

Hays in South Africa

August 2020



29 August 2020

Dear Friends

Greetings from David, Janenne and Rachel. Welcome to our August newsletter.

Time for an update since our last newsletter three months ago. Our May newsletter provided information about the impact on our activities as a result of the national lockdown due to the coronavirus. Things have continued much the same for most of the last three months, with things beginning to change in the last two weeks.

It appears that South Africa has passed the peak of infections, which has allowed for a relaxing of the lockdown restrictions. We are now able to leave the village for more than just grocery shopping. In the last couple of weeks, we have been able to go out on our day off. We have had a trip to the beach and a visit to the new museum at the site where Nelson Mandela was captured in 1962. In the last week, we have been able to meet in person with our Life Groups - the small groups we meet with weekly in association with our church. So much better than Zoom. Nearly all the children are now back at school but are still not allowed to leave the village other than going to school. You can read more in the COVID-19 update below.

While South Africa has passed the peak of infections, we pray that there will not be a second wave of infections like there has been in some other countries.

All of our children and staff have remained safe from COVID-19. For that, we are thankful, and we pray we all continue to remain safe.

In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, O LORD, will keep me safe.

Psalms 4:8

With the children returning to school, we now have an opportunity for a bit of a break over the next couple of weeks. Janenne and David will have a five-day break next week. Rachel will have a five-day break along with Petra (our Australian volunteer) the following week. We will not be able to go anywhere, so will still be at home, but we should be able to have some time out during the days.

In a normal year, we would have had two German volunteers join us this past week and be staying for a year. The two German volunteers who arrived in August last year returned early to Germany, prior to the commencement of lockdown in March. With the ongoing international travel restrictions, it is likely that it will be August next year before we again have German volunteers. With so much uncertainty about future travel, we do not have any prospective volunteers enquiring to come before the middle of next year. This means that when Petra leaves in December we will have no residential volunteers for at least six months. The longest gap we have had before with no volunteers is three weeks.

Throughout this time of COVID-19, we know that it is the Lord who has sustained us, and He will continue to do so. We are thankful for all of you who pray for us. Prayer is powerful. We were recently encouraged by the following quote from pastor and author Paul Chappell.

Storms can bring fear, cloud judgment, and create confusion. Yet God promises that as you seek Him through prayer, He will give you wisdom to know how to proceed. The only way you will survive the storm will be on your knees.

In addition to our normal newsletter content, we are sending you a letter on behalf of SIM Australia. Please find a copy of the letter enclosed.

Don't forget we love to hear from you! Please keep in touch and share what is happening in your life, your family and how we can pray for you.

With our love

David, Janenne & Rachel

COVID-19 Update

Our last newsletter was sent just before South Africa move from lockdown level 4 to level 3 (after initially starting in late March at level 5). We have remained at level 3 for nearly three months. We moved to level 2 last week. But it has been a bit of a rollercoaster ride with respect to school.

With the change to level 3 at the beginning of June, schools began to reopen. Initially, it was only grades 7 and 12. Grade 7 is the final year of primary school and grade 12 is the all-important matriculation year. The government's plan was for half to return on 6 July and the remainder on 3 August. However, as COVID-19 cases in South Africa began to increase rapidly towards the end of June, these dates were delayed, and schools closed again completely for a period of time. So home-schooling has continued for much longer and much more extensively than we had expected. Some of the children who attend a "model-C" high school have been able to access online lessons using our computer lab.

Children in the senior primary grades who attend a "model-C" primary school have been provided lesson materials sent to the village via email. These still need to be printed, gone through with the children and then sent back to the school.

The community schools have not provided any lesson materials, so the team has been responsible for finding appropriate lesson material using online resources.

There has been continual uncertainty about who would be going back to school when. All of this has put a great deal of strain and stress on the children and the team here.



Printing, collating and putting worksheets into packs for our primary school kids.

Under level 3 we remained mostly confined to the iKhethelo village grounds. The children have only left the village when they have attended school. Those who have not attended school have not been outside the village at all. Personally, we had only been going out once a week for grocery shopping.

With the change to level 2, we went to the beach at Durban on our day off last week. The beaches are still closed for swimming. However, we were able to have a relaxing walk along the promenade of Durban's "Golden Mile" and eat lunch at a cafe that was open. Now that restaurants and cafes can open (with restrictions), it is sad to see that so many have not survived the lockdown and are no longer in business. The economic impact of this lockdown has been devastating for so many, and it is the poorest that have been most impacted.

