

# Sawubona

Report on St. Mary's visit to South Africa July 2011

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Bambisanani  
Partnership

Over the past five years St. Mary's Catholic School in Menston has developed a unique partnership with a school in one of South Africa's poorest rural areas. This summer fourteen students and four members of staff visited Mnyakanya School in the Nkandla region of Kwa Zulu Natal to develop the collaborative work between the two schools and wider community, which is referred to as the Bambisanani Partnership (Bambisanani being the Zulu word for 'working hand in hand').

This visit was led by David Geldart supported by Lucy Watson from St. Mary's, Peter Latham from Prince Henry's Grammar School, Otley and Mick Russell, HSBC Premier Manager. The students included: George Brabin, Georgina Byrne, Jamie Carter, Jessica Connolly, Eleanor English, Torquil Hall, Freya Kew, Ciara Hanstock, Harry Minchella, Robert Neesam, Brogan O'Connor, Gemma Pennock, Patrick Smith and Alessandra Valle-Metaxas.

The Nkandla region is in the heart of Zululand and is extremely deprived with 90% unemployment, 60% adult illiteracy and one of the

highest HIV/Aids rates in the world with one in three adults infected.

The Bambisanani Partnership has a key focus to use sport as a catalyst to promote education, leadership, health and global understanding.



An important aspect of this year's visit was to develop a relationship with the well resourced and highly successful Eshowe High School situated approximately an hour away from Mnyakanya. To that end four students from Eshowe were invited to join the Bambisanani Leadership Programme for the week with St. Mary's and Mnyakanya students. Chesslyne Lucas, Hilary Walker, Wendy Mchunu and Nkosikhona Mthebu consequently joined the team and added a very positive new dimension to the project.

During the visit the St. Mary's students, supported by the Eshowe students, mentored twenty Mnyakanya students on the Bambisanani Leadership Course. An aspect of

the course was for students from all three schools to jointly organise and deliver a Multi-Skill Sports Festival and a Literacy Festival for four local Primary Schools.



The mentoring programme was a tremendous success as were both festivals. Students from St. Mary's, Eshowe and Mnyakanya taught reading and sports skills to over sixty children from Ntowane, Halambu, Khomo and Kwamanqondo Primary Schools at a festival on the final day of the visit.

Ntolwane teacher Moses Xulu hailed the work of the St. Mary's, Eshowe and Mnyakanya students "What we have witnessed today in the Literacy and Sports Festivals is almost beyond words. The Primary School learners have been inspired, as have their educators, by the young leaders. It is difficult to express the importance of being able to speak and read English and the young leaders have been so effective; the use of sport



*to reinforce language development is fantastic. If I had not seen the events of today I would not have believed it. It was wonderful to see the St. Mary's, Eshowe and Mnyakanya students working so well together; they are a powerful team, so mature, confident and effective. This initiative is amazing."*

The intention is that the young leaders from Mnyakanya will continue to work with Ntolwane and the other Primary Schools to support the teaching of both reading and sports skills. The extensive sports and reading materials provided by the St. Mary's community and sponsors for the festivals were left with the Primary Schools. It is hoped that the leaders from Mnyakanya will ultimately support adults in the community who would like to learn to read.



The development and progress of the Mnyakanya students during the leadership course was outstanding. Bambisanani Leadership Awards were duly presented to the following students at a special ceremony by their student mentors from St. Mary's and Eshowe: Celumusa Mhlongo, Ngiphile Buthelezi, Sihle Nzuzo, Nomfundo Nzuzo, Nothando Khanyile, Nokulunga Sikhakhane, Sakhiseni Ndlovu,

Samkelisiwe Mabaso, Noma-  
langa Zuma, Nokuphila Mpanza,  
Ntombifuthi Thusi, Nokukhanya  
Buthelezi, Kwanele Mahlashama,  
Mfundo Magwaza, Snenhlanhla  
Khanyile, Sifiso Gcaba, Nombuy-  
iselo Nzuzo, Lungile Mthethwa,  
Simphiwe Ndlovu and Snethemba  
Mkhize

Speaking on behalf of the Mnyakanya student leaders, Nokulunga Sikhane said *"We are so proud to be Bambisanani Leaders. We have learned many things about leadership and we now have the confidence and motivation to do more in our community now. We have loved working with the St. Mary's and Eshowe students and learning from each other."*

The impact of the experience on the Eshowe students was also interesting and most significant. *"This week has been a real eye opener for me. I was not aware of Mnyakanya School before this and the rural area where it is situated. I have learned so much about my own country and the day to day challenges that some people face.*

*I am so proud of*



*what we have all achieved together at the festivals. It has been a fantastic opportunity for all of us."*

Wendy Mchunu

*"This week has been the best week of my life. I have learned so much about leadership, mentoring and the importance of teaching literacy in rural communities. I have also learned how important sport can be in bringing people together. I have made some wonderful friends and I have been inspired. My outlook on life has been changed by all of this."*

Chesslyne Lucas



Whilst at Mnyakanya, St Mary's students also taught a range subjects and activities to students including: Chemistry, Biology, Maths, Economics,

Physiology, English, Dance, Football and Cricket. In one after school session more than two hundred Mnyakanya students (25% of the school population!) stayed behind for extra lessons provided by St. Mary's students. This is even more remarkable as many of the Mnyakanya students walk more than two hours to and from school each day.

