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A letter from Tonia Cope Bowley (co founder of Thembisa 1988)

Greetings friends of Thembisa – old and new.

I write in this second lockdown on behalf of the Trustees as some in our communications team are overloaded. We hope you are safe and well in this challenging pandemic. We are thankful that you are part of the Thembisa team working, in various ways, to support those in Southern Africa assisting the marginalised and destitute. Do encourage others you know with a love for Africa to join us too.

Besides giving you an update, here is something of the motivation, history, and vision for the Trust's future.

DREAMS



For 20 formative years I lived on a little farm on the South African plateau. Our modest stone house, designed by my Yorkshire father, was built by Africans living on the farm using local materials. As far back as I remember it troubled me that my African playmates were so very poor. My parents (mother, a first generation South African, fluent in Zulu), did whatever they could to enhance the lives of these people. **My dream** was that some day, I too could help.



For many years this seemed unattainable. Then, in 1980, I met Minerals Planner Stephen Bowley – a big thinker. Soon Stephen announced he'd like to meet my mother and explore South Africa!!! In December 1981, we flew to Cape Town and worked our way to Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal – the first of many trips to Southern Africa. One time we visited Bonginkosi (Zulu for Praise the Lord, a project providing school meals for impoverished children, sponsored by African Enterprise). Bonginkosi was born in 1972 when headteacher, Daphne Tshabala, walked the grounds while eating her lunch. Her sandwich crust, tossed to a dog, was grabbed by a starving child.

This story planted a **dream-seed** in our minds. Perhaps we too could do something for the 'have-nots' – but what?

Fast forward to spring 1988. Britain, with other nations, was putting pressure on the Apartheid government. In the UK goods like oranges were boycotted. But guess who was suffering the consequences? The orange pickers! This motivated us to find out what, if anything, was being done to support these people. During our visit we'd met groups working to uplift the poorest. Flying home, the engine hum lulled me to sleep. Suddenly I was wide awake as Stephen burst out: **We've got to do something.** This was the seed that sprouted Thembisa into being. Back home we found others shared our vision.

A JOINT DREAM

We started small – a fund – raising garden party in our Oxford garden. £300 collected enabled the building of a water tank for a remote school in The Valley of a Thousand Hills, Natal. Thirty-three years on Thembisa has raised about £400,000 that has been donated towards 75 grassroots projects in South Africa and Zimbabwe. **Thembisa** is a Zulu word meaning **to hold out hope**. The Trust is doing just that. You can read more of the Thembisa story, and about projects supported at www.Thembisatrust.org

CURRENT PROJECTS

ZIMBABWE (Photos from our Bowley visit in 2015)



CHISHAWASHA

supports a rural community near Harare. In 2020 Maggie wrote: "Things are dire in Zim. The local school which many of the orphans attend (and for which Chishawasha pays school fees when the families can't) has just raised its fees from 50 to 1000 Zim dollars per term!" Maggie has protested and sent 500 Zim dollars per pupil but this is a terrible blow for other families.

Photo: This house was built for a lady caring for many children.

CROSS OVER

provides opportunities for local children who have missed out on schooling. Besides the chance to learn each child also has their own vegetable garden. These gardens supply food for the school and sometimes there is enough for the gardeners to take home. Children walk many miles to and from school each day and voluntarily tend their gardens in holidays.



SOUTH AFRICA



SWEETWATERS SELF-HELP PROJECT

Volunteers support this isolated community in vegetable growing, craft work etc, providing food and materials. Sarah writes: "We're safely back from Sweetwaters. Everyone received a huge parcel of food. Our vehicle was loaded up with fabric donated for those who sew. We reminded them that all we bring is from God, Christian brothers and sisters, NOT just us!"



ITHEMBA www.ithembaprojects.org.za

iThemba works with the people in the extensive Sweetwaters area. Their aim is "to transform a generation of kids and teens through education and mentoring so that they may bring hope to their community, and be a light throughout South Africa".

MASIKHULISANE TRUST

Based in Grahamstown the Trust gets involved in a multitude of supporting program like bursaries for school children; training; daycare programs; environmental work and more. During the pandemic, through the Cathedral, much effort has been put into food distribution.



AFRICAN ENTERPRISE www.ae.org.za

During COVID-19 AE is participating in food distribution, making face masks etc.



Photos: Pre School classroom, iThemba lomntwana prior to the Pandemic, and emergency food distribution.



MNCP

Works in Informal Settlements near to Pietermaritzburg area, KZN. As with all projects, MNCP is visited from time to time by a Trustee or representative. I've often seen their work, sometimes accompanied by family members.

