

HANDS ON DECK



CONTRIBUTORS

in this issue of Hands on Deck

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Hands at Work family:

This is our 100th Hands on Deck Newsletter. Isn't that amazing? Over the last 100 newsletters we've read countless stories of God's goodness and faithfulness amidst challenges. Before we enter into the newsletter, praise God for His faithfulness in bringing us this far, and pray that He will continue to equip and challenge us as we move forward.

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” - Hebrews 10:23



“It was another incredible reminder to me that you can be extremely generous with God’s gifts.” – Ashley McKinley

A COMMUNITY OF LOVE AND CARE

Ashley McKinley, International Volunteer (US), Regional Support Team

In February, alongside several other Hands at Work volunteers, Ashley was able to travel to Eswatini for the first time to support the Lomahasha Service Centre as they walked in the communities and supported in facilitating a workshop for Primary Caregivers.

“On Tuesday we went on Holy Home Visits. We visited a grandmother named Siphos, who was passing away. She was an older Gogo, and very intertwined in the community there. When you enter the valley of the shadow of death there’s a different feeling – a different weight, a different heaviness – but this room was quite different. There was the heaviness but there was also so much care, love and hope, and I felt like this is what Hands at Work is doing well, in that we were going to be there with the dying. I felt so comforted and it actually took me back to when my mother was dying and that thickness and the weight, and how I wished that I had what Gogo Siphos had.

So there we were, praying with them. But while there, we were learning that family members were coming and going – visiting and bringing things and checking in on them. And this community, whilst they didn’t have all the physical therapists that my mum had and all the doctors telling you how long you might have to live or not live, this community had this God-fearing love and respect and care, and they really poured into the difficult, uncomfortable dying process. And whilst it was sad that she was dying, there was also so much hope because she loved Jesus. She was serving the way God called her to. And so there was this sense of rejoicing that she was being received and called to by the Father. I was really blessed by the way that I felt that God was glorified in the manner in which she went.

Then we did another Holy Home Visit to another Gogo, who showed such hospitality. As we sat under a tree, I could not stop her from giving me food. This woman had never gone to school. She couldn’t afford her own clothing. All the clothing that she’s ever had has been given to her and I just felt humbled again that she was so generous with what she had. It was another incredible reminder to me that you can be extremely generous with God’s gifts.

The next day we had time with the Primary Caregivers at the Care Point. We shared some more of the Watchword and Charissa (African Leader, South Africa) shared about a tree and roots that grow down, and being grounded in Jesus. During our time together, a Gogo came but she wasn’t necessarily of her right mind, so we prayed and asked God to do a miracle because we have no power to change people. We have no power to fix the brokenness of whatever’s going on in people’s lives, but we did present that to God as our hope and our prayer. The very next day we went back and reviewed the situation, and we asked ourselves, “Okay, so what did we talk about yesterday?”

And this Gogo, she recapped everything. She said, “Well, this is the Watchword, this is what we studied, and I want to believe that same crazy God that, you know, parted the waters and delivered them from Egypt, so I’m going to pray to that God today!” Everyone was like, who is this person who is making these proclamations of belief? We were all, again, humbled by what God was doing because we cannot go into someone’s heart and perform surgery and make those changes, but we could see an incredible shift had happened in this Gogo’s life. God did amazing things.”

KNOWN BY NAME

Josh Snyman, African Leader (South Africa) Projects Team Leader

In February Josh travelled to Nigeria to spend two weeks supporting the Lagos and Ibadan Service Centres as they care for the most vulnerable children.

“I want to start by saying that often when we go to communities for the first time, we think we’re going to be the blessing and that we’re going to bring the change. Obviously, we try to do that. We try to bring the Word of God, but the reality is that many times when we leave, we’re the ones who have benefitted and we’re the ones who have changed the most.



Over the last couple of years, we’ve been trying to think about how we can do projects in Nigeria and what does it look like to give advice, help with designs and create budgets. The main idea of the trip was helping with projects. When they speak about a house that’s sinking into the ground, it’s very difficult to comprehend until you go and you see it in person. There’s a number of houses that just sink, especially when it rains. It rained one evening when we were there and when we went to the communities the next day, there was water everywhere. There’s no proper drainage, and so it just becomes a slum filled with water. How do you build in that? How do you actually build something that kids can use? As you walk to the end of the community, you literally feel your feet move underneath you because you’re walking on rubbish that’s floating, and that’s where people live. That’s their home.

