

HANDS ON DECK



CONTRIBUTORS

in this issue of Hands on Deck

Khaya Mamba

Mpendulo Mamba

Thobile Mamba

Wonder Mamba

Kristi and Daytona
Swarbrick

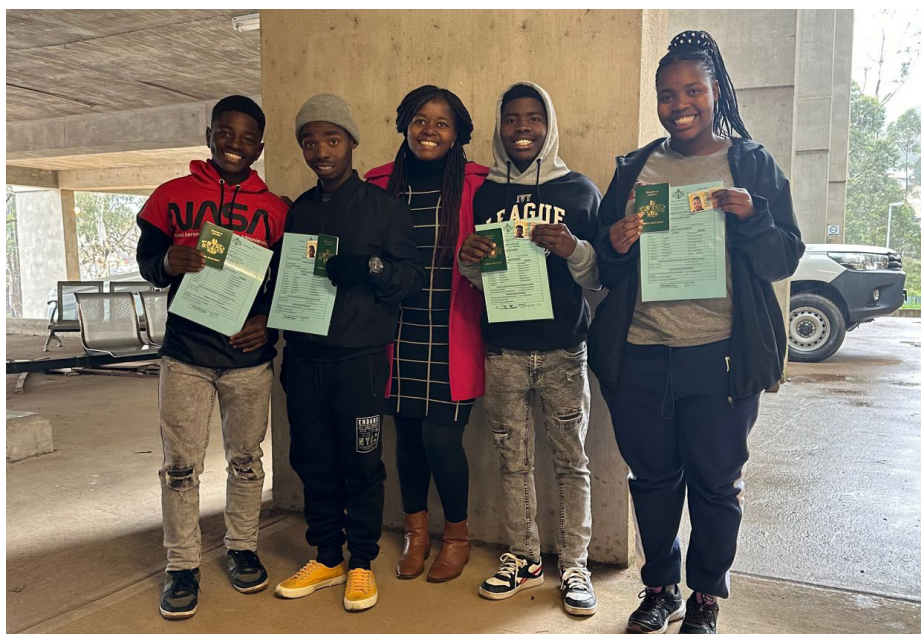
Nevermind

Virginia Tshabangu

Hanne Snyman

Sylvia Chitenge

*“Now to him who is able to do
immeasurably more than all we ask or
imagine, according to his power that is
at work within us, to him be glory in the
church and in Christ Jesus throughout all
generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”
- Ephesians 3:20-21*



“We’ve seen God exceed our expectations again and again and this is the reason why we testify.” – Kristi and Daytona Swarbrick

A GOD OF MIRACLES

The story of the Swarbricks and Mambas becoming the SwarMamba family is nothing short of miraculous. Every step of the way, God’s hand has been evident; guiding and leading them through every challenge and obstacle. The story below is simply a snapshot of everything that God has done in their lives. If you would like to learn more, please watch the video, in which the family shares their story in more detail.

Khaya Mamba – “Without my ID documents I wouldn’t have been able to get my matric results and it would mean not going to university. I got my documents with the help of my parents and a lawyer and other social workers. During this whole process, especially when we were in Eswatini, everything was falling into place. God cares for everyone and He cares for me. He is always by my side. God has done lots for me and I’m very grateful.”

Mpendulo Mamba – “It happened

very quickly – God made a way. I’ve very happy. I can look at applying to university. I can get a driver’s license. I am so excited. I look at it and smile. I want to focus on plant science and now I can apply to school and chase my dreams. God keeps his promises – we just need to be patient and trust in what He is doing. He opens doors that you don’t think are possible.”

Thobile Mamba – “Some years I wondered if it would ever happen but people believed in us. Never give up, don’t lose hope. I know that we say keep praying but also the other thing is that God doesn’t always answer the prayers in your timing – He may have a different way. When the time is right everything will fall into place.”

Wonder Mamba – “There are many opportunities that I now have. I see the hand of God in my life and the power of prayer.”

Kristi and Daytona Swarbrick:

“Our story started back in 2012 when we first arrived in Africa.

