

## The Beatrice Project: Zimbabwe

### restoring dignity and opportunity

More than a week has gone by already since I returned with Karen and her husband, Barry, from our trip to Zimbabwe, where we spent time with Joy Khumalo working on The Beatrice Project. Joy has been doing tremendous work ensuring that the 300 girls in our target group have continued to receive sanitary towels each month. Along with this, they have been attending regular workshops where personal and sexual health topics have been addressed. These have run throughout the year, even when access to the rural areas was almost impossible, because of bridges being washed away, making for long detours which sometimes doubled the mileage for Joy.

The first part of our time in Bulawayo was spent discussing and planning for the weekend 'camp' taking place at one of the rural schools. Joy had done a magnificent job of organising the weekend for the adult trainers and peer educators. The venue, a rural secondary school, had no water and no electricity: donkeys had been hired to bring barrels of water to the site, firewood had been collected, solar lights bought, a cow slaughtered and sufficient groceries and fresh food bought and stored for the 100+ people, mainly girls and young women, who were attending. Accommodation was on the classroom floors and meals were cooked by a wonderful group of people who looked after us all amazingly, making sure no one went hungry or thirsty.



When we reached the site, in temperatures of over 35 degrees, the excitement was palpable and, after the afternoon and evening sessions, enthusiastically encouraged and led by their teachers, the girls who are peer educators sang and danced long into the night before settling down to sleep. Karen led the training weekend which was aimed at helping improve the skills of the peer educators and adult volunteers who mentor the girls and provide the monthly health education discussion groups. On the Saturday, local youth worker, Bonani Medina, provided input on using the Aunti Stella materials, using discussions, songs and drama.



The PEs and volunteers were invited to put questions to an expert panel where Karen, local leaders, teachers, a nurse, a pastor's wife and a lady from Childline were able to give accurate as well as culturally relevant advice on topics ranging from painful periods to dating to sexual abuse. Through drama and poster design, participants explored the challenges facing a fictional 14 year old girl struggling to come to terms with being pregnant but wanting to stay at school. Their work is now going to be collated into a new Aunti Stella question directly relevant to the girls in Zimbabwe.

During the weekend, Barry led us in some short devotions (as well as some hilarious games and songs) and interviewed the leaders and teachers, documenting the very positive and appreciative feedback on the impact of The Beatrice Project. The weekend gave special opportunity for the sharing of experiences amongst those working for the project at different sites and the building of meaningful relationships across the sites and the generations.

Teachers, Health Workers and the girls themselves testified to the success of The Beatrice Project intervention:

- Whereas culturally girls were encouraged to stay home and not tell anyone they are menstruating they now know menstruation is natural and normal.
- No one now says they do not want to go to school because of periods and the girls are no longer shy in asking questions....[the peer educators] help with the younger girls.
- I feel I want to think of a way to create unity and understanding amongst girls and to comfort other troubled girls.

The girls, their parents, grand-parents, teachers and community leaders were unanimous in their resolve to share all they were learning and many of them asked us to come back soon, even suggesting we repeat the weekend camp termly! Unfortunately, we don't think that's going to be possible, but it was gratifying to feel our efforts and your generous gifts were so appreciated.



The beautiful donated 'Days4Girls' packs of re-usable cloth sanitary towels and the panties made by the students of Solent University were received warmly by the girls who were moved that people should care so much for them. A group of ladies were keen to try the menstrual cups we'd brought and there was an impressive openness to look at ways forward which might be environmentally or economically sustainable.

Now back in England, the work of raising funds is continuing with fresh determination. We, and those we are seeking to support, would like to express our gratitude to you who are giving to fund the work. Every donation, however small, is appreciated and we would welcome any opportunities to share what we are doing in the beautiful nation of Zimbabwe.

Do please consider whether you might be able to give towards the funding of the project for the coming year. Until further notice, please use our new bank account:

**The Beatrice Project, Barclays Bank, sort code 20-79-31, account number 93590631**

**Or, if you prefer, you may give cash or a cheque (payable to The Beatrice Project) to me, Sue Hutchinson, or either of the other trustees, Karen Trewinnard or Adrian Thomas.**

**We are so grateful for your prayers, encouragement and support.**