MNCP was born in 2007 through the vision of Pastor Chris Pillay – to uplift these impoverished people. In 2012 Sandra Pilay became MNCP's first full time worker. Currently work is underway building a community centre to provide opportunities for locals. (You can read about their work in Newsletters 33, 34, 35 on www.Thembisatrust.org)

In 2019 a bequest from my late husband, Stephen, enabled MNCP to start developing their own site on recently acquired land – levelling the land, building a security wall and moving in from borrowed sites. In 2020 another bequest has provided funds for 'bricks, mortar and labour to erect the edifice. This has caused us to think BIG.



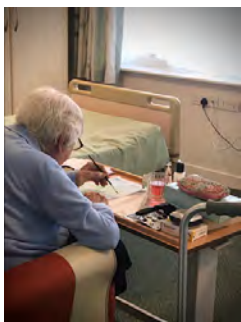
A BIGGER DREAM

An estimated £40,000 – £50,000 is needed to make the centre fit for purpose. This includes installing security systems, hire of a compactor and labour to tar surfaces, equipment for teaching and learning – computers etc. At the time of writing Sandra says: "Wow! To think that we will no longer be doing our programmes under the open skies in all kinds of weather – today was a VERY HOT day. Way above 40 °C. Soon we will have our very own building."



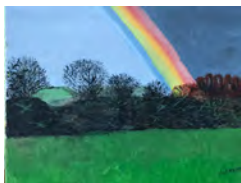
Thembisa wants to help a lot more. Can YOU? Perhaps you know of firms with interests in South Africa that would be willing to contribute, or maybe you have ideas on what YOU can do to raise funds. Please let us know. Where possible we will assist you with information to use.

THEMBISA CARDS



This fundraising venture started small but is growing as new cards are added. The idea to set up an online shop came after 3 people who'd received a letter written in a Thembisa Rainbow card got in touch (we'd stopped selling cards years back). Two asked to buy quantities. The third, Audrey, an artist of 93, painted the scene in oils while suffering from Covid-19. Quite remarkable. Recently a talented friend, Katie Lambert, has set up two online sites showcasing the greetings cards we have for sale. Proceeds go to Thembisa.

www.Facebook.com/thembisatrustcards/
www.instagram.com/thembisatrustcards/



It is always good to get a card through the post, so why not have a browse and order some to support Thembisa and to cheer your friends. Do please share this card news! PS. If you do not have Internet access ask a friend to show you what's available and then post an order to the Thembisa office (address at start of this letter).

Opportunity: Katie is brilliant at designing and making cards for special occasions. A card specially designed for YOU could involve a photograph or other material you provide, or be based around a theme you suggest. Why not order one for that special person you want to surprise? Order details are on Instagram and Facebook sites. Katie will donate a proportion of the profits to Thembisa.

STILL DREAMING



THEMBISA NEEDS NEW BLOOD

To his very last Stephen kept his focus on improving the lot of others. In his final letter to supporters written from hospital he said: "It is clear that I cannot continue in any leadership role in Thembisa so I will need to resign my chairmanship in the next few months ... My hope and vision is that by the time we celebrate the 30th anniversary we will have, on our team of Trustees, some who are (say) 30 years younger - with vision and vigour to carry on the work of Thembisa into the next 30 year phase." (Extract from Newsletter no. 32, Summer 2017)

Change and growth are often slower than we hurry-hurry humans would like. Three years have flown by since Stephen wrote this letter. YES! We have a new chairman - able and visionary Frank Adam. The other seven Trustees press on too but we do NEED new blood to carry the Trust forward. If YOU have a love for Africa, a desire to do your bit in uplifting the poor, and time or resources to give please get in touch to discuss. There are many different **areas where help is needed**.

All Trustees began by volunteering in some specific way before moving into the role of Trustee. Areas where help is needed include marketing, fundraising, IT, web development, communications, office assistance, hands on help for events... the list is endless.

FUNDS ARE NEEDED TO SUPPORT PROJECTS

So far during the pandemic Thembisa has sent over £15,000 in support of projects involved in feeding the starving. A big thank you to all donors. But, like Oliver Twist, we are asking for "more please". Mindful that financial hardships have hit many, and that charity must begin at home, please send a contribution as and when you can. A little goes a long, long way in Africa.

Ways of contributing financially include:

- ★ Direct giving through the DONATE button on website
- ★ Amazon Smile – Shop online through Amazon smile to make a FREE donation. Example: We have just received notification that £11.55 has been transferred to Thembisa by Amazon Smile because some using this online shopping facility have chosen ThembisaTrust as their charity to support.
- ★ Virgin Money Giving
- ★ Charities Aid Foundation
- ★ Cheque made out to THEMBISA TRUST

THE WEBSITE www.thembisatrust.org

is being upgraded. Please send us feedback and suggestions for improvements.

GOING FORWARD

Our anniversary celebration for Thembisa's 33rd birthday was not possible in 2020 due to the pandemic. However we hope that come June or July 2021 you will be joining us to mark Thembisa's 34th birthday.

Thank you for reading this, and more so for you support and encouragement.

Just remember **Follow your dream – one step at a time.**

Very best wishes,

Tonía