

FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER

Hello friends of Zimbabwe Gecko,

January in Zimbabwe finally brought the rain that had not satisfied for many years. There was rejoicing as the rivers swelled and filled, and crops were planted. A great harvest is expected!

Along with the good came what Zimbabweans are calling the *Christmas Virus*. Thousands of Zimbabweans who work in South Africa came home for Christmas bringing with them not only survival gifts for the family but also the S.A. variant of the Corona Virus. Some say thousands of deaths were reported. Most Zimbabweans are used to a difficult life and are accepting that hospitals have little with which to treat this virus or many other diseases, fractures, etc. Some hospitals have no staff and many do not have even a band aid. Yet, they are strong people of hope and courage.

This will be more a report than a newsletter—a little long but persevere LOL-- and we hope you will be as pleased as we are to see the progress at Rasper Community Center. The next newsletter will be shorter. As you know, each year when we have travelled to Zimbabwe, we have taken the time to meet and greet new communities and then choose one to encourage by the start-up of projects. We have come alongside some with whom we already have a relationship, but we decided to maintain a focus on Rasper and lead them into greater development. It's a decision we are pleased with.

You last heard that we were building a piggery and hoping to expand, as well as chicken runs which would include laying chickens and more broiler chickens.

PIGS:



We have done better than we expected. We now have two piggeries: one for ZGS as a fundraiser within the country and we have another one in the community. Between the two, there are now 10 pigs and we are in the process of getting a boar. To date, 28 piglets have been born and there are another 3 sows expecting.

The pens that we build are large and the piglets are separated to save them from harm and to give mum a break at times. They are fed in a different area and taken outside daily while their pens are washed and dried. Fresh straw is provided for their comfort and laid daily for our compost. In other words, they are treated like hotel guests up to a point. The pigs provide work for the community as well as training and opportunity for advancement. Because food is expensive, 15 hectares have been planted which will produce food for a year. The crop comes in April (see pictures). Profits go toward wages and back into community developments, as well as school fees for those not able to manage.

GOATS:

Finally we have a Billy goat who likes action! The herd is growing.



CHICKENS:

We have two sets of chicken runs: one for ZGS fundraising and one in the community. One set is for broilers and one for layers. Right now, there are two hundred chickens in each run--100 chickens at two weeks apart. Our goal is to have 400 chickens at one week apart so there is an income once a week. The layers are expensive. Our goal is to have 200 chickens in each run and right now we have just 50 in the community run. Eggs will provide not only a community income but also provide a protein for our school kids, many of whom arrive at class hungry.



Meal Program

GARDEN:



You can see from the pictures that the garden is hugely successful. It is providing a wage for the workers, food for the school and for the hungry, as well as profit for the community.

One donor is talking about a tractor and we are now asking the government for more land. They have been incredibly supportive of our programs and what used to take months or years for permission is usually granted quickly. Land may take a bit more time.



Vegetable Garden



8 Hectares

COMPUTER LAB:

The lab is unable to function at this time due to incredible lightning and storms right now. The lab has been moved into the Grade 6 class.

CARPENTRY SHOP:

The men are now accustomed to the tools and their carpentry skills are developing nicely. The furniture in the pictures was built by them and they feel enormously proud.



For now, the men provide for their own salary but soon the shop will also provide profits to the community.

MILL:

The mill has not worked at full potential mostly because of shut down due to Covid but contracts are being sought with farmers who want their land cleared. They receive the firewood and for our labor we get the trunk. All the wood the carpenters use is from our mill work.

SHOP:

The shop is doing well and providing a great service for the community. People can now purchase their basics at the shop as well as some other items and goods made for consignment.

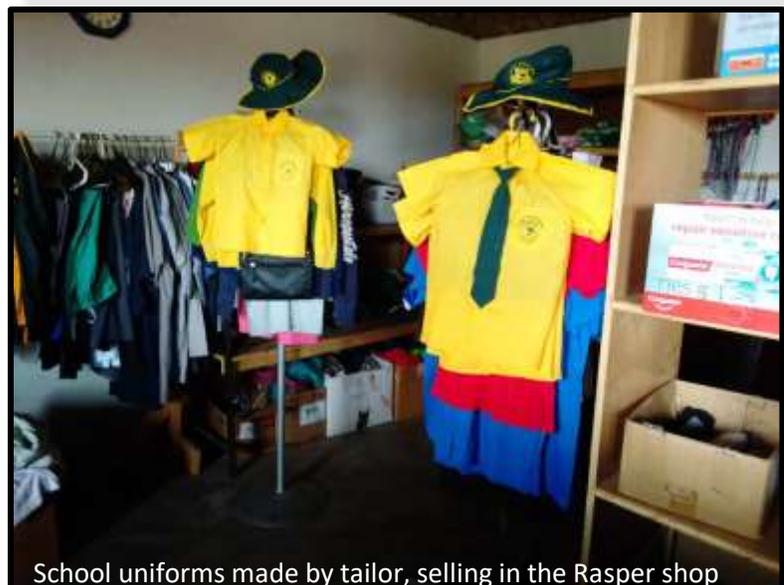
CLINICS:

Sibongele has taken over the Maternity Clinic and provides excellent service to the ladies. Statistics have dropped from a high mortality rate to lots of healthy babies with safe and healthy deliveries. We have an excellent reputation.

