

The Friends of Amasango

The Friends of Amasango is a UK charity, no. 1116268, which supports the Amasango Career School, for learners with extrinsic barriers to learning, including some street children, at Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. This support largely involves the provision of money and volunteers.

Grahamstown, aka Makhanda

Grahamstown is a small city of roughly 120,000 people, about eighty miles (130 km.) north-east of Port Elizabeth. Whilst it is home to Rhodes University, and has a renowned annual arts festival, there are few opportunities for employment for the majority, and thus unemployment rates can be as high as 70%.

The school

The Amasango Career School was founded by Mrs. Jane Bradshaw in 1995, to help those children who, through no fault of their own, had missed out on mainstream education at the usual age. The school, which is now supported by the provincial department of education, takes in boys and girls and attempts to accelerate their learning so that they can eventually move on to local high schools and catch up with their peers.

The school is currently still housed in inadequate old railway offices, but it is hoped that a new school site and buildings will eventually be provided.

Pupils are nowadays referred to the school from other schools or by the social services, and are typically aged between 8 and 18 years. Many have had little or no prior experience of schools due to a variety of challenging circumstances. At the school, the Friends of Amasango provides food, basic clothing and additional local staff who unlike the teachers are not funded by the Department of Education. The pupils are given love and support from those that work at the school. This is much needed.

As is the norm in South Africa, the school has a Christian ethos and the vast majority of members of staff and supporters are Christians, although learners of any religious orientation are welcomed. To continue to ameliorate some of the challenges faced by the learners once they have passed their grade seven exams (the end of primary level schooling), the Friends of Amasango supports those who move on to mainstream high schools with groceries and uniforms for as long as they continue in full-time education. Others stay at the school to continue with training in pottery and there are also plans to extend this option in due course to include hairdressing, welding, woodwork and catering.

Economic conditions in Grahamstown are not favourable for young men and women; despite this, an increasing number of Amasango learners have moved from the school into full time employment.

Volunteering

The charity seeks to facilitate volunteers who would like to help in the school for varying lengths of time according to their availability and to the school's needs. Volunteers help in a variety of ways according to their aptitude and the school's needs but most frequently as classroom assistants.

The Friends of Amasango are delighted that you are interested in volunteering and wish to make you aware of the above and of the following:

1 Under UK Charity Commission rules, all volunteers must have a valid DBS certificate as they will be dealing, at times unsupervised, with vulnerable young people. This can be arranged if you do not already have one.

2 You are going of your own free will by your own arrangement and at your own cost in all respects including travel, accommodation and subsistence. You will receive no pay, honorarium or other compensation. You agree not to hold the Trustees liable for the partial or total failure of any of these arrangements or for any loss, accident or medical condition that may arise directly or indirectly from your volunteering.

3 The school, and to an extent the country, is 'developing' in nature so you can expect all sorts of physical and emotional hazards – uneven paving and flooring, barbed wire, lack of seating, and children who may sometimes be traumatised, violent and/or on drugs, etc. (Though you are not expected to take any responsibility for handling such complex situations within the school) Thus, you must accept what you find and cannot expect more – the principle under both UK and South African law of *volenti non fit injuria* or 'no injury is done to a person who consents' applies.

4 While en route to or in South Africa you will be entirely responsible for your own welfare. To that end you must take out and show evidence of good quality travel insurance which must include cover for medical costs.

5 While at the school you will be under the general supervision of the Principal and staff of the school (who are employees of the Department of Education of the Eastern Cape Province) but will frequently be left unattended and must be prepared to show resilience and initiative.

6 If you are accepted as a volunteer we will provide you with a detailed information sheet *Advice for Amasango Volunteers* which gives general guidance on travelling to and living in South Africa, on the operation of the school and its staff, and on the standards which are expected of volunteers. It includes an agreement to report back and support the Friends of Amasango on your return.

Our volunteer coordinator is: Charl Oosterhuizen, PO box 217, 42 Triangle West, Bristol, BS8 1ES.

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Please don't hesitate to phone for any further information. I would be very happy to hear from you and to help in any way I can.
