



# Children of Fire

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[www.firechildren.org](http://www.firechildren.org)

## Newsletter

No.5 2007



*Doreen celebrated her tenth birthday Sinamuthunzi style. For parties, chips and cakes are allowed—thanks Baby Joe!*



Children of Fire—Africa's first burns charity

*Top left: Electrical burns survivor Mitta with her new Matric-year hairstyle*

### Happy Healthy Christmas Packs

Many charities are approached at Christmas time by people who feel like giving, especially to children, the aged, the infirm or the sick. Many people want to give what they perceive as luxuries—"chips", sweets, fizzy cold drinks and similar.

This year we ask you to think a little deeper, and then to give to any truly reliable organisation. Please check yourself to see that gifts really reach those who are meant to get them.

The poorest children in South Africa often get more sweets and chips even than brown bread and peanut butter. Often they do not even know what salad is. In fact it is so unusual that when we have given some children fresh vegetables, they scrape them off their plates as they don't think vegetables are real food. Give them a bunch of grapes and they ask their mothers if they are safe to eat?

Protein for poor children is chicken's heads and chicken's feet, known as walkie talkies. High sugar snacks can be cheaper than real food and they curb the appetite. But a poorly educated parent will give the child something cheap to eat to keep them quiet.

**These children do not grow.**

Some have kwashiorkor; many have worms. They do not gain weight, they do not have protein needed to develop properly, they are apathetic and generally fail to thrive.

The worst cases are marasmus—long term starvation leading to severe stunting. These children can be half the weight and half the height

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### Sudan boy stranded

Rachid (12) a Sudanese burns survivor living in a tent in a Chad is still not here. We combed the country for Masalit speakers; Waging Peace had his and his grandma's airfares sorted with Ethiopian Airlines, South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs put the "civil" back into "civil servant"—they were so helpful. The chargé d'affaires in N'Djamena helped by Home Affairs, sorted out visas—complicated by the refugee family's lack of documentation. The UN High Commission for Refugees played its part. And then the Chadian authorities dug in their heels. Why? All because of the debacle around Arc de Zoë—a French organisation allegedly trying to kidnap 100 "orphans" who had families, from Chadian soil. Don't tar us with the same brush, please!

that they should be. Not only that, but their brains do not develop well. They will never reach the potential they once had. A starved child will not learn well at school.

Giving food once a year is kind but it would be better to pool resources with a church, a mosque, a reliable community organisation or similar and help children on a sustained basis. Even multivitamins can be given out if there is someone to administer them safely.

That requires more effort and more money than most people are prepared to give. But then ask yourself—are you giving so that you feel good? Or are you giving to make a child's life better?

The most common problems related to diet in South Africa are: Not enough food. Too much sugar; too much salt; uniodised (or insufficiently iodised) salt leading to iodine deficiency; no fresh fruit or vegetables; too much carbohydrate; too little protein; too much caffeine and too much tartrazine.

So Children of Fire's Happy December/Christmas pack would contain:

A box of Ceres fruit juice and a box of Liquifruit fruit juice (the brand doesn't matter, we just urge variety).

A packet of South African macadamia nuts (but be careful with toddlers because these nuts are big and the child could choke).

A large roll of dried guava.

A packet of Safari prunes, apple rings, peach and apricot pieces.

A packet of peanuts.

A packet of SuperC sweets.

A packet of biltong or a ring pull tin of tuna fish



with vegetables that does not need cooking.

A large pack of dry savoury biscuits.

A small jar of cheese spread.

A plastic jar of peanut butter.

A jar of fish paste.

A plastic knife.

A toothbrush and toothpaste.

A packet of colour pencils.

An exercise book.

A South African story book.

A pencil sharpener, ordinary pencil, eraser and ruler.

A pencil case.

*One or more pieces of fresh fruit if they can be delivered only on the morning of Christmas Eve.*

*(We don't have facilities for long term storage of fresh produce.)*

An old school bag or sports bag to put everything in.

What's listed above would be enough.

However, wash things and "doing" games (chess, drafts, checkers, snakes-'n-ladders) are always more appreciated than soft toys.

Dress up dolls, toy cars, balls of all sizes and skipping ropes are also liked.

Small homes don't have clean flat surfaces for jigsaw puzzles though.

And it is generally better not to wrap a present so that e.g. marbles suitable for a ten-year-old boy are not given to a two-year-old who might swallow them.

Many children also have just one pair of underpants. Multipacks of underpants/panties for children aged from 3 to 18 make them not have to wash their only underwear and hope that they dry overnight.

Many food items we'd like to give, will not work without a fridge. We would welcome ideas of other nutritional items with a long shelf life to add to the Happy Healthy Christmas pack.

**Please bear in mind the increasing rate of paediatric HIV-Aids.** Sweets have a disastrous effect on the CD4 count (blood quality) of these children. Even corned beef and tomato soup have sugar in them so it is very hard to live healthily. So read the ingredients on the side of the tin or packet, check the sell-by date and together: **Let's help these children live longer, happier, healthy lives.**

*Volunteer: There is an opening for a student to work on our squatter camp malnutrition project.*

## Fires in Alex attributed to the new SA disease: power cuts

Twelve shacks burned in Setswetla, Alexandra on National Women's Day, August 9th 2007. UMashesha Rossina Mogano (*nee* Malatjie) alerted Children of Fire as the fire was being extinguished by residents—she organised a bucket run. New British volunteer Debbie Ng had just arrived by plane that morning and set off on GT Furniture Repairs's bakkie kindly lent by Louis Rutstein, with other volunteers to hand disaster recovery supplies to the families... including three lovely blankets for each family and some snacks for all the kids around—even for those who were not involved in the fire. We also shared a surplus of *Oprah Magazines* that had been kindly delivered to our offices, some Dawn lotion and some Dove soap. Fortunately no one was hurt in the daytime fire.