Marion and Joy have taken over management of the First Aid Clinic. They say the nutrition in the area, especially among the children, has taken away nearly all the coughs, colds, and fevers. They say the kids now have rosy cheeks. 😊 They are not always fully busy so some of their time is spent in the garden providing for the nutritious meals. Nurse to gardener - they are so willing. Unfortunately, Dr Markham and team have not been able to share knowledge this past year.

TAILOR:

The tailor makes marvellous outfits! He sews for the community and makes all our school uniforms. Soon he will do this for other schools. He says that it is the best job he has ever had because he is paid fairly for his work but a portion also goes into the community pot. The ladies are eager to get to lessons when the shutdown is over.



ECD (Early Childhood Education):

We have moved around quite a bit lately. The old ECD classroom is now a preschool classroom for 3 and 4-years-old. They learn English and how to play and share in the class, so they are ready for ECD. The ECD learn English and many developmental skills and are also prepared for "Big" school. This is an excellent program with parents eager to register their children. The children grow their own vegetables in a garden they call "Elva's Garden".

GRADE SCHOOL:

We recently had the school licencing inspector visit the school and apologize for dragging their feet. The authorities had no idea what an excellent school had been built (from that old barn) with all the excellent furnishings, school supplies, school uniforms, signs, toilets, kids' garden, just to mention a little of what he praised. Our licence for

grade 1 to 8 will soon be given, along with some of Zimbabwe's best teachers.



Rasper School Grades 1 and 2

We can now accommodate up to Grade 6 with 7 and 8 still needing to be build. (Donors needed). It is the ideal setting for a school, he said, as we can teach carpentry, sewing, agriculture, business management, cooking, chicken, goat, pig care and business, computer skills, accounting, and the list goes on. We are proud of the vast opportunities the school can supply.

TEACHERS HOUSING:

We now have 4 teachers' houses completed. We had originally built each house with three rooms, but we decided to extend the homes to 5-room housing: two bedrooms, living room, shower, kitchen with chimney and all with running water and electricity. By doing this, we can have two teachers share a home, which cuts the cost of building supplies. The school inspector was very happy with the design. Now we need the shutdowns to pass and get the kids in school. It has been a very off and on situation.

EXCITING NEWS

CHRISTMAS PARTY:



A donor stepped up this Christmas and invited the original Rasper community to a Christmas party. I say original as now folk are arriving wanting to help and find work. The party was a great success. A cow was purchased and provided enough food for the day and some to take home, along with potatoes, mealie meal and vegetables.

To top it off, special cupcakes were on the menu...the whole meal luxury. Prizes were given out to the children who put on some entertainment and there was music and dancing, of course, along with fun and laughter.

A highlight at the Christmas party! →



Here is a short clip from a long thank you letter one of the teachers wrote:

To a very special woman, xxxx.

Holding the pen and paper is Mercy Munenge, a teacher at Rasper Primary school, teaching Grade 3.

“Dear Aunt, xxxx,

Words will not be enough to say thank you for the kind gesture you extended to us as Rasper community. It is one out of a thousand people who have a heart like yours. You showed us true love. You

do not even know us. Thank you so much for the lunch you provided. It was just awesome; the food was plenty such that everyone ate and left some to eat at their homes. The girls and boys and the Physical Education entertainment really appreciate the prizes you gave them after showcasing their talents to the community.”

It was a much longer letter with comments of gratitude from the community.

CHURCH:

Pastor Darlington, who has overseen the church since its conception, has wanted to work at Rasper full time for quite a while. Due to a donor supporting his wage until the projects can provide, Pastor Darlington quit his job in December and started at Rasper on the 2nd of January. He is already making a world of difference with his business ideas, energy, and love of people, as well as his accounting and office skills. Here is a clip from a letter he wrote to say thank you to the donor:

I have now quit my old Job and now I am working at Rasper wellness center. This has given me enough time to meet with community people especially for counseling and prayer. We have also started a program that I am doing with the men from the church, we, once every week visit the elderly in the community and we spend the day at their homes. We wash their clothes, clean the place, tell stories, and have a meal together. It's my joy to be working there.

What a delightful start. I have known Pastor Darlington since we started the Zimbabwe Gecko Society. We hired him as a teacher at the first church and school we built at Saffron. Before he had the teaching position, he helped build the church. The church has a healthy growth. It's not about numbers but sharing God's love.

EVERY PROGRAM THAT WE MENTION HERE WILL BE OVERSEEN BY PASTOR DARLINGTON – ERICK GWAZE AND MATILDAEach will play a role in supporting the community toward growth in all their particular ministries through all of these programs.