The St. Mary's team brought with them much needed equipment for Mnyakanya School including books for the Bambisanani Library, opened a year ago, calculators, stationery and resources for art, science, sport and health education. St. Mary's supports forty individual orphans at Mnyakanya and these students were provided with the uniforms and equipment they need for the year ahead.

William Vilakazi from Mnyakanya said *"The Bambisanani Partnership continues to inspire with the young leaders making a most remarkable impression. The joint learning projects that we are developing in art and creative writing using sport are fantastic and are raising the aspirations of young people from both communities. The Library opened last year is an amazing resource for my learners and educators. The Library will support the development of 'Literacy Leaders' which has been introduced on this visit. The young leaders developed through this programme continue to make a significant impact at Mnyakanya and increasingly in the wider community. The orphans supported by St. Mary's are all thriving and taking*

*full advantage of the opportunity that they have been given."*

In a new venture for St. Mary's, the team also developed the relationship with the Norwegian based charity 'Zulufadder' at one of its Orphanages a few miles from the town of Eshowe. Zulufadder is a small organization that supports and cares for HIV/Aids orphans and vulnerable children throughout Kwa Zulu Natal.



The St. Mary's team brought a range of equipment for the orphans and spent time singing, dancing and playing sport with the children as well as serving meals. They also met Zulufadder staff and volunteers including the incomparable Popi, a Zulu lady who has devoted her life to working with orphans. She is the Playschool Manager and is enthusiasm and devotion personified. Popi had a profound effect on the St. Mary's team causing them all to reflect on and discuss her significance as a genuine role model and inspiration, compared to the so called celebrity role models that many people admire in the UK.

The group also had the opportunity to meet two other inspirational people: Nick Phillips, Managing Director of the Zulufadder Chi-

dren's Trust, and Silvia Hellsvik who had moved from her native Norway to become Zulufadder's Project Manager. Nick praised the work of the Bambisanani Partnership and welcomed a link with Zulufadder.

*"The pioneering work that the Bambisanani Partnership is doing developing young leaders in South Africa should not be underestimated. You are making a bigger difference than you think. The fruits of your labours may continue to emerge for years, which is the nature of developing a leader. You are making a massive impact. You are a tremendous advert for young people. You have caused me to think how Zulufadder might develop young leaders in the future. Zulufadder will always welcome you to South Africa and we look forward to working with you in the future."*

Nick Phillips



The visit to South Africa clearly had a tremendous impact on the St. Mary's students:

*"They say that you should never judge a person until you have walked a mile in their shoes. My time in South Africa has taught me that this is true. I now have a greater understanding and empathy."*

Gemma Pennock



*"This trip was an amazing experience for me. It taught me so much about myself, friendship and the world. The only way we can overcome problems facing the modern world is through creating relationships, like we have done, through partnerships like ours. This is the only way we can make a difference and really change the world."*

Ciara Hanstock

*"I now fully understand why the Bambisanani Partnership is so important. This visit has been the most rewarding time of my life. It is a spectacular country and the people are so genuine. It has been such an amazing time; my eyes have truly been opened."*

Patrick Smith

*"Visiting South Africa has been the best experience of my life."*

Eleanor English

*"This adventure has changed my aims and goals in life. It has made me realise the change one person can make in influencing someone's life. It has given me a totally different outlook on world issues."*

Freya Kew

*"My horizons have been broadened. I leave Kwa Zulu Natal with a sense of achievement, knowing that I have gone someway to making a difference. I cannot imagine the full effects of the work we have done because much of what we have done is about giving peoples skills for the future. For this reason I will definitely go back."*

Robert Neesam

*"This amazing week has taught me that anyone and everyone can make a difference in the world if they really want to."*

Torquil Hall



*"The people I met throughout this incredible journey have altered my perspective on life. In our culture we take far too much for granted, constantly wanting more and never appreciating necessities. Those I encountered on this visit were grateful for everything they had. Even though many suffered unimaginable hardships, they managed to lead their lives with the largest smiles on their faces, a quality which I deeply admire and will never forget."*

Georgina Byrne

*"The visit to South Africa has been the best experience of my life; I have learned an unbelievable amount about South African culture, history and politics. I have learned so much about the importance of leadership and about myself. It has widened my perspective on life. It has given me a greater appreciation of many things especially good health, education and opportunities we simply take for granted."*

Brogan O'Connor

*"There is one word and one word*

*only that can describe this experience and that is 'UNBELIEVABLE'. No matter how it is described to you there is no way you can comprehend just how amazing it is unless you do it yourself."*

Alessandra Valle-Metaxas

*"The experience has been amazing; it has really made me think about the world and about life."*

George Brabin



In recent years St. Mary's have invited colleagues from partner schools to join them in South Africa. Peter Latham joined the team for the 2011 visit which had a profound effect on him.