Some of those helped on August 9<sup>th</sup> were: Abraham Ramatsokotla K36, Lavinia Machaba K91, Mapula Mphekwane K34, Maria Rikhotso K38, David Tibane K37, John Rikhotso F220, Moses Mahlagola, Chaisa Ramoshweli K88, Hendrik Maake, Robert Mashaba K35, Memory Monyai.



### Psychology of “welcome”

The children are happy that weekend-volunteer Michelle is back from her psychology conference in the US. She was glad to go to meet fellow academics but less-than-enamoured of the American way of life... “everything so synthetic, fake meat on the pizzas, oversize portions, overfull aeroplanes”, strange vocabulary (“they had no idea what a pharmacy was—or a cool drink, and what’s more, they didn’t even try to understand”) and no welcome. She commented how in Jo’burg we like foreign visitors and ask them about the places they come from. In the USA people were prejudiced against her as a white South African... like guys, she was a baby at the end of apartheid and you really can’t blame the history on her! But she said it was far worse for anyone who looked even vaguely Arabic...

Thanks to Rossina’s alert response, we assisted with disaster recovery after another fire that happened on Friday night 17<sup>th</sup> August; we helped early on the morning of Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2007.

The cause of the second fire was indirectly City Power because one resident had his stove on to cook food, then there was a power cut (*the new SA disease*) and not surprisingly the stove-owner did not remember to turn it off. Instead he went out and when the electricity supply came back on, things on or near the stove caught fire.

Many shacks in Alexandra have electricity, both legally and illegally. Those where the power supply and a small distribution board have been installed by City Power (or its subcontractors) are illegal because they have not been given Electrical Certificates of Compliance. This is a requirement under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

Among the rubble of the shacks that burned down was a brand new refrigerator and a four plate stove, just charcoal carcasses now. The residents took wheelbarrows to cart away the debris and tipped it straight down the steep slope into the Jukskei River. In this area where rats are as big as cats, environmental health might as well be in another province or planet. The debris is a serious health hazard to the thousands of people living throughout Setswetla. Occasionally environmental health prints leaflets which are kept at its neat office in main Alexandra and Wynberg, telling residents that the rats carry bubonic plague. (*yes... that sickness that killed off half of Europe several hundred years ago...*)

### November plum time

So many children come and go, staying a while for assessment or surgery and when we sort out the photos of their progress, it is hard to remember quite who was here and when. But photograph them in the garden and the vegetation gives the date away! August was full of apricot and plum blossom; in September the light pink jasmine hung heavy and fragrant and the clouds glowered with the promise of rain denied to us for so many months. In October again the streets of Melville and the road leading up to Johannesburg Academic hospital were Jacaranda purple—so glorious that one sees it afresh each year and thinks that that alone is enough reason to live in this vibrant city.

## September 11<sup>th</sup> blood pours from a girl I know

September 11<sup>th</sup> held fresh horror this year. Not this time for 2752 people killed in America, just because they were there. But instead, for one of South Africa's beautiful teenagers whose life was changed for ever that night.

Mendeka Taje\* spent most of her life in a squatter camp. For those of you who live lives of privilege, her daily conditions were unimaginable. Cramped and squalid, yet each shack dweller tries to make their rusty iron box into a home. Dirt floors sometimes with carpet, old linoleum, even concrete screed. A door and for the lucky few, a window as well. Newspaper coats walls and ceilings in the smarter homes, held in place with a flour and water mix. There's a bed, a table, the lethal paraffin stove. A candle stuck to the table edge. And little else.

I have worked in these communities so long, I now see beauty where you might turn your nose up in disgust. I see pride in the addition of a curtain. Or the upgrading of the home with a new-second-hand-radio, or a row of steel-wire-scrubbed saucepans on a shelf. The strong-smelling green floor soap and hung on a nail, old orange string bags used to rub skin from rough heels when washing.

And I see the families whose homes have been burned down maybe three years in succession, picking themselves up and starting over and over and over again.

But amid these wonderful, brave, kind, endlessly-patient people live monsters. Depraved people for whom there is no hope.

One of these mistakes-born-of-woman decided to hurt Mendeka that night. The sweet-natured bright schoolgirl was asked to run an errand to buy some tomatoes. She went willingly and returning with the

fruit, took them into the man's shack. He closed the door behind her. With knife in hand, he said that if she screamed, he would pour boiling water on her genitals. The pot was ready. For five and a half hours he cruelly raped and assaulted the skinny sixteen year old girl.

She's left the squatter camp now for a tiny back-room in Cresta. On October 24<sup>th</sup> she had another blood test. In the meantime, she took her post-exposure prophylaxis medicines, and more medicine each day.

She prays. Prays that the medicines do all that they are meant to do. That she is not pregnant, not HIV positive, not carrying some other sexually-transmitted disease. Prays that somehow she can live through the degradation and the pain.

