



# Sawubona

Report on St. Mary's visit to South Africa July 2012

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Bambisanani  
Partnership

**O**ver the past six years St. Mary's Catholic School, Menston has developed a unique partnership with a school in one of South Africa's poorest rural areas. This summer fourteen students, three members of staff and a business sponsor 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'). The project was originally inspired by the UK's successful bid to host the Olympic Games this year with the specific aim to *'reach out to the world and inspire a generation through sport'*.

This visit was led by David Geldart supported by Martin Green and Barbara Pounder from St. Mary's and Chris Crowther from business sponsor and supporter Cardinal Maritime. The students were: Hannah Armitage, George Barber, Ruth Bevan, Holly Charles, Joe Doonan, Mark Haluszczak, Cait Hanstock, Ryan Houston, Natalie Meachin, Beth Pounder, Maisie Sammon, Declan Smith, Liam

Ward and Emma Williams. 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. Charlene Beukes, Zekhethelo Ndlangamandla, Sandile Thabede and Kwanda Mthembu consequently joined the team and

added a very positive dimension to the project.

During the visit St. Mary's students, supported by 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 an Olympic themed 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.

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: Khethiwe Cele, Sanelisiwe Dlamini, Sizwe Zuma, Minenhle Hlombe, Nokwethemba Magwaza, Ntokozo Mbatha, Nomcebo Mchunu, Celumusa Mhlongo, Ntombikhona Mthethwa, Nomathemba Mtshali, Nonkululeko Nala, Nothando Ndlovu, Ntombiyesihle Ndlovu, Nomfundo Shangase, Sibusiso Shange, Siphesihle Shange, Cebolenkosi Siziba, Sphindile Zondi, Bonukuthula Zuma and Noxolo Zuma. Speaking on behalf of the Mnyakanya students Nothando Ndlovu said *"We have all learned so much from working together. We have learned to be leaders and to work in the wider community. We have made friends and now have greater confidence in the world."*



The impact of the experience on the Eshowe students was also interesting and significant. *"The experience has been amazing for all of us. I have learned so much this week about people from my own country, people from the UK and about myself. I have learned about inequalities and how hard some people's lives are. It is vital that Eshowe School maintains the link with St. Mary's and Mnyakanya. The Sports and Reading Festivals were amazing successes on so many levels. I feel privileged to have been part of this. We made friends and succeeded together – we all learned so much"* said



Kwando Mthembu.

Whilst at Mnyakanya, St. Mary's students also taught a range of subjects and activities to students including: Biology, Maths, French, German, Geography, English, Dance, Football, Rugby and the history of the Olympic Games. In one after school session more than two hundred Mnyakanya students (25% of the school population!) stayed behind for a Dance session provided by Natalie Meachin and Holly Charles. 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 two years ago), calculators, stationery and resources for art, science, sport and health education. On



Nelson Mandela Day (a special day of volunteering in South Africa) the St. Mary's team spent time working at the Zulufadder Orphanage. 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, reading and playing sport with the children as well as serving meals. They also met Zulufadder



staff and volunteers including the incomparable Poppi, a Zulu lady who has devoted her life to working with orphans. She is the Playschool Manager and is enthusiasm and devotion personified. Poppi 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 final day culminated not only in the Festivals but also in a remarkable celebration event at Mnyakanya attended not only by school members but also community members and politicians. William Vilakazi, Principal of the school, praised the commitment of St. Mary's to the partnership *"The Bambisanani Partnership continues to be an inspiration to our school and community. We all learn from working together and the focus on developing young leaders is changing people's lives. We are working in an equal partnership where there is mutual respect. There is a saying in Zulu culture: 'Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu' – meaning, 'we are what we are because of others' we are genuinely working hand in hand and I believe that both school communities are enhanced as a result. What this partnership teaches cannot be learned from books."*

At a celebration ceremony at the end of the week a range of awards were presented to students for their achievements.

At this event the twenty four South African students proudly received the Bambisanani Leadership Award in recognition of successfully completing the course.