We spent three days in Ibadan, visiting the different communities and the school that was started in Onilemo. What I loved about visiting Onilemo is that we didn’t just go and do our own thing. We recognised that God was doing something special through a lady who started a very small school there and realised that we could actually go in, partner with her, and bring the Hands at Work vision into that area and assist her. This is a lady who has been serving God for many years in a community that’s 99 percent Muslim. It was a blessing to be a part of the team and to see how they interact with the community whilst at the same time looking at projects, what we need to build and how to build it. What is great about being part of the projects team is that when we travel we get to do projects and Holy Home Visits, and spend time with the Care Workers and children.

In the slums in Lagos is our Temitope Care Point, It is on a church property and besides the church there is literally one roof for the kids. Yet in the midst of chaos, there’s life. I was so deeply challenged to be there and to look and realise that they don’t have a single building. They’ve got one shed that’s made of wood, that needs to be fixed, but there’s so much life there. Many times, we think that if we have six buildings on a property life will come. But I want to challenge us that adding buildings doesn’t add life. Buildings lift what is already there.



We also went to do a Holy Home Visit for one of the kids from Temitope. It’s one of the roughest home visits I’ve done. I was sitting next to an open window and some kids outside noticed that I was there so they started coming forward. I was a little bit naughty, engaging with the home visit but then also calling the kids with my hand to come and give me a high five. The kids started coming closer and closer as I tried to make them feel welcome. Eventually there was this boy whose name, I found out, was also Joshua. So I said to the Service Centre team, tell him that my name is also Joshua. You could see immediately how the whole setting changed: his eyes lit up, the other kids were more vibrant around him. I want to encourage you in this – that when we speak about knowing a kid by his name, and he knows that someone asked him and has the same name as him, there’s something really special in that”



SEEING WHAT GOD IS DOING

Emeldah Nanyiza, African Volunteer (Zambia), Kitwe Service Centre
Clara Mutembo, African Volunteer (Zambia), Kitwe Service Centre

In March the Kitwe Service Centre facilitated a three-day extended Relationship Group in the community of Mulenga. Emeldah shares: "The reason why we had this period of time is because for the last five or six months in Mulenga the commitment of the Care Workers has been down. It hasn't been like it was previously. After praying about it, it came into our minds that we could do an extended Relationship Group. This year, we have a goal to walk with the Primary Caregivers (PCG) and so we thought that instead of having the Care Workers alone, we could invite the PCGs so that we can start walking together."

Clara says: "On the first day we talked about how Christ is the foundation in our lives. The Care Workers and PCGs were touched and encouraged. After that we went into smaller groups and they were able to share what they were going through and we had time to pray together on the first day. The second day we talked about graduation. When Cosmas (Kitwe Service Centre member) shared about graduation, people were scared about it. But Cosmas shared well and how it's not something to fear. After that the Care Workers and PCGs were more understanding. We shared that when we graduate children it allows us to grow to another place. This gives an opportunity for church leaders and local stakeholders to be more involved. We need to invite the churches and local stakeholders so they can know more about graduation. On Thursday we talked about taking ownership and how the Care Workers and PCGs need to be taking ownership of the children. The PCGs need to be supportive of the Care Workers. Together they can go to the stakeholders, councillors and police to share about the work that we are doing."

Emeldah says: "The Holy Spirit was helping us in a lot of things. We saw that the number of Care Workers had dropped and that they were not committed, but through your prayers and the power of the Holy Spirit God has raised them again. We have seen revival. There was power of praise and worship. After they received the word, some of the PCGs gave their lives to Christ and were able to be prayed over. They have a lot of challenges and people are bound by a lot of things, and what they need is to receive deliverance in their lives. Each one had that heart to be delivered. One of the Care Workers – Beauty – had been a committed Care Worker but from last year she stopped coming. We tried to ask her but she wasn't saying anything. After this time together she came to say that she was bound by lots of things and she had lots of challenges. She said that she had failed to open up to everyone. There was conflict amongst the Care Workers so she had just stopped coming without saying anything. But because of this time she has agreed to come back as a Care Worker. That is one of the highlights of our time together – to see what God is doing in Mulenga."

"They have a lot of challenges and people are bound by a lot of things, and what they need is to receive deliverance in their lives."

- Emeldah Nanyiza



DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH RELATIONSHIP

Dan Waspe, International Volunteer (UK),

In March Dan facilitated a church-mobilisation workshop for pastors in Eswatini and then, also in March, helped facilitate a pastors' training weekend at the Hands at Work Village in South Africa.

"One of the things that struck me during my time with the pastors in Eswatini and at the Hands at Work Village was the work that went into it beforehand to get the pastors to this point. It wasn't like we were meeting them for the first time. There was a huge amount of groundwork that had taken place. Church mobilisation isn't an event, it's a relationship and a friendship that takes a little bit of effort.

