

Hays in South Africa

June 2021



'Take up the cause of the fatherless'
Isaiah 1:17

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Dear Friends

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

It will be no surprise that the coronavirus pandemic continues to have a major impact on us and our ministry at iKhethelo Children's Village. While living with the impact has been challenging, we are in a very good place in terms of our emotional, physical and spiritual health. We are amazed (but shouldn't really be) at how the Lord has given us strength and comfort through this time of COVID. It has also been a time of real growth in relationships amongst staff here at iKhethelo.

One significant piece of news for you our supporters is that we will not be returning to Australia later this year as planned for our next period of Home Assignment. This has been a difficult decision to make, but after much prayer and consultation, we know the Lord is calling us to extend our current term into 2022. You can read more about this below.



Children Outside our Cottage

Please continue to pray for our son/brother Andrew. His cancer has remained stable, which is what his oncologist hoped for at this time. He will start another 10 weeks of chemotherapy towards the end of July.

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

When we wrote our last newsletter, we had just passed the second wave of Coronavirus infection in South Africa. After a few months of relatively stable numbers of new infections, South Africa is now in a third wave. The daily new cases are still below the peaks of the first and second waves, but are expected to soon surpass those levels.

We enjoyed the relative freedom of level 1 lockdown for a couple of months. Level 1 is the lowest of 5 levels, but still requires wearing masks in public, adhering to social distancing, and restrictions on some activities. We could attend church in person, though with reduced numbers. A few weeks ago, the lockdown was raised to level 3, which meant we could no longer go out to church and resumed our own services in the village.

With cases continuing to rise dramatically, South Africa has gone to level 4 lockdown this week. Level 4 is significantly more restrictive, so the village is now closed again to all visitors, and no one is able to go out unnecessarily.

We are thankful that all at iKhethelo have remained safe from COVID. However, with the high number of cases in South Africa, everyone knows a family member or friend that has had COVID. Quite a few of our SIM colleagues here in South Africa have had COVID, including one who spent several weeks in ICU on high flow oxygen. Thankfully, he is now recovering well.

The vaccination program in South Africa began in late February. Initially, only health workers were being vaccinated. After two months, nearly half a million health workers were vaccinated and vaccination started rolling out to the general population, commencing with the older age groups and other high-risk categories, especially those living in communities. We applied for vaccination to be made available for all those at iKhethelo, but we have been told that because children are not considered high-risk, we would not be included at this time. That may change with the new Delta variant.

Now that vaccination is available to the general population, over the last six weeks, nearly 3 million have received either a single-dose vaccine or their first dose of a two-dose vaccine. That is about 5% of the population. Currently, only those over 60 have been eligible to receive or register to receive the vaccine. David is registered, but to yet vaccinated. Janenne will soon be able to register. As yet, we do not know when Rachel might be able to register.

School

For most of this year, almost all our children returned to school full time. We had a small number that continued to attend only part-time and doing home school on the other days.



We have had several new children come to iKhethelo this year. One of the new boys started attending a special needs school that a few of our children attend. However, he was not coping, which resulted in some behavioural issues. Janenne has now been home-schooling him for three hours each morning over the last month. With the love and individual attention she has been able to provide, we have seen incredible progress in his learning and behaviour. David has enjoyed time helping develop his fine motor skills with construction toys. Rachel also continues to be involved in home-schooling.

With the move this week to lockdown level 4, all schools have now closed again. The two-week winter school holidays were due to start in a couple of weeks, so the government has brought forward the start of the school holidays to this week. Depending on the effectiveness of the more restrictive lockdown to curb the increase in COVID cases, the beginning of term 3 may be brought forward.



Volunteers, Home Assignment and Visa Extension

We have often written in our newsletters about the international volunteers who come and donate the gift of time and experience to help us at iKhethelo. In a normal year, this would include a couple of volunteers who come as part of a German volunteer program and spend a year with us. When COVID reached South Africa in March last year, the two German volunteers who arrived in August 2019 returned home early. At the same time, a volunteer from the UK also left. We were grateful that Pertra from Australia was able to stay with us until the end of last year.