A number of very special annual awards were also presented. Two years ago a young man from Otley named Laurie McCauley sadly died. Laurie was passionate about

sport and literature and his family donated two special awards in these areas to be presented annually at Mnyakanya School to support the partnership. The awards are referred to as Laurie's Legacy and this year the Most Improved Footballer Award was won by Nzama Slindelo and the Creative Writing Award by Precious Nxumalo. At the ceremony Precious said *"It is a great honour to win this important award, I am so surprised that it is me. The Laurie's Legacy Awards remember Laurie and inspire us. I am so proud and hope that I am a worthy winner. We thank the McCauley family for all their support."*

Another annual award was also presented in memory of Sbonelo Magwaza, a Mnyakanya student who also died two years ago. Sbonela was an outstanding young leader who, in the year before his death, had successfully completed the Bambisanani Leadership Award. In tribute to Sbonela each school now present an annual Sbonela Magwaza Award for Outstanding Leadership. The award at Mnyakanya was presented to Mdunge Lindokuhle.



During the last year a major joint learning project at both schools has been sport inspired competitions in

Art and Creative Writing. Over five hundred students from St. Mary's and Mnyakanya took part in the Bambisanani 'Power of Sport' Art and Creative Writing competitions and, during the celebration event, all the Mnyakanya students that entered received a special certificate.



Specially commissioned engraved glass trophies were presented to the three students who had produced the most outstanding art work: Kholeka Magwaza, Mcebiseni Mngadi, Samkelo Mkhwanazi and the most outstanding creative writing: Hlengiwe Zuma, Snenhlanhla Khanyile, Thabile Magwaza.

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

*"I have had the best trip ever, I will never forget all I saw and how I felt. There is so much to think about now and so much to be done in the future."*

Maisie Sammon

*"I had an amazing time in South Africa, I have learnt so much from what I have seen. The people I met*

*made the trip one to remember."*

Natalie Meachin

*"I was given an amazing life changing opportunity. I will never forget the children I met and the friends I made. I have never worked so hard in my entire life!"*

Holly Charles

*"There are no actual words to describe what I saw and how it affected me. I am so glad that I have had the opportunity. I have met the most inspirational people and at the orphanage I was truly moved."*

Liam Ward

*"This has been so different to my usual trips abroad but it was so absolutely fantastic. I am so grateful for the opportunity and hope sincerely that the legacy of Bambisanani continues and develops."*

Declan Smith



*"Bambisanani has opened my eyes in a way I never thought possible. The visit to Zulufadder was a cruel reminder of how unfair and unforgiving our world can be; though the kindness and selflessness some human beings have for one another has never been so apparent. The unrelenting compassion that Poppi has for the orphans made me realize that even when a society fails a*

*population, leaders can take charge and care for those in need. People like Poppi are an example of why leadership is so important in a place like South Africa."*

Ryan Houston

*"I have had the best trip of my life. This was much more than a visit to another country; it was much more than that. I will never forget my time at the Orphanage: it was an experience to learn from and taught me that things are never quite what they seem and that people like Poppi surprise you and inspire you."*

Joe Doonan

*"I can honestly say that this trip is definitely going to change my life. The people I have met and worked with have inspired me to do better."*

George Barber

*"I came on this trip thinking I knew something about the Bambisanani Partnership and life in South Africa but nothing actually could have prepared me for what I saw and the people I met. It has filled me with a confidence and a desire to do something with my life that will be of use. My eyes were opened. I didn't want to leave."*

Beth Pounder





*“This trip has been an eye opener, not only from seeing how the orphans are cared for but because the people on this trip have all been great. I cannot really express how much I appreciate the opportunity and it certainly is one I won’t forget. I have had to say goodbye to so many people which made it hard but at the same time I can be happy that I made such friendships.”*

Mark Haluszczyk



*“Before I came on this trip I was told what I would be doing; but as I have learnt, experiencing it for myself was completely different. The experience has definitely made me think about the world in a different way, and meeting all those inspirational people has made me want to help people more. I have had an amazing time and I am very grateful to have been given this opportunity.”*