My particular focus with the pastors was this idea of graduation – that the biblical responsibility of caring for and continuing the work in our communities doesn't rest with Hands at Work but rests in the hands of the local church. We're there for a smallish period of time to walk with them and train them but, ultimately, the responsibility is going to be left with the local church.

The first thing I did was recap what Hands at Work is and I shared the scripture in 1 Corinthians 3:7-9 when

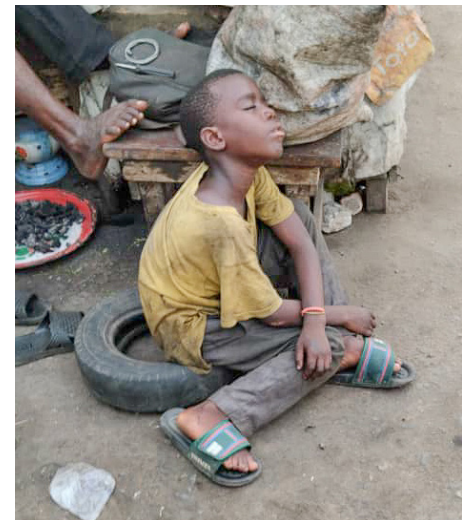
Paul is talking about Apollos, and he says, 'I planted the seed in your heart and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together for the same.' I used that scripture to explain that Hands at Work are seed planters. I showed them a piece of ground that was covered in bush and rocks and I said, that's the sort of place – we clear the ground, we move the rocks, we cut down the trees and we sow the seed, and then someone else can come and water it.

We talked through the idea that we're always looking, once something's sprouted and grown, to work in the next community. We don't want to claim credit for someone else's work but we always want to hope that something will grow so that we can move to another community. We talked about the picture of light in a fire and about the idea that some animals' eyes are designed to work at night time – it's like as Hands at Work we're designed to work in the darkest places. Our eyes work best when there's no light. That's who we are as Hands at Work.

Then we moved on to start to paint the picture, in different ways, of what Hands at Work isn't. We talked through the idea of a hospital, that someone would come into a hospital super sick, ready to die, and the doctors and nurses would do everything for them,

because the person wouldn't be able to do anything for themselves. We had to feed them, give them medication and wash them but, as the person got better, we realised that actually it's a lot easier to care for someone who's well than it is to care for someone who's very sick. So we don't let them leave. We say no, stay a bit longer. And then, during the workshop, we would act out someone knocking on the door and they would come in and they'd say, look, someone's going to die, they're sick. And we would say, you know, there's no room – the hospital ward is full of people who are well. We talked through those pictures of who Hands at Work isn't, and then we moved on to talk about who they are, what they can do, and the idea that God doesn't expect every pastor and every church to support in the same way. The level of care needed when we first move into a community is different to that which is needed now. We've been there, we've walked and disciplined people, and we've grown Care Workers and invested in that community, and we've got young people who have come through and know Jesus, so the support and care that that community needs now, as the local church takes on this work, is completely different."

Please pray for the process of graduation to be understood across the communities in which we serve. Pray that it won't be something to be afraid of but will be something that people are excited about and expectant for.



REST IN THE CHAOS

Jackie Okindah, African Leader (Kenya), Regional Support Team Leader

In February Jackie travelled to Nigeria where she spent four weeks walking with the Lagos and Ibadan Service Centres, sharing the Watchword and encouraging them as they faithfully care for the most vulnerable. For part of that time she was joined by Josh Snyman (who shared his reflections earlier in the newsletter).

Jackie shares: "One of the reasons I went to Nigeria was to share the Watchword. In Nigeria, we have two Service Centres – one in Lagos and another in Ibadan. Both are caring for three communities. We brought two Care Workers from each Ibadan community to Lagos for the Watchword. It was beautiful because we stayed with them in the SC/RST office and house where we built relationships, leaving these ladies feeling so refreshed. It has been a huge challenge getting them to do things like Maranatha Workshop because they work hard in the fields and in making palm oil. But during this time they were very relaxed being away from the hecticness of their community and work. So the Watchword was shared but it was also an opportunity to have an exchange visit. The two areas in Nigeria are very different and so the Care Workers from Ibadan came with fresh eyes and also learnt lots from the seasoned Care Workers in Lagos. We did Holy Home Visits and Relationship Groups with these Care Workers, which were great because they could see and learn how other Care Workers lead, even during the Holy Home Visits.