NEW ADVENTURES

SMALL HOUSES:

You will notice a housing plan in the photo section. It is our desire to serve women/widows and orphans in the Rasper area...one small house at a time. (Sponsors needed). Many women and youth have resorted to an unhealthy lifestyle in order to survive and/or are not living in healthy homes. Children are starving. Our goal is to bring people to a safe spot in the community under the supervision of Pastor Darlington, as well as the team, and to provide a home and work.

From This ↓



And This ↓



To This !!



We have already taken in two women and 5 children--two homes that are comfortable and furnished with water and, if affordable, electricity. Such excitement!!

(Note the teachers' housing in the background in picture to the left.)

And This !!





Future Tea Room

TEA ROOM:

We are wanting to build a Tea room/Tea Garden as a place of gathering for the community. Once again this is not about making hundreds of dollars (however, we will not stop growth) but if the wage and ingredients are paid for, then the purpose is to be able to go to a place and feel like a king or queen... to meet and laugh with friends, to be served a nice scone and jam or a bun on

fine china (or near to it)...to enjoy nicely set lunches. All this is something sadly missing in the middle of the bush. (bush = a long way from most places surrounded by long grass and trees) the vision right now is tables on the lawn (we already have the lawn) and nice flowers for the setting. We would like a nice room with tiled floor, a good oven in which to make bread, scones, buns, chicken. There would be tables with tablecloths and a flower, mirrors on the wall and paintings on the wall...a touch of elegance! We will be converting the large area opposite the kitchen that you see in the pictures. We hope soon to be able to afford to have it up and running. Goods are in a container recently packed.

HAIRDRESSER:

The area sadly lacks anywhere to go for a hair cut, a manicure... a place of unheard-of luxury. We have sinks and hairdresser chairs on the way in a container. Matilda whom I have also known since Saffron will be taking this on. She recently quit her management position at a hair salon and so knows all the tricks of the trade.

SHOEMAKING:

The container also holds shoemaking tools and lots of leather, heels, threads, etc. to start a shoemaking business. This will be geared to the teenagers who right now are not engaged in healthy living, offering a new chance at a new lifestyle.

CONTAINERS:

It is with grateful hearts and minds that MANY communities say *Thank You* to Dr. Jerome Harvey, Tom Baxter and Karen Harper EFCCM MEMO TEAM for the containers they have sent to Zimbabwe from their own EFCCM Ministries. They have provided supplies to hospitals, clinics, schools, nursing homes, community support, to mention a few. A huge gift this year is dental tools and everything needed to extract teeth. We expect long line ups as soon as the goods arrive as dentists have not been available to many people for a lot of years. We are expecting two containers to arrive in February. One is rather late but will get there after travelling around the world... all done by donation and volunteer workers.

With equally grateful hearts we thank Dell Marie Wergeland and the team of volunteers at Compassionate Warehouse in Victoria for the jam-packed supplies that go into the containers. After much struggle, a container left in mid January due to arrive in April, just in time to equip the hairdresser shop, tea room and shoe shop, all of which we hope to build in the interim. Gleaners Food is one of the great gifts packed and the many rosy cheeks mentioned under clinic can be attributed to this food. The items in these containers are just too numerous to mention but they are life changing for all who receive the gifts.

These containers are not cheap to send. Costs range from \$15,000 - \$20,000 depending on the port of exit. All are generously donated. All Zimbabwe Gecko Society has to do is pay the duties and taxes, as well as costs of cranes and trucks to get to the final location...approximately \$2,000 to \$2,500 USD.

You will notice in two of the pictures that two containers have been turned into housing for 50 boys in the Wedza area, now fondly known as the Wedza boys. Not only do they now have a comfortable home, but it will be fully furnished from the containers, including computers, desks, blankets, pots, and pans etc. ... all they will need, including garden tools, to have a good ending at school and start to life. Judy Travers (IMIRI) oversees the project and all the hospitals and clinics for us.



I hope you have found this letter of interest. It is YOU, the donors, that facilitate all this work happening. I also hope you feel as strongly as we do that extending the projects at Rasper actually does more for the community at large than smaller projects, which of course have also been life changing. The community are excited and have new hope as well as opportunities to thrive and succeed.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Erick Gwaze our Manager and friend who has taken Rasper to new heights, working day and night...at night to work with me on WhatsApp, as well as early mornings. We, as well as Erick and his wife, are relieved to now have Pastor Darlington and Matilda on board.

In conclusion, we want to share below a short piece sent to ZGS by the Theunis Botha Chugutu Ministry that we support.



We want to take this opportunity to say thank you for your ongoing support. You are sowing seed into the Kingdom and the Lord will bless your faithfulness and obedience.

My boys planted a sunflower seed in our garden and I have attached a photo of the plant, unbelievable what came from one seed and that is my encouragement to you that you don't know how God will use the seed that you have sown.

You are a blessing to us as a family.

Please continue to pray for our work. God has been faithful through all the struggles.

If you have any questions or need clarification, please feel free to contact Susan.
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