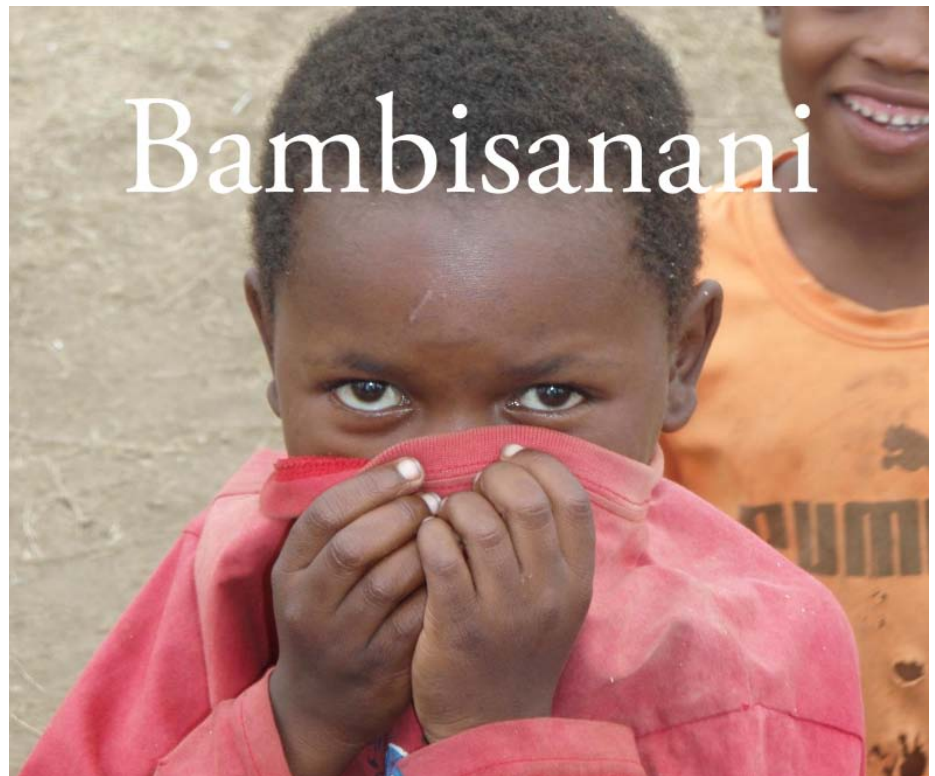
*"I was unsure what to expect and approached the venture with an open mind and heart. I was amazed at what a diverse and beautiful country South Africa is and how open and friendly our hosts and the people of the Zulu nation are. Massive problems exist, especially in the remote areas and it was pleasing to see the infrastructure moving forward in some of these areas. The partnership has moved a long way since its inception in 2006; the pupils of St. Mary's were quite incredible. Their compas-*

sion, friendliness, patience and vision left me agog. The friends they made, the relationships with the South African students and their team work was nothing less than outstanding. They were great ambassadors for their school and country. The lasting impression that I will have is that I think we brought some happiness to the children we worked with and they were so joyful, relaxed and happy in our presence. The orphanage in particular was an incredible experience; so many beautiful, loving and undemanding children who were so pleased to see us. I conclude by saying a huge thank you to St. Mary's for giving me this opportunity. It was an unbelievable experience and an absolute pleasure to be part of the team. I hope the partnership continues to go from strength to strength."



David Geldart was delighted with the visit "We had a fantastic team and I cannot praise them all enough for what they achieved. My colleagues Lucy, Mick and Peter made the most wonderful and unique contributions and the students responded in ways that continually gives me so much faith in young people. We took on a range of new challenges that have really moved the project on. The work on developing literacy was incredibly successful. We have developed links with a range of additional organisa-

tions and individuals who we can work with for mutual benefit. This visit also helped establish a range of joint learning projects which both schools will be engaged in over the next year. The possibility of creating adult volunteering opportunities in South Africa has also moved a step closer. The partnership has moved on this year which has created even more opportunities for the future."



▲ **A hardback book marking the first five years of the Bambisanani Partnership will be available in December of this year.**

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