Cait Hanstock



*“I cannot really explain how much this journey has broadened my horizons of the world. I am not very good at explaining things but I hope that my actions throughout the time in South Africa have proved how extremely grateful I am, and will continue to be.”*

Emma Williams

*“This trip has been absolutely fantastic. The reasons are many. I am now going to appreciate what I have a lot more. I have loved making new friends, but more than anything, I now understand that a demonstration whether in sport (for a clearer explanation) or in life, (such as a hug), is definitely worth more than a thousand words.”*

Hannah Armitage

*“Thank you so much for the opportunity to come to South Africa; it has been one of the hardest yet most rewarding experiences of my life. I will never forget the students at Mnyakanya or Zulufadder, the struggles they face every day, but most importantly I won’t forget their smiles.”*

*One of the most important things I have learnt from this trip is that success and happiness is not measured in terms of material possessions but in how we help others and make a positive change.”*

Ruth Bevan

The impact on teachers too cannot be overstated. Barbara Pounder said, *“It has been three years since my last trip and although there are still the many frustrations, the underlying desire for nearly everyone involved is still to make a change for the better. As a teacher it warms my heart to see our students react and be touched by what they see. As a mother it breaks my heart that the orphanage children don’t have their own mums to read to them at night. But as a human being it reinforces for me the knowledge that Bambisanani is a project of hope and without it so much would be lost.”*

Martin Green, Head of Physical Education at St. Mary’s was making his first visit to South Africa, a visit that clearly had a profound effect on him *“South Africa has always been a very distant yet influential factor in my life since way back in 1977. My Uncle, Aunt and two young cousins moved, permanently, to Cape Town in that year and I followed closely the developments in the country throughout the turbulent times that followed. Steve Biko and Nelson Mandela were hugely influential figures in the development of my world view. It was with a mixture of excitement and trepidation that I set out with the sixth annual St.*

Mary's Bambisanani trip in July 2012; I simply did not know what to expect! The visit to Eshowe and Mnyakanya was an incredible assault on the senses and a challenge to all the accepted cultural norms I have been exposed to in the northern hemisphere. The people I met, from the can-do South Africans, such as Graham Chennell and Logan Govender, to the resilient and talented Zulu people in the towns, homesteads and schools, were so full of joy and humanity, even when faced with the malevolent shadow of AIDS/HIV. They were a constant inspiration to all of us on the trip and they left with me the abiding impression that, with time and continued co-operation, the South African nation can make the leap forward to become the true 'rainbow nation' of the African continent. The energy, music, dance, language, wildlife, landscapes and humour are remarkable in this new country. What a privilege to take part in this wonderful educational partnership; the memories will be with me forever. I will return in future to show my daughter this astonishing country."

In recent years St. Mary's have invited colleagues from partner schools and business sponsors to join them in South Africa. Chris Crowther from business sponsor Cardinal Maritime joined the team for the 2012 visit which had a significant impact on him. "I would like to thank the St. Mary's staff and students for being so welcoming to me when I joined the team to go to South Africa.

It was very much a team, or even a large family, and I was made to feel part of it. I had an amazing experience in South Africa learning about a different culture. I enjoyed every minute of the visit and feel that the partnership between St. Mary's and Mnyakanya School is providing remarkable opportunities to develop new attitudes and life skills. I can see that for many students, from both countries, the experience really is life changing. I am so grateful for the opportunity St. Mary's and my employers, Cardinal Maritime have given me. I have become a better person through this experience. The work of the Bambisanani Partnership is so valuable."



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 Barbara, Martin and Chris made the most wonderful and unique contributions and the students responded in ways that continually gives me so much faith in young people. When I see the impact of our work on young people and adults in both countries outlined in this report it is clear that despite many difficulties and frustrations we are making a real difference in some people's lives. This visit has highlighted enormous challenges for



the future but has also given us the spirit and motivation to respond to these challenges. Special thanks must go to all our supporters for their outstanding contribution to this project. There is much more to do but we intend to keep the Olympic spirit alive."

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