africa and the UK, to meet all the people who have helped her.



At the same time as visiting Esther and Tino we saw Blessed, who is the son of Yvette (Esther & Tino's older sister who ended up on the streets, pregnant at only 16). Blessed is now around 20 months, he is small for his age but looked very healthy and content. His house mother said he was severely malnourished when he arrived at SOS, hence his small build. Unfortunately Yvette left the school she was accepted into, and has gone back to the streets. After several attempts to help her with no success I'm afraid we have now lost contact with Yvette, and although this is disappointing for Esther who asked after her, we explained to her that we can only wait for Yvette to want us to find her again.

Tino was just as moody and cute as ever but opened up quite quickly, especially when we got the camera out. She looked great!! She is still very attached to her house mother, but is happy and laughs all the time. Tino has taken a surprisingly big interest in Blessed and apparently goes next door to his house to play with him often. Esther is doing exceptionally well in school! She showed me all her books with pride and has every right to be – straight A's all the way!! I know she is way behind for her age and is only just beginning but if she carries on, she will surely be chosen to go onto the SOS International University in Ghana 1 day.

Grace & Michelle

We have recently been having some challenges with Grace who, in all honesty, is simply a young teenage girl struggling with the same issues that any teenage girl goes through. However, in Grace's case there is also her traumatic past to deal with and as much as we all want her to be happy, this is something that cannot be avoided. When I spent time with the girls, we identified how conflicted Grace is about whether to continue at boarding school or attend a day school near her home. It doesn't help that her mother (who abandoned them when they were very young) pops in and out of their lives sporadically, sending the girls into a spiral of confusion with empty promises.

We have offered Grace the option of returning to her local school if she wishes and maybe even attending counselling which, for now, she has chosen not to take up. However we will do whatever we can to support both Grace & Michelle, and with their maid and friend, Regina, to look out for them we will continue to monitor their situation closely. Since my return Grace has written a letter which shows a wonderful improvement in her focus and we hope this will continue, in the knowledge that help is there, if she wishes to take it.



ZIMBABWE'S
forgotten
CHILDREN



Michelle is growing up to be a lovely girl, albeit shy and quiet. Unfortunately there has been little improvement in Michelle's school performance last term, so we decided, together, to find another teacher to try and help Michelle. Our search has led us to a lady who lives close by and specializes in helping children who are struggling to keep up in school. Regina has also been trying to help and she suggested she gets more involved in the education side of things, maybe attending some extra lessons with Michelle so she knows what is going on and can go over it with her again at home.

We have asked Regina to look into renting an allotment for them so they can start growing their own food. This is something Grace and Michelle have shown interest in since we first met them as they are practical, creative girls so we want to help them in developing whatever ideas will facilitate their future sustainability.

Obert and Gogo

Obert is doing better than we could ever have hoped. I told him how proud we all are of him and to keep up the great work. When I asked him if there was anything he needed, his only request was for a novel to read in his spare time – brilliant!! We have since found him some great books to read; old classics, African adventure and of course, English literature, which we found Obert has a particular affinity for. He also spoke about how wonderful it was to see his friends, Evans and Jonathan and obviously Gogo during his long school holidays. His father spent Christmas with Obert and Gogo, and he told his father of his dream to become a doctor. I said we would look at what subjects he should do next year (the start of his O'level syllabus) that could set him on the right path. I hope we can give more attention and support to Obert this year – it is obvious that he is aware of the help being received at his old school because of him and is very grateful for it, he asked that we keep sponsoring his friends and I said we would - as far as possible.

We have now arranged for Gogo to have both a day maid and a night maid. This may sound unnecessary however Gogo is getting old now and she has explained that without Obert there she gets frightened staying alone in her hut at night. She said she dreams of snakes coming to get her in the night and she cannot go out to get water for herself because of her bad dreams. Having two maid means we have helped two very poor women in her community with small jobs, whilst also giving this lovely old lady a sense of security and support.

We have recently had her hut re-thatched as bad weather caused holes and will be supplying her with clay to re-do her floor. Gogo does not want to move from where she is and treasures her simple life, so who are we to try and change what makes her happy. As always she was extremely grateful for all the help she is receiving and asked that we pass on her sincere gratitude to all the donors who have allowed for her life to be improved so drastically.



Which brings us to say...

Thank you from all of us to the very special people who have, and continue, to donate money to Esther, Tino, Grace, Michelle, Obert and Gogo. We have committed to helping these children have a better future and we cannot fulfill our commitment without your non-stop support.

We have a long way to go and even though big changes have happened, we cannot sustain this without you! They have been given a wonderful opportunity after much trauma - it would be heartbreaking to tell them it cannot continue because people have stopped giving.

Donations have dwindled beyond hope – we understand these are very hard times, we really do! However please remember that these young children's lives are harder than most things we could dream of going through, without a mum or dad, food, water, health, education, hope, support – they are completely lost and have no chance of a future unless someone helps them! Please be that person... Thank you!