When we sent our newsletter in August last year, we knew that we were not getting any volunteers from Germany for 2020/2021, and there were no other people enquiring about coming. We thought it would be August this year before we would have any new volunteers.

Earlier this year we received applications from two Germans and one Austrian, all of which we approved. We were excited about them coming - the Germans in August for a year and the Austrian in October for seven months. Sadly, in the last couple of months, they have all decided not to come.

When we left Australia for South Africa after our last period of Home Assignment, our plan was to return to Australia for our next Home Assignment in November this year. However, as iKhethelo is already under-resourced with a lack of volunteers, if we were to leave for Home Assignment as planned, this would put enormous strain on already stretched staff and negatively impact our children.

We have consulted with others and prayed through this over the last couple of months and have decided to delay our return for Home Assignment by up to 12 months. We hope that within that time there will be volunteers able to come. It is also likely that we will have another member of SIM here who is currently preparing to join us by sometime next year. We also hope that the strict cap on the number of passengers arriving in Australia has been raised, making the cost of returning more affordable. The present caps have resulted in airfares being up to ten times the normal cost, in addition to the high cost of hotel quarantine.



Our current visas for South Africa expire at the end of November this year. If we are to stay, we need to extend our visas. Yesterday we lodged our applications to extend our visas - which involved preparing and submitting 90 pages of documents. We now wait a few months before we hear whether our applications are approved.

Commissionings

We have had the privilege of attending two commissioning services over the last few months.

The first was for Puleng, who we wrote about in our last newsletter. Puleng grew up at iKhethelo, finished high school last year, and this year is doing an evangelistic gap year program. The program began with three months of training and preparation for mission trips

travelling around South Africa and nearby countries. At the end of the training phase, we attended the commissioning service for Puleng and the other team members. We got to see first-hand some of the dramas, dances and messages they have prepared for their time of ministry.



The team recently returned from a mission trip to the neighbouring country of Lesotho. Puleng is currently home while the team have a short break. Last week we spent a lovely day at the beach catching up with Puleng. We are extremely proud of the amazing young woman she is.



The second commissioning service was for the new Director of SIM South Africa. Benjamin Pillay takes on the new role from the first of July. While the SIM South Africa office is located in Cape Town, Ben and his family are from Durban, so the commissioning service was held only a one-hour drive away. This meant we were able to attend in person.

Youth Day

June 16th is always a special day at iKhethelo and across South Africa. June 16th forty-five years ago was the start of the Soweto Uprising of 1976, sparked off by a government edict that all instruction in black schools would be delivered in Afrikaans. The day is now a public holiday to celebrate and acknowledge the importance of South Africa's youth. Youth Day is celebrated at iKhethelo with fun activities and a party.



Lily Sports

Lily of the Valley Children's Village is about a one-hour drive away from iKhethelo and is our sister village. The children love the opportunity to get together and compete at sports - something we try to do about four times each year. In May it was the turn for Lily children to come to iKhethelo for soccer and netball matches. This time, as well as the children competing, some of the house mothers competed. Several of the house mothers from Lily challenged our house mothers to a netball match.



Holidays

We had a full program of fun activities during the school holidays in April.



We discovered walks to new waterfalls.

A real highlight for the younger children was a Picnic in the Park. We went to a local park that was recently upgraded with new play equipment.



Easter



Easter is always a special time as we remember Christ's sacrifice for us and celebrate His resurrection. We enjoyed a beautiful sunrise service on Easter Day in our open-air amphitheatre, which faces east and is a wonderful place to watch the sunrise.



Following the service, while the children returned to their cottages, we hid 300 Easter Eggs around the village. While most of them were quickly found, there were some that remained hidden and were only discovered over the following days and weeks.

Bible Studies

The major theme for our weekly Bible Studies over the last few months has been on the Fruit of the Spirit, with a focus on one of the fruits each week.



For those who pray:

Praise God:

- all at iKhethelo have remained safe from COVID-19
- that Andrews health has remained stable

Please pray:

- for continued protection over the village from coronavirus
- for the approval of our visas
- for healing for Andrew

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

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