

REPORT ON THE JULY 2016 SOA TRIP TO ZAMBIA

On 8th July 2016, a group of 14 students (*Nicolas Borowski, Felipe Browne Abadie, Ramiro Casal Vila, Anika Diaz, Eduardo Espinosa Olivares, Ricardo Estevez Juttner, Rim Chebli Fawaz, Andrei Iovanescu, Seth Kirby, Ayaka Komori, Tomomi Niizuma, Lazar Pashov, Anya Stern, Quinten Tupker*) and 3 staff members (*Kevin Gilbert, Nicola Gilbert, Philip Shaw*) departed from Geneva for the bi-annual 3 week SOA ('Serenje Orphans Appeal') trip to Zambia. They were met in Lusaka by 5 other volunteers of the Collège du Léman community which included 3 staff more members (*Sarah Leyshon, Maria Weinz, Paul McGuire, Eva Weinz, Louisa Weinz*) and travelled together to Serenje on 10th July.



Serenje lies about 500km from Lusaka and it is here that the SOCH orphanage ('Serenje Orphans Childrens Home') is located. This orphanage, founded in 2004 by Kevin Gilbert and Alouis Mwansa, has a capacity of 44 children and is fully funded through fund-raising by the ZOA and SOA committees respectively at St George's British International School (Rome) and Collège du Léman (Geneva).



Prior to the trip, the student participants each raised funds for particular projects that were identified by the SOCH management. These funds were transferred to the orphanage in the weeks before the group arrived and were used to purchase the materials (e.g. paint, brushes, timber, nails, etc) and to hire local tradesmen who would work with the students during their 2 weeks at the orphanage. There were 3 clear phases of this trip.

- 1) **Week 1** – with 22 people on site, an enormous amount of the planned project work was done and most of these were accomplished by the time that the 5 additional volunteers departed on the Friday 15th July. These were:



Painting the front wall of the orphanage

This task took a couple of days to complete. It required support from several members of the team each day.



Purchase of shoes for the children

The relatively high cost of local shoes had meant that the annual budgeted clothing and footwear allowance had been challenged this year. Therefore, groups of children were accompanied to the local BATA shoe shop and fitted with good quality shoes.



Health including Health Checks on the children Each child was weighed and height measured, and these details updated on the computer. Graphs of this data may be drawn (on the computer) for each child so that we could see at a glance the progress each is making (such records started in July 2008). The general health of each child was ascertained by working with the orphanage Matron. In general, the children had grown as expected and maintained very good health. This is the result of a good balanced diet, sleeping under mosquito nets and a healthy lifestyle.

Purchase of clothing for the children.

An audit of each the childrens' clothing was done, and a decision was made as to the type of clothing that could be purchased with the funds that had been raised. Then, some of the group accompanied children to the local PEP clothing store and assisted each of them to choose appropriate items that was consistent with the budget. The process of our students (and staff) taking on the responsibility of clothing an orphan makes a powerful connection between them.



Repairs to the existing playground and design and construction of additional playground item(s)

Originally built by the first school visit in 2006, and repaired and added to during the 2008, 2010 and 2012 trips, the playground was in dire need of maintenance and new equipment. One of the students led this project as part of his *Eagle Scout Service Project*. A local carpenter was on hand to provide advice, tools and assistance so that the final product was of a very good standard. Other participants lent their support in sanding down the structure and helping paint it.



Completion of construction of the basketball court.

The half-court was built in 2014 but was in great need of replacement due to termite attack on the supporting beam and corrosion of the hoop. Several students worked together with a local

welder to replace the corroded post and backboard as well as adding a second post and backboard to the court. After this, the enlarged court was concreted to provide a great facility for the orphans. What made this project quite attractive was that the younger brother of a participant on the 2014 trip was able to repair and enhance the work achieved by his older brother and friends.



Library improvement

Some ESL reading books with accompanying DVDs and a data projector donated by Collège du Léman were brought out with the group. In Lusaka, further useful English books suitable for the orphanage children were purchased in order to enlarge and enhance the small library. All books in the library were sorted into reading levels in an effort to encourage reading by the students.



Planning for the completion of the Guesthouse, and establishing procedures for hiring and training of staff, and day to day running and accountabilities.