Yesterday on our day off we had a day trip out and went for a drive to see the new museum at the site where Nelson Mandela was captured in 1962, prior to his 27-year imprisonment. When we first visited iKhethelo in 2014, another SIM member took us to visit the old museum at this site. We found it very interesting and informative. There is a wonderful sculpture of Nelson Mandela. Since then we have regularly taken international volunteers to visit the museum. Over the last few years, we have watched slow progress as the new museum was being built. Yesterday we took Petra and it was wonderful to finally see the expanded displays in the new museum.

The impact of COVID-19 in Africa has been somewhat behind most of the western world. Early on, South Africa appeared to be faring very well compared to Australia, which has fared very well compared to Europe and the US. By July, South Africa had become the country in the world with fifth-highest total COVID-19 cases. South Africa was exceeding 10,000 new cases per day and for a couple of weeks in July, it was over 13,000 new cases per day. It was this surge that led to the schools being closed again.

Things have changed since the beginning of August. New cases have been declining and are now about 2,000 new cases per day. Active cases have dropped from over 170,000 in late July to under 80,000 now. It appears that South Africa has passed the peak of infections. This has allowed for relaxing of the lockdown to level 2. We pray that South Africa does not see a second wave of infections.

Nearly all our children have returned to school this week. The rest return for the first time next week. Many of the children are only attending school part-time, as overcrowded schools need to meet social distancing guidelines, so they are staggering attendance. This means we only have between a quarter and a third of the children at home on any single school day.

The church we attend in Hillcrest continues to have church services and prayer meetings online. So we have continued to have our own Sunday morning church services at iKhethelo. We continue with weekly Bible studies in the village. The older kids are missing Friday night youth group at church.



Petra at the sculpture of Nelson Mandela at "The Capture Site"

Photography Prize

David gives photography lessons to some of the teenagers. Over the last couple of years, one of the girls has developed a passion for photography and has entered a photography competition for high school students, held by one of the most prestigious private schools in South Africa. Last year she won a prize and attended a special prize-giving presentation, where she got to meet the professional photographers who judged the competition. She heard firsthand from the judges why they awarded prizes to particular photos. Her photos were included in a special photographic exhibition.

She entered several photos again this year and also won a prize. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 there was no prize-giving or public exhibition. Here she is with her prize certificate and a few of her photos from this year's competition.



Spiritual Life Conference

A highlight of the year for us is the SIM Spiritual Life Conference (SLC) that is held annually in late June/early July. This is an opportunity for all SIM workers in South Africa to come together for four days of fellowship, teaching, prayer and encouragement. While we could not meet in person this year, we did have a virtual SLC over a couple of days. Meetings were via Zoom and teaching sessions were streamed on YouTube. We missed meeting in person very much but were still greatly encouraged by our virtual participation.

A Fresh Coat of Paint

We love bright colours at iKhethelo. Each of the buildings is painted a bright colour. Over time the colours fade. A company in Durban recently donated paint to redo a couple of the children's cottages. Cottage 5 is now a beautiful bright green and cottage 7 is a bright blue.



Youth Day

June 16th is a public holiday in South Africa commemorating the start of the Soweto Riots of 1976, sparked off by a government edict that all instruction in black schools would be delivered in Afrikaans.

The iconic picture of Hector Pieterse, a black schoolchild shot by the police in Soweto near Johannesburg during a peaceful protest march, brought home the brutalities of the Apartheid regime to many people within and outside of South Africa. In the weeks that followed over 700 people - mostly youth - were killed.



Youth Day could be a conflict-ridden date, but instead it serves to remind South Africa of the importance of its youth and brings across the message that something like the Soweto riots should never happen again.

Youth Day is celebrated at iKhethelo with fun activities, including sports, games, a talent show and a party.





For those who pray:

Praise God:

- all at iKhethelo have remained safe from coronavirus
- that South Africa has passed the peak of infection for construction of our new outdoor area prior to lockdown

Please pray:

- for continued protection over the village from coronavirus
- that there is no second wave of infections in South Africa
- for our five grade 12 children who are sitting their trial matriculation exams over the next two week, and will be sitting the final exams between 5 November and 12 December
- for strength, endurance and patience during this challenging time

Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.

James 1:27



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Our website: www.HaysInSouthAfrica.com

SIM website: www.sim.org.au

Our mailing address is:

David, Janenne & Rachel Hay
PO Box 290
Hillcrest, KZN 3650
South Africa