The man was about 26 years old. He has not been arrested. He has run away, they say, and his neighbours "don't know" where he works.

I know Mendeka. I helped her attend a human rights programme at the Constitutional Court in 2006. She studied hard at school and dressed conservatively. She was not a kid who drank or smoked. She had potential to rise out of the poverty and create a better life from her own endeavours.

For those of you who live those distant, comfortable lives and who so readily condemn the "squatter-camp-scum," Mendeka did no wrong. She was a daughter to be proud of.

But what is her future now? She had an innocence, a gaiety. Forever lost.

I wish her strength and justice. Without justice she can never really heal. And justice is in short supply.

*Bronwen Jones 2007*

*\*not her real name*

## Effective rehabilitation is impossible for Zanele in her garage home

Zanele Jeza, a four-year-old girl who was burned by hot home-made polish two years ago, lives in a garage. She stays there with her family: mother, father and five brothers and sisters and a new-born niece. Her mother Mirriam is unemployed, her father Patrick works as a chef at Moyo in Melrose Arch. He is the sole breadwinner for the family of nine. Three of his children are still at school.

The cramped environment that the family has to live in is unacceptable and probably contributed to

Zanele's accident. She had several operations and she needs hygienic conditions to recover and to prevent others from being infected by resistant bacteria that her wounds may harbour, said Children of Fire's general practitioner Dr. Giuseppe Trincherio.

Children of Fire assisted the family with applying to the Housing Department for a reconstruction and development programme house. The outcome is awaited.

## ChiFi teenagers represent Gauteng at Energy Conference

In late September, ten teenagers from Children of Fire and two care workers attended the National Children's Energy Summit at the Kopanong Conference Centre in Benoni. The event brought together 200 teenagers from across the country enabling the nation's potential future leaders to discuss the critical issue of energy on both a global and local scale. Children of Fire carefully selected teenagers who would benefit from this event and also act as excellent representatives for the Gauteng Province. The children we sent included those from deep rural areas, Joe Slovo squatter camp and Alexandra Township, some of them burn survivors having missed out on life's many opportunities.

South Africa is re-writing its *White Paper on Energy Policy*, and as energy affects future generations of adults, the event was held to encourage teenagers to think and talk about energy and raise their concerns. The teenagers learnt about energy policy management such as energy governance, safety and supply. After university-style lectures focusing on social, environmental and economic factors, the teens were split into discussion groups. They made presentations, and an amalgamation of ideas was formed to create their own *White Paper on Energy*. This was presented to the 'grown-ups' on the final day at the National Energy Summit held in Sandton. Twenty children attended, two of whom were Children of Fire's Musa Zwane and Tristan Jones. Tristan has been involved in charity activities for 11 years and is a long-serving UMashasha volunteer. Musa (aged 18) is a resident of Alexandra Township. He was burned as a toddler when his sister was preparing homemade polish and the hot solution was knocked over. Musa climbed Kilimanjaro with Children of Fire in June 2007, is in grade 10 and hopes to study graphic design in future.

During the summit, the teens visited a Sasol fuel production plant and Lonmin platinum mine. Sasol is a world leader in its field, and with plants in Secunda and Sasolburg it produces oil by gasifying coal and then converting it into liquid synthetic fuels and petrochemicals. During the tour around the plant, the chemical processes and the production equipment were explained. The guide said the coal conversion was among the most efficient in the world, and that the process created "very little impact" on the environment. It is interesting though, that in June 2007 there was speculation from the Xinhua News Agency that China has halted

progress in setting up more of these coal-to-liquid fuel plants because of the negative affect the process has on the environment. One by-product (paraffin/kerosene) harms many of the children we work with, particularly those burnt when paraffin stoves explode. The tour introduced a complex chemical process but had a slight element of propaganda, as Sasol sought to convince the teenagers that coal-to-liquid fuel production was South Africa's future and that Sasol would be the leader of the international market.

Then the youngsters were introduced to the platinum industry which contributes significantly to the nation's economy. The country provides 50 per cent of the world's platinum, and Lonmin is the third largest company in mine-to-metal production, employing 25,000 people and investing in social responsibility projects in areas surrounding the mines. It felt as though these companies were promoting their career opportunities, but the excursions were interesting, and particularly with Sasol showed that energy was produced through industrial processes rather than just existing when we switch on a light.



At the final dinner, guest speakers Councillor Duma Nkosi, Mayor of the Ekurhuleni Municipality, and Buyelua Sonjica, Minister of Minerals and Energy, thanked the teenagers for their contributions. All enjoyed an Edu-Play on energy conservation, bursting into laughter on a regular basis. As a British volunteer I found it difficult to understand the Zulu dialogue! Then a DJ took the spotlight creating a memorable ambiance where children and caregivers danced together.

The energy sector makes up 15 per cent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP); 75 per cent of energy consumption is provided through coal, used to generate electricity and to a lesser extent

to generate synthetic fuels, oil and petrochemicals. A third of coal production is exported via Richards Bay, the world's largest coal exporting facility. Eskom generates 95 per cent of South Africa's electricity, and two-thirds of the electricity used across the African continent. It exports power to countries including Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. South African electricity is among the cheapest in the world and is priced at even lower levels within townships and the few squatter camps that have a supply. The low price of electricity could create apathy towards energy conservation, but it is set to rise by 18 per cent. Coal has an enormous impact on the environment and is a major contributor to the fact that South Africa is the world's fifteenth largest emitter of carbon dioxide.

The Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) was to 'diversify primary energy sources and reduce dependency on coal'. It is seeking new ways of creating more sustainable energy industries that are less harmful to the environment and the workers, who may suffer serious respiratory problems. Most coal reserves are in the northeast while a high demand for electricity is in Gauteng. Moving solid coal or electricity long distances is inefficient. Alternative energy, e.g. nuclear, lead to construction of two nuclear power reactors, operating since 1984 and 1985, in Koeberg near Cape Town. These pressurised water reactors (PWR) are for example also used in France. It would seem that nuclear power is South Africa's next step in effective energy production. Since 1993, Eskom and others have been developing the Pebble Bed Modular Reactor (PBMR). This world-leading technology allegedly improves the way in which nuclear power is generated; in terms of safety, economics and used fuel reprocessing. The construction cost is said to be modest and generating cost competitive. Currently 92 per cent of South Africa's electricity is generated through coal, and 5.2 per cent is generated through nuclear power. According to the Nuclear Energy Corporation this figure is set to rise to 30 per cent by 2030, aided by South Africa's uranium mining industry. By 2016, it is planned that more PWRs will be in operation, and PBMRs will be used for local production and for export. The new generation of nuclear energy is alleged to be eco-friendly, but anti-nuclear groups point out that no other country wants to make pebble bed technology.

Approximately 30 per cent of SA households don't have electricity. The government hopes to provide

every household with electricity by 2014. It should consider every option in efficiently generating and using energy. Although there was some discussion of renewable energy sources at the energy summit, there seems to be no DME commitment to increase environmentally-friendly energy production. There needs to be R107 billion invested to ensure that the supply of energy is consistent and sustainable. Since 2005 the country experienced electricity capacity constraints causing regular power cuts.

Surely South Africa's bounty of sunshine could play more of a role in producing solar electricity, though the cost of producing panels and the risk of theft is significant?

The concept of the summit was an excellent way for young adults to be brought together to discuss the future of their nation. But it is questionable how effective the summit was in tackling the real issues of energy in South Africa. I felt some of the lectures and discussions were appropriate for an older, higher educated audience rather than high school teenagers from a diverse background. From this view it failed to explain simply that we can all contribute to energy conservation by being more vigilant; for example by using fluorescent tubes or energy efficient lamps instead of high usage spot-light bulbs (which were predominantly used throughout the hotel we were staying in). It would be a positive step if in 30 years time when some of these teenagers are in powerful jobs, South Africa becomes a world leader in renewable energy production. The summit could have been treated as a step towards this.

The Energy Summit did allow Children of Fire to send disadvantaged teenagers not only to learn but to also enjoy the luxury of staying in a hotel for the very first time. It was also nice to see the teenagers look out and take care of each other. Thembeke from Joe Slovo was always considerate and vigilant with Katrinky, blind from glaucoma and a pupil at the Johannesburg School for the Blind. During the children's social time before supper, many of them enjoyed the gym, sauna, squash court and swimming pool and took full advantage of the 'all you can eat' buffet at breakfast, lunch and supper. They all received a certificate stating that they had contributed to the Children's Energy Summit.

*By Chris Wilson*

## Royal Jam production creates jobs in the Amangwane Kingdom

Bayéte King Alfred! That was the greeting made by two UMashesha when they travelled to Natal to visit the Amangwane King Alfred Hlongwane. Debbie Ng and Angelika Einsiedler spent five days of September in the rural area of Emmaus in Ukhahlamba some 200km from Johannesburg. Getting to know the King, his family and the Amangwane people proved to be a real eye-opener in how to survive on very little money, the struggle for work and encouraging children to say “no” to teenage pregnancy and drugs and “yes” to an education.

Children of Fire have a long-standing relationship with the King. Our own Sizwe Hlophe (aged 6) is the honorary grandson to the King, making him a royal Amangwane prince. Plus on the last day before Debbie and Angelika left for Johannesburg, the King referred to them generously as his daughters. So this in theory makes the British and German women Amangwane princesses too — a matter that has been disputed back in the Children of Fire's office where it was insisted that royal titles aren't so easily obtained. More seriously, earlier this year we helped the King get the Amangwane Royal Jam label trademarked and from mid 2008 more overseas volunteers will move closer to seeing those jars of royal jam on the supermarket shelves.

Debbie and Angelika were privileged to have stayed in the King's kraal. More specifically his youngest daughter Princess Dumisile (21) gave up her bedroom for them while she and her four-month-old son Sbonga stayed in the small, spare bedroom. The idea of living with royalty was an initial shock but that was nothing compared with the reaction Debbie experienced when the Princess collected water for her to bathe, sat at the foot of the bed waiting for her to wake up and then later brushing her hair for her. The guests felt like royalty.

Debbie and Angelika were treated very well by everyone they met and even made a great impression on two men who were hoping they would become their wives. Debbie was slightly offended to hear that she is valued at only 11 cows. It turns out if a woman does not speak Zulu or is an Amangwane, her value is decreased significantly from the average lobola payment of 20 cows.