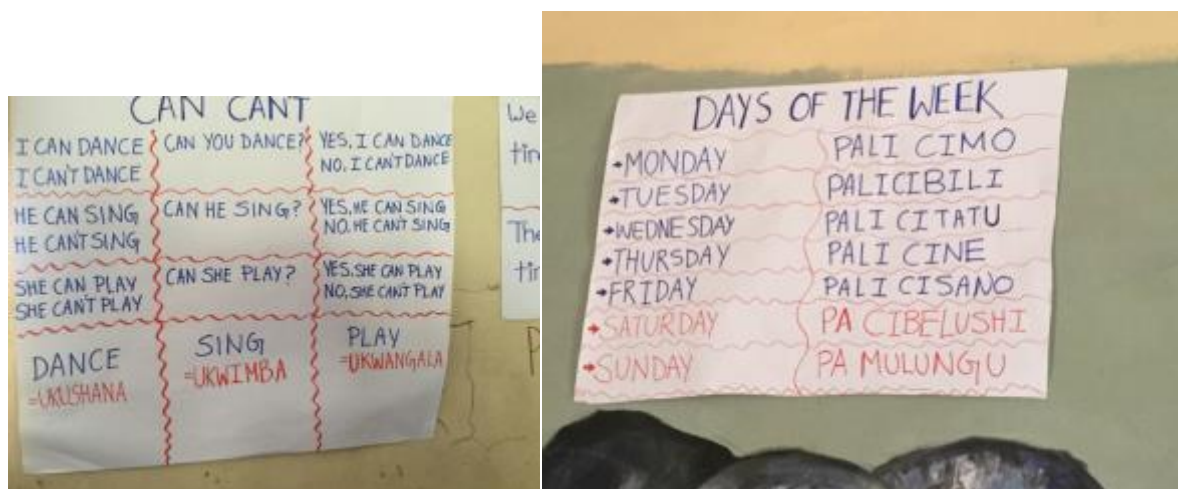
This project can potentially help the orphanage towards self-sustainability and therefore required careful attention. The progress of the new building impressed the whole group with its high quality and attention paid by the Managing Director of the orphanage, Kamandete Chuma.



- 2) **Week 2** - With the departure of the 5 volunteers and the completion of all major projects, the remaining 17 participants made a huge focus on Education support for the children. By assigning every child to either a staff-member or a student, individual attention was assured. Personal Learning Plans were established for every orphan and articulated through interviews with each one. These were based on the most recent school reports and areas of individual difficulty identified during the tutoring sessions mainly focusing on English, Maths and Science. Opportunities were also provided to encourage the orphans to write letters back to their 'pen pals' at Collège du Léman.



During the education week, many poster and mobiles were also constructed and placed on the walls of the Library and Dormitories.



Another aspect of support included visits to the local schools attended by the orphanage children with a view to deciding how best we can help improve the education offered by these schools. This encompassed an inspection of their English textbooks and other resources, and observing the local teachers in action in their classrooms.



Budget Preparation

A budget of the running costs for the next 12 months was prepared in conjunction with the local management. A major issue that dominated this budget was **education**, specifically to address the academic underperformance by many of the older orphans). The sponsors are determined that every orphan under the care of SOCH must produce evidence of significant academic progress (e.g. number of subjects passed), and academic accountability is also required of the orphanage management who will now be reviewing current procedures to ensure that every child is accountable in terms of their daily study routine and has access to support teaching staff where necessary for improvement.

A second issue was to ensure the provision of the **minimum wage for every employee** (this is a recent government requirement).

Finally, it is clear that there needs to be further investment in self-sustainability projects like the **Orphanage Guesthouse**. This Guesthouse project is designed to contribute its profits directly to the running of the SOCH orphanage. As soon as profits are realized, additional orphans may be sought to fill the places of those aged 16 and over, who will be required to leave the orphanage by the end of

2016. There are still significant funds required to complete the construction of the guesthouse but it is hoped that these will be raised by the end of this year so that it can start operating early in 2017.

Another possible self-sustainability project that has been proposed is that of a **maize grinding mill** (known locally as a ‘hammer mill’). The Manager has proposed that funding (about £3,000) be sought to construct a mill on the boundary of the rear of the orphanage site. During times of high cost of maize meal, local growers will turn to such mills and this can generate significant profits for the orphanage. The sponsor will prepare a grant application about this project to submit to the ECIS who are usually willing to fund such small-scale initiatives.

Week 3 – After 14 days of hard work at the orphanage, the group left Serenje for a final 3 days in the Livingstone area where they visited the Victoria Falls (where the mighty Zambesi River thunders into a narrow gorge) and joined a safari in the Chobe National Park. In this park, located in Botswana, the participants enjoyed a river cruise and several land bush-drives. Great fun was had by all as we caught glimpses of many of the wonderful wildlife of Chobe, including an overnight stay in tents with lions roaming and roaring outside.



After a delay in Johannesburg for 20 hours due to a cancelled flight, the group arrived back safely in Geneva on Saturday 30th July 2016. It was a wonderful trip, especially memorable due to the exceptional dedication by each of the participants to the education of the children at SOCH.

(K. Gilbert - 11 August 2016)