

Covid-19: Friends of Amasango response

I usually write the newsletter from my sitting room but this time it is slightly different. My sitting room hasn't changed but the outside world has. For all of us, both near and far, we are faced with a set of circumstances many of us will be unfamiliar with. We might be thrust together with family that we usually see come and go in the normal fashion of life, or we might find ourselves alone without the option of meeting those we would normally. We are experiencing an unexpected pause to our normal. Of course for many on the front line this has brought life sharply into focus – both in very obvious roles and those that are in the background keeping the cogs turning. We are, no doubt, all very thankful.

But we are not alone. Covid-19 does not take any interest in borders and therefore our attention has been drawn to the plight of our students at Amasango in Grahamstown. Schools have been closed there for a similar amount of time to here in the UK and as we have heard about provisions here for children and young people who receive Free School Meals there is no such provision in South Africa.

I spoke with Linda, the Principal, a week or so ago and all they could do in the time they had was to offer the students and past pupils attending high school the food parcels they would normally get each weekend. This will clearly not see them through and it is a concern to us all how families will manage over the coming days, weeks and months. Our concerns do not stop there. The students at Amasango come from the most marginalised corners of South African society. Stability in families is either fragile or chaotic. Home, wherever that may be, can be, and often is, a violent place and as tensions rise owing to shortages of employment and food we only hope and pray for the safety of all concerned. The pastoral support that Amasango provides on top of the day to day teaching must not be underestimated. Meeting physical needs alone goes a long way but mental and emotional well-being is at the heart of the mission of the school and the Friends of Amasango. There is little we can do apart from be ready for when the students return to school in due course. We cannot know when this will be but we can prepare for what might be a very intense re-entry into normal day to day activities.

So, as I sit here and write this now, I ask that you will consider your contribution to the work of Friends of Amasango and the staff and students in Grahamstown. Please include them in your prayers

- For safety
- For security
- For nourishment
- For courage
- For a safe return to school in the future

If you are also able to contribute financially, please know that we will use this wisely and generously to support the students in this time of great uncertainty. www.amasango.org.uk

Thank you, Rebecca (Trustee)

Thank you for your ongoing support for the students and staff at Amasango. Your donations make a huge difference to the lives of many families in Grahamstown. www.amasango.org.uk

Kate Mier (Trustee) Report from visiting Amasango in October

It was wonderful to spend a week at Amasango School last October. I have visited and volunteered at Amasango regularly since 2008. This time Lynda Barr, a friend from my church joined me.

We led an Assembly about the Cross of Nails Community centred on Coventry Cathedral. Amasango is an International Cross of Nails (ICON) School in recognition of the work the school does in reconciling young people into their society, healing the wounds of history, and working for peace. I am a vicar in Coventry Diocese, and my churches belong to the Cross of Nails community, so this connection is very special to me. The Cathedral in Makhanda (Grahamstown) and the Anglican theological college are also members of the International Community of the Cross of Nails.

Amasango was in good heart: it was great to meet up with Linda Ngamlana, the staff and volunteers. Former pupils Misiwe and Siyanda were still working at school as Teacher Aides, supporting and inspiring the learners.

Highlights of the visit included;

- Time in the needlework room. This has developed so much in recent years with children sewing, creating beadwork, fabric painting, and rag rugging. One young lady who designed and created a fabulous beaded apron surely has a bright future.
- Supporting English lessons and listening to learners read one to one. One learner made up her own tune and SANG the story she was reading to me!
- Several Grade 5 girls clearly wholeheartedly enjoying being at Amasango. When I admired the several plastic coiled bracelets a girl was wearing, she took one off and gave it to me as a gift – what lovely generosity!
- Lunch with Nkosinathi, a former student I know, who had just completed his matric exams and hoped to start at Rhodes University in January.
- Being able to give one to one support to a 13 year old boy who was very disruptive in class. His spoken English is excellent but he could barely read or write. He appreciated the personal attention.
- The inevitable work for volunteers of tidying the library! It's like painting the Forth Bridge, a never-ending task – but that's because the learners use the books and really appreciate this facility. It was great to see Grade 7 enjoying using the library as a group.
- A meeting of the parents committee to elect several new members – it was encouraging to see that there are parents and grandparents who are supporting their children in this way.

Amasango School continues, under very demanding conditions, to educate and support severely disadvantaged young people, bringing opportunity and hope into their lives. Lynda and I felt so privileged to have been able to play a small part in its life.



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