Living the rural lifestyle proved difficult for our volunteers. Water was to be collected from a tap each morning and the only toilet facility was in a mud hut outside from the main house. At the farm

next to the King's, women were queuing around the tap with their buckets waiting patiently for the water to come from the mountains. On a good day



they would only have to wait four or five hours. On a bad day they could wait all day just for two buckets of water which is then used for washing dishes, the laundry, drinking, cooking and bathing. How many buckets can an average 10 minute shower fill?

In order to earn whatever money she can get, one woman, a 53-year-old dressmaker, spends two days making a typical dress for another person in her community and would charge R40 per item. This tiny amount is enough to last her for the week. A 74-year-old talented arts and crafts maker charges R5 (40 British pence or about 80 US cents) for each item she spends two days making.

These people are poor. Their leader, the King, wants to do everything he can to change this. He is a generous man with big dreams for his people. As well as the jam production, he hopes to build a hotel, a university, a chicken factory and a bakery. All will hopefully produce jobs for the four million Amangwane people, of which 80 per cent are unemployed. Children deserve an education, yet there are still many families in the area who are encouraging their sons and daughters to leave school to either find work in the city, get married or have babies of their own—just to get less than R200 a month from government benefits. Surely a Matric qualification or even better a University degree is far more appealing than becoming another dropout statistic? The King wants to see more children in school and finishing Grade 12. He is also hoping to see one day where there will be no division between the white and black farmers and that everyone can work together in harmony to make Natal a great nation.

The King and the Amangwane people are proud of their heritage. While their language is also part of

the Nguni group, they are 200 years older than the Zulus. This nation has great potential to prosper and with the right people helping them, they will achieve great success. The production of the jam will get people working. We hope to see the Amangwane Royal Jam™ on supermarket shelves

across South Africa by end 2008. We want tourists visiting Natal to buy a jar as souvenirs for their friends and family. While this project is still in its beginning stages, Children of Fire volunteers will be helping out the King and the Amangwane Trust all the way. It's worth it. *By Debbie Ng*

## International leaflets for North Africa outreach

Children of Fire has leaflets again, and this time in English, French and Portuguese. A great thank you to Rick Phillips and Gavin Slater from Pixel Print, who printed the leaflets.

On 8 November African Outreach Manager Lindiwe Ngwenya took off to Tunisia to set up Children of Fire's North Africa office. With the official languages being French and Arabic, "Les Enfants de Feux" will need according brochures.

Outreach to the Democratic Republic of Congo is tentatively planned for Autumn 2008.

The Portuguese leaflets will inform Mozambican and Angolan burn survivors whom we help.



lines personnes des 200 familles aidées  
des sacs de désastre après une incendie  
Malvern, en juin 2006.  
Children of Fire est une organisation caritative  
créée en Afrique du Sud: 006-702-NPO  
Children of Fire est financé par le public. On accueille  
aucuns cadeaux en nature. S'il  
à continuer notre travail.

## Peacekeeping at night in Slovo

A row between neighbours turned ugly in Slovo squatter camp. Sadly it was between two families of good standing who have both been assisted by the charity for several years. So BJ and TJ set off for a September evening's mediation by paraffin-lamp-light between the Mtolos and the Mbangas and administered a little First Aid for a 26-year-old's head injury as well (*Primapore* is so versatile). One family sells beer - against the law but we are not able to fix every breach of the law in that community. The young man from the other family allegedly

sought to "second some supplies" for himself. He failed, had a very sore head when his own protective stick was used against him—and then allegedly threatened to burn the other family's shack.

From our experience, these threats are not usually serious because both families would be left destitute as a result. But in that precarious lifestyle, it doesn't make people sleep easily.

A long chat later, the young man apologised and maybe tragedy was averted.

## Anele surgery at Sunninghill

Dr Helene van Rhyn visited Dr Martin Kelly with Anele to plan ahead for further surgery.

"Earlier this year she had surgery to release the contractures on her cheeks and around the eyes and mouth.

"Dr Kelly is very happy with the way the facial tissue has settled post-operatively. The release of contractures on the cheeks and around the mouth was a large success. The mouth is closing well... a view at the pre-operative photos show vast improvement. The eyelids are closing sufficiently to allow protection of vision." However when sleeping, her eyes are still open 2mm and 4mm respectively.

"Scarring due to surgery is minimal.

"Future: Anele needs surgery to improve/build up her nose and Dr Kelly is prepared to do this for her.



*Baby dolls like Milka chocolates*



It is, however, at least two years too early to consider this. Her nose needs to be close to expected adult size to perform this operation. Anele has just completed a rapid growth spurt. The next significant spurt will only be at the age of about nine or ten, when facial features become more refined and the face loses the "baby"/chubby look. It is at that age, or even later, that noses are normally worked on.

"Re the digit-extensions: Dr Kelly has never done this before. He knows about it, but is negative about the success thereof. Apparently the proximal digits cannot be broken as we thought. The result is therefore a finger that is aesthetically more pleasing but functionally not optimal. He would not recommend this on Anele... her hand is quite functional as is. She picks up objects with the hand and seems to be having a good grip with it."

## Breast reconstruction for female burn survivors

Children burned through accidents involving a paraffin or electric stove often sustain damage to the chest. Four female burn survivors under our care have burns on their chest. Two of them have fully grown breasts but no one had advised them on their functionality, e.g. breast feeding. One of them is starting to grow breasts but the burns restrict the growth. The fourth is only seven years old but we

took her to see a surgeon to get advice on the way ahead.

