

Friends of Matthew Rusike Children's Home
The Home is based in Epworth, a suburb of Harare, Zimbabwe.

We give support, mainly by cash but also by advice and assistance, to the Home for the benefit of the Children.

Newsletter
September 2003

Chairman's Report

Dear Friends,

We are very pleased to report to you on the visit in July to the Matthew Rusike Home by Barry Barnes of NCH. Barry spoke to the Executive committee in August (What follows are John Richer's notes on his presentation, because we felt this was the best way to give you all the latest information.) Although it is difficult to understand what life in Harare is like, it is good to know that the Home is functioning and the children are being cared for.

The second piece of good news is that your committee is sponsoring a visit to England of Astonishment Mapurisa, the Superintendent of the Home in October. The intention is both to help him to explain how the Home is functioning at this difficult time and also to give him the chance to visit some NCH establishments and see current practises on child care. He will speak in several places to meet as many of the Friends as possible.

Thirdly the committee was pleased to re-affirm that the money you donate will continue to be used primarily to support the basic needs of the children at the Home. Your donations are vital to ensure that the Home continues to care for them. The Friends executive are pleased to donate all their costs and we have few expenses apart from a little printing and postage, so virtually all your money is available to support the children.

John Bromley Hon Chairman.

Latest News from the Children's Home

Barry Barnes had recently returned from visiting Zimbabwe and MRCH and he gave us a most stirring account of their situation and the various changes taking place. He said how pleased he was to attend the executive and paid a warm tribute to the FoMRCH for the very substantial flow of donations which were massively important to the Home and probably it could not survive without them. He said our contribution was 'extraordinary'.

The Home now has no Government funding and relies entirely on donations. The Methodist Church of Zimbabwe contributes by a levy on churches towards the Home but in their difficult circumstances this cannot meet the Home's need.

Entry to and exit from Zimbabwe is difficult, with only BA and Air Zimbabwe maintaining international flights. Zimbabwe is in crisis with inflation making life incredibly difficult for everyone. There are effectively two finance systems operating, the official at 1,100 Zims /£ and the unofficial at 4,000 Zims/£, for example, petrol at the official rate of 450 Zims per litre is virtually unobtainable without long queues but can be found unofficially at 1,500 Zims. The largest banknote is 500 Zims but a loaf costs 1,000 Zims and street sellers offer to sell part of a loaf to those who cannot afford a whole one. Banks will only allow customers to withdraw 10,000 Zims (equivalent to £3) at one visit. Cheques are often not welcome but notes are not available.

All items are hard to find and at the Home, significant staff effort is put into simply finding and queuing for goods. Doing the regular 'day job' can become secondary to searching for necessary goods. Recently the Superintendent was returning to the Home with a load of Maize when he was stopped by police who threatened to confiscate it. With great resourcefulness, he told them if they did this, they should first drive to the Home to pick up the 120 children and explain why this was being done – he was allowed to continue.

However and most importantly Barry assured us that in spite of all this stress and the limitations of the situation, the Home was doing its best, looking after its children and was delivering good care. Barry spoke highly of the new Superintendent, his deputy and of his core team of staff and of the new Development Officer Leslie Mudehwe, who is funded by NCH and the World Church office, and who was working closely with the MRCH team.

The Superintendent and his team were building on the good training given by John and Mary Bromley in previous years. Astonishment was aiming to strengthen links to the Zimbabwe Methodist church and to re-awaken the awareness of MRCH's role and needs. He is being supported by the Bishop: and he will address the next Church Conference.

The key development issue for the Home is to expand the move away from the old dormitory structure now outdated, towards small family units so that the children can grow up in a 'normal' group. Barry gave us the excellent news that the first two 'eight children' family units are being built and the foundations are in and the walls are part built. (To overcome supply problems, the Superintendent had to drive to a cement factory to obtain the cement). A start on a third unit has been stopped due to inflation. Sadly the average age of the children in the Home is falling as more parents and families are lost to HIV/AIDS.

