

## The Beatrice Project: Zimbabwe

### restoring dignity and opportunity

Sept 2018

It feels rather strange to be back in a most definitely Autumnal England, having left here in sweltering conditions, arrived in Zimbabwe at the end of their winter and then left again in summer! Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who helped to make the trip possible whether through financial giving, through donations of practical gifts for the girls on the project, through praying or through generally keeping us all afloat via Whatsapp and other means of communication while we were far from our homes and loved ones.

It was an interesting time to be in Zimbabwe: the elections had taken place but were being contested and almost without exception people were willing to talk about the political situation, something I had never experienced in the 30 years I have been going to the country. Everywhere we went, we found people hungry for change and actively seeking a better future for themselves and their families. Needless to say, views on the new president, Emmerson Mnangagwa, are as divided as are views on our government in England, and the way ahead is far from clear. What is clear though is that people have begun to find their voice and are less afraid to use it. This we found very positive: it is something we are actively seeking to encourage in our Adult Volunteers, Peer Educators and girls on The Beatrice Project, not that they become politically active but that they begin to see themselves as valid and valuable members of their communities rather than the second class citizens they have been taught to be, useful only for being potential bringers of wealth through dowries, for child bearing or, as one of the girls put it , as 'worthless property'.



As last year, Joy had done a superb job of the practical arrangements for the 'camp' and everything ran smoothly from start to finish. There was a palpable sense of excitement as we arrived at the boarding school and were each shown to our lodgings for the weekend, most of us in dormitory type accommodation with fairly basic amenities. The girls behaved impeccably and with cheerful enthusiasm throughout, drawing up an excellent set of ground rules for the smooth running and success of the camp at its outset. They did, however, need some firm discipline from Joy on the first night when their excitement and high spirits seemed to know no bounds and many of us were kept awake until the early hours of the morning! The meals, which were all cooked for us and were delicious, must have been a special treat for the delegates, something which was made possible through your generous giving to the project.



The theme of the weekend was 'Choices' and Karen had been given responsibility for the content of the training. Once Barry had begun the day for us with a reflection, Karen worked tirelessly, and with the help of a translator, producing a thorough and varied programme, interspersed by Barry's songs, games and ice-breakers, and delivering sessions expertly. The ladies and girls joined in the sessions well, looking at topics such as Safeguarding as well as exploring different methods of managing menstruation. They threw themselves into the drama presentations with great commitment, exploring situations which were potentially dangerous or where a girl might find herself vulnerable to exploitation. Although the dramas inevitably looked at situations where some sort of intervention was necessary, some of these proved to be hilarious, while others were very moving. It was clear that, through all they were learning, the delegates were being empowered to help themselves and one another in the challenges of their daily lives. The session looking at menstrual cups, led by a local expert, was given to the ladies and older girls who engaged seriously with the discussion and together grappled with the cultural issues raised by such ways of dealing with menstruation, and coming up with a plan of their own to take things forward.

The activities of the weekend were all recorded by a very valuable addition to the team this year in the shape of Sally Brown, a photography student from Zimbabwe who is currently studying in Southampton, and who donated her time and talents to the project, taking hundreds if not thousands of pictures and capturing on video various scenes of singing and dancing, most notably around the Saturday night camp fire! It was a tremendous help to me and to Karen to know that we did not have to think about taking photographs (as well as conducting the weekend and being available to chat with individuals or groups) and we had the utmost confidence in Sally's sensitivity and professionalism. We plan to use much of her material on our website which seems a little less far off now that we are a registered charity and have some quality pictures to share!

Perhaps the highlight of the weekend was the moment when one of the beneficiaries asked to deliver a speech she had written. She began: 'The change that has taken place in my community has forced me to take a pen and a paper {to} write down this speech expressing my gratitude to the Beatrice Ntombi Nto (Joy's name for the local work) Project' and went on to speak of the transition that is taking place in her community. She finished with these words: 'I would like to thank you, Beatrice Ntombi Nto, for the provision of sanitary wear and delivering menstrual education to our girls, imbokodo zakusasa (mothers of tomorrow). With this I would like to commend our donors: we are really grateful as a community. To our mentors, peer educators, our dear mother Mrs Khumalo (Joy) and the entire Beatrice group...siyabonga, iNkosi yezulu ilenzele kahle (thank you, may the good Lord bless you) I hope you agree that this, and the smiling faces of the girls, make it all worth while!



**To give to The Beatrice Project, please visit [www.give.net/23237532](http://www.give.net/23237532) or speak to one of the Trustees.**

*The Beatrice Project is a registered charity (Number:1175299)*