One of our medical student volunteers Nyawira Wahome Ng'ayu collected papers on the reconstruction of burn-damaged female breasts. Read more about this topic on our website in the students' research section: [www.firechildren.org](http://www.firechildren.org)

## Do not remove motorcycle helmets

Cars have labels on them saying "Do not tow" but how many motorcycle helmets have notes on them saying "Do not remove if I am involved in an accident"?

Zaccaria died around 4.30pm on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> September 2007, at the junction with Barry Hertzog and Napier roads in Johannesburg. He was collecting vital supplies for Lancet Laboratories; just one month into the job and while the work was essential, he was also looking forward to a peaceful old age as retirement was not so far away.

As he crossed the junction, a kombi taxi speeding the other way, jumped the red light and hit him.

Children of Fire children returning from playing soccer at Wits University witnessed the event. The volunteers accompanying the children tried to help, but the only one with Level 3 First Aid skills felt discouraged by the older age of the person who was first on the scene, even though that person had not declared himself a First Aider. This man removed Zaccaria's helmet. Whether or not as a direct consequence, Zaccaria died.

TJ commented. "Another time I tried to help a man having a fit, at the Lifestyle shopping centre in Durban. People just swore at me." Prejudice against young men is international.

## Cars and cadavers: Alcohol so often the cause of death

Our UMashesha on the Durban beat helped to cut a young male Toyota driver from his car on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2007. After feeling through the wreckage for his pulse, there was no sense of urgency. The man had died on impact. And around 3a.m., a BMW and a taxi had collided - the car driver was relatively unscathed but the taxi had rolled and

rolled, with passengers seriously injured. Fire fighters shovel sand onto the spilling fuel and wonder whether excess alcohol was the cause, as it so often is. The fire brigade has a chaplaincy to help people to deal with the trauma of seeing so many dead, but it is not always easy to access counselling.

## Thabiso M and the Springtime mulberries

Children from Joe Slovo squatter camp were walking home one afternoon, when they noticed the fruit-laden mulberry tree near the petrol station in Hurst Hill, Johannesburg. Some ran across the road and an SABC employee said that she could not stop in time. "Mag" hit Thabiso (8) with her car. His

pelvis was broken and his tibia as well. Fortunately there are no long term head injuries but he was in hospital for several weeks. He was seen by Drs Khan and Barnell. Thabiso is a regular member of our squatter camp reading scheme. Teach your children road safety please.

## Beware the hair

There's a lot of rubbish on television and imported quack-medical coverage but a comment made on TV by a woman in the UK who had her breast reconstructed after a mastectomy, rang true. They took skin from her lower abdomen and cut so low that they included pubic hair. Then, instead of having a shape that made her feel beautiful and feminine again, she had a hairy breast. *Surely*, surgeons, you can just take a highlighting pen and outline any hair-bearing area *before* cutting, so mistakes like this are not made?

## Third attempt to fix fiddly Feleng's eyelid

Twice reconstructive surgeons from Johannesburg Hospital and St John's Eye Hospital attempted to release the contractures of Feleng Mahamotse's left upper eyelid. But the clumsy five-year-old could not resist picking his bandages when no one was watching. His friend Sicelo (9) commented: "This one is a naughty one. When everyone is sleeping and snoring and dreaming nicely, he scratches his eye and takes off his bandages."

Even though his eye was taped closed every night since his last operation in August 2006, ophthalmic surgeon Dr Genevieve Ephraim saw there was almost no improvement.

St John's Eye Hospital next to Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital admitted Feleng once more for a third attempt on his eyelid. When he left hospital after the operation he had an enormous bandage all around his head and his eye to keep him from fiddling with it. Now, in early November, he is without any bandage. While his eye shuts completely, it only opens half-way. He will need to train it with blinking exercises every day.

Feleng's much bigger issue is the large bony deficit



*It seems like Feleng's left eyelid looked better before, but a closer look at his eye showed that the lens was starting to turn opaque from constant exposure of not being able to close the eye properly. An eye that half-opens is maybe better than an eye that only half-closes.*

## ChiFi in the media again

We were in the *Citizen* late August 2007, *Northcliff Melville Times* late Aug 2007 and again in early October, *The Star* October 2007, *Beeld* late Aug 2007; *Radio 2000* hour-long interview October 2007, SABC1 *Sinamuthunzi* early October 2007, *Sunday Times* 14<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> October 2007, *Pretoria News* 20<sup>th</sup> October 2007, *Jacaranda FM* 19<sup>th</sup> October 2007. *Baba and Kleuter* December 2007, *Renaissance* December 2007.

And in America, Junius Hughes the Children of Fire documentary maker, was on radio too in October.

(hole) in his forehead. When he was admitted to Baragwanath after being burned at the age of one month, part of the bone was reabsorbed and part had to be removed due to severe sepsis. A process not offered anywhere in South Africa would rebuild Feleng's forehead by inserting demineralised strips of bone from a cadaver; these would become part of his body and grow with his skull bone. Most other options would require him to wait until his skull bone has stopped growing. This can be between age 7 to 12.

The Shriners Burns Institute in the USA (there are two bases—one in Texas and one in California) is one of the places with the facilities to perform this kind of surgery. Feleng has a passport but the policies of the US Embassy are anything but welcoming towards South Africans seeking medical treatment. Feleng can be glad he is not yet 16 years old or he would have been asked questions about any previous terrorist activities or suchlike! If you know of any Europe-based reconstructive surgeons that help us reconstruct the deficit with bone, please let us know.