Nationally in Zimbabwe, the key childcare need is to address the severe impact that AIDS is having and will have on the whole society. The official infection rate is 25% but it probably is much larger in practice. While MRCH concentrates on a group of typically 120 children, there are and will be huge numbers of children suffering through the loss of parents, grandparents, and the weaker local community. MRCH can function as an example but support in the local community must be the main aim. The Development worker is collaborating with the Methodist HIV/AIDS worker seeking new methods of child care such as adoption, fostering and MRCH staff are cooperating.

The Superintendent has set out to make simple low cost improvement to the Home's environment to brighten the lives of the children by improving the appearance, planting flower beds, building a low wall around the creche area to make it more of a defined unit. The vegetable patch, chicken run and piggery are looking better after some hard work. Although Quantas no longer fly to Zimbabwe, the cabin staff have continued their support, paying for the chicken run improvements and raising awareness of the health hazard by banning asbestos sheet roofing. Looking after the animals and other handicrafts train the children in basic skills, but Astonishment has made children and staff more aware of the need for self sufficiency by using these for food production, however this is not at the expense of normal Home life. The sewing group makes money by making clothes for Hotels, Brownie packs, the staff, etc, but these are sewn by paid local staff not by the children. In fact by employing local staff, the Home also helps the local community in Epworth which is a very poor area.

Barry ended by saying that NCH wanted to continue a close liaison with the FoMRCH and that he felt humbled by seeing how people of Zimbabwe were trying to cope in very difficult circumstances.

Treasurer's Report

Paddy reported that donations since January amounted £ 29,700. He has sent £23,000 including any school fees for specific children, as agreed with some donors. He is in contact with the Superintendent and receives acknowledgments of receipt of these amounts though this can take some time to reach him. Inflation is accelerating and our Treasurer is currently obtaining Z\$6,800 to £1 in bank to bank dealings, sending Zim\$ from London direct into the Home's bank account. (This is nearly four times the rate in January this year and higher than the 4,000 in July quoted by Barry)

The Southampton District Network has contributed so far a magnificent £11,000 and we can hope this will rise further yet, however this commitment is now almost complete. The Chairman warmly thanked the Donors for their generosity and the Treasurer for all his efforts. Thanks to his skill in managing the flow as the exchange rate rises, our pounds give more Zim\$ so that a loaf of bread still only costs 30p of our money. Because of the very severe inflation, holding money in pounds and only converting to Zim\$ each month when it is needed by the Home, makes the most effective use of your donations.

Have you got news for us?

If you are planning a meeting or fund raising event to support MRCH, we can supply leaflets, posters, videos and will be pleased to supply speakers wherever possible. Please contact the Chair or the Secretary at any time.

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Notices.

1. The Annual General Meeting will be held on Saturday the 7th of February 2004 at Wesley International House, 52 Oakfield Road, Selly Park, Birmingham at 2.00pm. Shared lunch at 1.00pm. All members are invited to attend.

2. In the last issue we reported that our Chair John Bromley felt it was time for a change after 8 years of leadership. We were delighted when Mrs Carol Banham agreed at the AGM to be designated as our next Chair person from the February 2004 AGM. John will remain on the Executive so we will still have the benefit of his ideas. Carol and her husband Don have been members of the Executive since FoMRCH was formed and have been strong supporters of all aspects of life at the Home for several years with a particular interest in training the boys and girls in joinery, as a useful extra skill.

This is a Newsletter distributed by the
Friends of Matthew Rusike Children's Home
Chair Mr John Bromley
Secretary Mrs Shirley Richer

Visit of the Superintendent of MRCH October 03

The committee has been keen to sponsor a visit by Astonishment Mapurisa to the UK and now arrangements are almost in place. We hope that he will travel widely, so that many of our members will have the opportunity to meet him, hear him and question him about life in the Home, the use they make of our donations and their plans for the future.

His visit has been supported by the Management Committee of the Zimbabwe Methodist Church and this will not leave the Home uncared for because it will be under the care of his very capable deputy.

NCH through Barry Barnes are very supportive of this visit and they will be his hosts at the start and end of his visit as he passes through London. Barry plans to show him examples of the work of NCH in helping needy children in the UK

More details about meeting places will be sent out as soon as they are confirmed.

Barry is the NCH Director of Children's Services, responsible for planning help for all needy children in Zimbabwe, so MRCH is only a part of his concerns