In Eagles Wings Community we had a community school built where we have 151 children. While I was there, I saw some of the children sleeping after class. I asked why the children weren't going home. I was told that after school these children go and start working or learning a skill as young as eight years old. And so, because of the busyness, the heat and the rough life in the community, they don't have that kind of rest. This is one place where they can come and sleep after class. What a beautiful gift that God has given this school structure as a space where not only they can learn but also where our children can find rest and be healed. Reuben* is one of these children (pictured top right). He is an eight-year-old boy who is doing grade three. He comes to school but after school, he goes to work at a mechanic shop. He starts learning now so that when he's older he will be well-equipped. One day, Esther (a Lagos Service Centre member) was walking home and she saw him sleeping at work. Within Lagos, there are occultic gangs who will recruit children. When we did a Holy Home Visit at Reuben's home the parents explained that it's either they allow him to learn a skill (work) or he gets caught up with these occultic gangs. The parents would rather know that the boss is keeping their son busy working than him being in the community somewhere involved in gang stuff. Both options are not good but what is the better option of the two evils?"

For part of the time, Jackie was joined by Josh Snyman (who shared his reflections earlier in the newsletter) and, together with the Lagos Service Centre, they were able to visit a community called Makoko, which is located in a different area in Ilaje. Jackie says: "It was so strange being in that community. As we entered Makoko, riding in our boat, we realised that the deeper in we went the water colour became blacker and had a foul smell. The atmosphere changed. You're tense in your mind. I wondered, are these people or are they spirits as well? By the time you reach the end, the water is so muddy and black that the boat can no longer move. We felt so much darkness but we also knew that this is where we are called to – it was tough. We got out of the boat and as we walked we found a small yellow gate. I can't tell you how different it felt walking out of the tension yet our hearts broke deeply for the people living there. Please pray for Makoko; we used to visit there many years ago. It feels like God is stirring our hearts again. There is a reason that God allowed Josh and I to have the experience we did in Makoko. These are the places that God calls us to go."



PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Pray for the expansion that will be happening throughout 2024. Pray for each child who will be coming to the Care Points, that they will experience life and life in abundance through the love and dedication of the Care Workers. Pray for the Service Centres and Regional Support Teams to have a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit as they think about expanding.

In most communities, there has been drought. As a result of this drought, many of the most vulnerable families' crops have failed. Pray for Hands at Work leadership to have wisdom and discernment as they address the situation. The challenge with the poor harvest is not limited to the food that people will receive. In places like Mozambique the most vulnerable families have to walk long distances to reach their fields, and it has become dangerous on the way as bandits are looking to steal food and cause harm to people. Pray for God's divine protection over people and that those perpetrating this fear will stop.

Tyler shares: "It's been years and years trying to get our proper registration in Malawi. It's like when the house is on fire, you jump in. You don't have time to put all your ducks in a row. But now we're busy,

and we've been trying for 10 years or so to make this happen. We kept coming up against a wall, we just couldn't get it, but now we have the registration. It's not a small thing, it's amazing. We have even been able to do contracts, and there are new friendships forming within the government – people of influence who say we like what you guys are doing, we love it, let us support you." Praise God for the registration that has been obtained for Malawi. Pray for these relationships in the government to continue forming and developing. Pray that they will continue to grow in their understanding of the heart and vision of who we are.

After many years, Baba Vusi retired after serving with Hands at Work. In March, the Eswatini Service Centre hosted their own personal farewell for Vusi – a place where he spent a significant amount of time (pictured above). Tyler shares, "The Service Centre arranged everything. They pooled their own money and planned for people to come – children who've grown up at the Care Point, Care Workers, grannies, pastors, local chiefs. All there to give testimony to Vusi. The first one to share was a young girl from Msengeni A. I remember a time when the team was advocating for her. They came and said, this girl is so brilliant, but she lives with her granny, they've got nothing, and she's about to fall away. And you could see that there

was a line, it was going to go the good way or it was going to go the wrong way. It was so clear. And she gave testimony to say, I'm now going to college. Life is good. I can see God's hand in it. Mabuza was the one who pointed me in that direction. Mabuza is the one who came to fight for me.

Many Care Workers gave testimonies with tears in their eyes, saying he's not just someone who came and said, ok, we're doing uniforms today. They know him, personally know him. The chief stood up and gave testimony and said, we've had many NGOs come in and out but they don't say goodbye, they just go. This has been so special, to give testimony to a man who poured his heart out here. He's not even from here but he poured his heart out to care for our children, and the way he did it was so well. I felt blessed to watch someone finish well. When our time finishes, we'd be so humbled and grateful if someone spoke about us like that, that they could finish so well like that. Mabuza had a room full of people to do that and it was beautiful." Praise God for the many years that Vusi has faithfully served with Hands at Work. Pray that each of us will learn what it means to run the race well.