**More eyelid stories:** Sizwe's left eye is open by about 3 millimetres when he sleeps at night. Both Bongani Madlala's eyes do not close when he sleeps. Sicelo Maduna's burn-damaged eye does not close at all. He can only see light and dark in that eye. Both Irene Peta's eyes do not close completely. Ophthalmic surgeon Dr Genevieve Ephraim of Garden City Clinic warns that eyes which do not close will suffer chronic dryness, which increases the risk of infection and can eventually lead to sight loss. Maxillofacial specialist Dr Enesh Muthray at JHB Hospital explained that the dryness of a constantly open mouth leads to tooth decay and that good lip closure is needed to align growing teeth.

## Seiso alive and kicking soccer balls after groin contracture release

Milpark Hospital's Dr. Gereth Edwards kindly operated on our youngest charge, Seiso Ratswana, *pro Deo*. The two-going-on-three year old boy had been burned by boiling water after two boys attempted to kill him in August 2006. His groin and part of his head suffered the most damage.

When Children of Fire's medical researcher Suzanne Bode consulted different surgeons on the way ahead, it became clear that a contracture in his groin had to be released urgently to assure correct growth of the hip bone and joint. Seiso was admit-



Child-friendly music and stories through headphones help calm Seiso at Milpark Hospital

ted to Milpark Hospital in September and Dr. Edwards performed brilliant surgery on his contracture. After daily dressing changes for several weeks Seiso is now looking forward painless and free movement of his little legs. Occupational therapist Janet Fletcher made a pressure garment for Seiso, but until he uses the potty from Leora Magidson regularly, the stretching garment cannot work.

Children of Fire gave evidence in court at the two boys' trial on 18 October. The sentencing was postponed to 13 November and then to 22 January 2008.



Anaesthetist Pieter Bettings holding Seiso in his arms before the gentlest anaesthesia we've seen to date.

## Dancer held back emotionally and physically by web of burned neck skin

Michael Sithole was seen by surgeon Anton Potgieter in October 2007. He was last seen at a similar time a year before and booked for surgery in early January 2007. He had a phobia of hospitals and doctors and after spending a night in hospital for an operation ... that the registrar on call said it was not going to happen because it was not urgent... he was discharged and told to come back a week or so later.

After being in an adult ward overnight with seriously injured men (car crash survivors etc, their linen scarily off-putting and soaked in blood) he simply did not turn up for the next appointment,

because the visit had heightened his anxiety.

We spent much of the next few months trying to talk to his parents, his school, etc until at long last we got him into counselling - then the health services strike, then the counsellor changed, then at last he had two consecutive sessions with a psychologist and is now prepared for surgery... But delays or worse still, cancellations, would make him fearful again. We hope that he can still have a fish-mouth procedure to his neck before the end of 2007, so that 2008 will be a year of high self-esteem completing grade 11, which he abandoned this year.

## Tissue expanders for "the bald and the beautiful" (see last newsletter)



Karabo (left) and Sicelo (right) with tissue expanders visible temporarily stretching their scalps in unusual directions

Karabo Tebedi (7) and Sicelo Maduna (9) will start the new year with a full head of hair. Injured by an exploding paraffin stove and a fallen-over candle respectively, they had tissue expanders inserted at Johannesburg Hospital in September. Zenette van Wyk (9) had her operation in late October. Her tissue expansion will be completed probably early 2008. While tissue expansion of the scalp is usually only for cosmetic purposes, it is important for burned children's self-esteem to look as normal as possible and not to be half bald.

## Lotions and Potions (again) and micropore tape plea

Children of Fire has been the lucky recipient of some more skin treatments to help burns survivors; this time it is Régima Scar Repair which claims to accelerate the healing process. We are sending some in our next consignment to aid the paediatric burns ward at Mutare hospital, Zimbabwe.

Unfortunately to use the lotion, we first need to spread it on top of micropore tape, which in itself is

quite expensive... *if someone would like to donate some of that to us as well, that would be great.*

Régima contains “wound-healing” plants *centella asiatica* and *bulbinella frutescens* and elastin—“a natural protein present in skin.” They can be emailed at [aymac@netactive.co.za](mailto:aymac@netactive.co.za)

Website: [www.regima.com](http://www.regima.com)

## Painkillers needed to aid burned children in Mutare Hospital, Zimbabwe

Children in great pain get by on a teaspoonful or two of Panado; one cannot readily donate stronger painkillers because of the requirement for doctors’ prescriptions for the individual children and lack of petrol to transport goods. Dressing changes are carried out with this minimal pain management on a three month old baby boy who was burned from head to toe after a paraffin lamp fell over her body, the liquid fuel still burning as it flowed. He had inhalation injuries as well, but bandaged up like an Egyptian mummy, survived for two days post injury.



“Lizzie” suffered 38 per cent burns from hot water that was accidentally knocked over.

## Watched the Omo washing powder ads?

We have no axe to grind for any particular washing powder but the Omo adverts on South African television emphasise that dirt is good... in that a grubby child has been playing and exploring actively and vigorously... despite their morning or evening shower time. Our little Karabo is the grubbiest seven-year-old girl we know—she plays soccer and climbs the jungle gym and pristine white bandages are pretty soon not white at all. When she had a pressure garment, she chose Mlungu pink instead of the Shangaan brown given to most of our kids—big mistake—that gets brown in half a day as well. The doctors sometimes get a little sniffy about all of this. If you want our kids pristine, keep them cocooned in a hospital cot for weeks. Once they are back with us they immediately start schooling again and immediately (except maybe if in a wheelchair)

start active play again. Why? Because they are normal happy healthy kids and that’s what kids do. Even Sizwe, put into clean dungarees *ten minutes before setting off for hospital*, had knees that looked like a day’s-worth-of-play before he arrived at Jo’burg Academic!



## Sizwe singing

Kathy Salgado of Auckland Park Preparatory School allowed Sizwe to attend grade 0 singing lessons on Wednesday and Thursdays from late September 2007 and then he was lucky enough to again find transport for singing lessons with Ann Carol on Saturdays (thank you Boom) so he won all round—and just loved the chance to increase his musical repertoire and circle of friends.



# Notice Board

## Follow-up

The woman burned by a gas heater (Newsletter no. 4, 2007) was much happier and healthier in late October.

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Louis Rutstein, long term volunteer with Children of Fire, helped out again and fixed a bunk bed ladder in one of the children's bedrooms; put up a new doorbell at school after the old one was stolen; transported furniture for another volunteer; took a child to hospital; and fixed a big puncture in the charity car's tyre.

If you need someone to fix your furniture well and quickly, phone his company:

**GT Furniture Repairs**

Tel: 011 326 2626

Cell: 082 450 7547



Bye-bye and thank you to Debbie, who flew back to England in early November after helping the charity for two and a half months.

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**Fantastic Feedback :: Professor Heinz Rode of Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town commented on the Kilimanjaro climb: "Fantastic". And on helping Mutare Hospital: "Fantastic Work".**

## Killer Jacuzzis

A Johannesburg child aged ten died in October 2007 as she played in a Jacuzzi; her hair got trapped in the drain and she drowned. This same scenario was shown on an American soapie a few months ago.

Toddlers even drown in buckets of water in shacks.

**Please do not leave your child alone.**

Please send your child carers and domestic workers on First Aid courses.

Condolences to the von Ketelhodt family.

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**Look ahead ::** The next newsletter will include Thulani's family story, Doreen's foot saga, Marietta's long awaited thoughts on burn statistics at Johannesburg Academic Hospital, and the mysterious "Third-grandmother-syndrome".

People ring up for advice on almost anything including as to how Zimbabwean refugees legally apply for asylum.

The answer was: Take waterproof clothing, food and a blanket and queue for up to five days in Pretoria. Do not pay bribes, do not go to Durban where it is quicker, and where there is less intimidation because then you will have to go to Durban every time you renew your asylum permit. Do not leave your place in the queue.

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**Cartoonists, anyone?** There is a particular SA personality whose face we've been told would make an excellent caricature for a squeaky dog toy. A sculptor is needed to make the mould and then it can be mass-manufactured in China.

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**SMS donations ::** If you send a 10 Rand SMS to one of these five-digit-numbers and expect that it all goes to the charity that runs the campaign, you are mistaken. Vodacom, MTN and Cell C take more than half of your money!



## Sparkles and Skunks

### Sparkles to:

- Vaughan for our safety lights still shining bright
- Oztie who found Dorah's nose under the apricot tree on the street after others had searched for hours without success
- Margot—a breath of enthusiastic fresh volunteer air

### Skunks to:

- Rumour mongers
- Those who promised to get us a seesaw last Christmas and didn't send it
- Builders... again
- The bank that promised to paint the kids' bedrooms several months ago

## Thank You

Thanks to engineering student Gert van Rooyen for donating toys in October and for the help from different members of his church with entertaining the children.

Thanks to Ad Outpost and Lauretta Edeling for making a new billboard and hosting it in the Edenvale area for three months, and lending Limbe the driver on occasion.

Thanks to Greenside Plumbing for fixing our taps.

Thanks to Niva Waldeck for superb homemade pasta sauce.

Thanks to the assistance of volunteers from Melville Junction Church and Melville Union Church, particularly to Tebogo, Ntsiki and Mbulelo (Boom).

Thanks to Rose and Basil Grealy-Kransdorf for a donation of ePap breakfast cereal

Thanks to Hanna Jäger who made a donation to Children of Fire from Germany.

Moray Hathorn of Webber Wentzel Bowens and Advocate Paul Carstensen for extensive legal work relating to solving the planning breaches of the property we moved into two and a half years ago.

Cliffe Dekker for pursuing a "perpetual silence" case against a daily irritant.

Ian McLean for getting the gate re-welded.

Twice as Nice for inviting the children out for a morning in Kliptown.

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**Email:** [firechildren@icon.co.za](mailto:firechildren@icon.co.za) **Website:** [www.firechildren.org](http://www.firechildren.org)

*Children of Fire is entirely funded by the public; donations can be made to:*

### Children of Fire

**Account number: 614 920 23919**

**Sort code: 25-65-05**

**First National Bank**

**Melville, Gauteng**

**South Africa**

### Children of Fire

**Account number: 901 033 30**

**Sort code: 20-17-92**

**Barclays Bank**

**Canterbury (East Kent branches)**

**United Kingdom**