One of the first things we did was a community stay with the Mambas. The family consisted of four children – one of whom was older — who were staying with their mum. It was God’s blessing from the beginning and we could tell that God was in this from the start. Fast forward to 2017 and an unexpected tragedy took place as their mum passed away while giving birth at home. This was a shock to the family. As we went to the funeral, we both heard God speak to us individually, saying, “What is your role in this? What are you going to do?”.

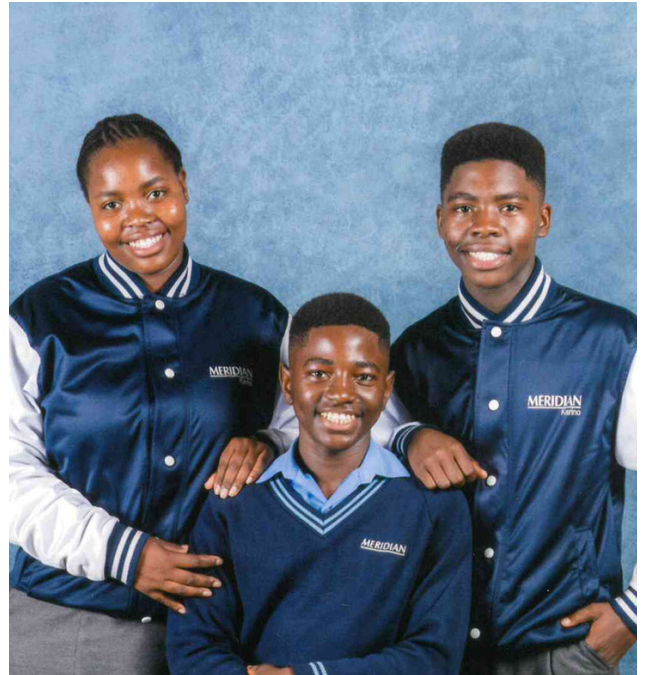
Kristi says, “I have to admit that my initial response was “God, it’s not my problem”. We didn’t have biological children and we had never intended to, but God had different plans and we’re so thankful that He did.”

Daytona says, “For me, it was a different reaction. I Immediately wanted to scoop them up and put them in the car and bring them home.”

Starting off, we went through the

legal processes of dealing with social workers and making sure that they were set up and that there were people in the community who could care for them. As time went on, they continued to wiggle their way into our hearts and our desire was to be able to care for them. However, we ran into issues with Social Development saying you can't legally adopt them because you're not South African citizens.

Fast forward to 2019 and we had a new social worker who, together with his supervisor, made a written agreement that we could be a place of safety for them which would hold up in children's court. They've been with us ever since. In 2022, we were standing before a magistrate and she was telling us that we were the children's foster parents. We had been told that we wouldn't be able to foster and yet God was working miracles. Ephesians 3:20 says, 'Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen'. We've seen God exceed our expectations again and again and this is the reason why we testify.



None of the children had identification documents, which means that there were huge limitations on what they could do. We wanted to help the children get these documents but, as we were nearing Thobile and Mpendulo's final exams, time was running out. But our God is a God of the impossible. We found huge tension in knowing when to be patient and when to push. There is tension in letting God do stuff but also knowing that our God doesn't simply ask us to sit back and do nothing. He does call us to action, but we didn't want to do that out of our own strength but try to seek His wisdom.

We first started to see things move when Kristi approached the lawyer and asked if there anything that she could do that it didn't take a lawyer to do. That's when things really started to roll and we got connected with person after person who was able to help. The lawyers realised that they needed to take a different route. They were trying to get South African permanent residency for the kids. But when an Eswatini mother gives birth, her child takes on her citizenship, no matter what country she is in. They said we needed to get the kids their Eswatini documentation. From there we could look to obtain study permits, then work permits, and then permanent residency. That was a whole different plan of attack.

The lawyers contacted the Eswatini embassy, who said that we needed to involve a social worker. They put me in contact with a social worker who, even though there were more senior and qualified people to help, felt the Spirit



say that she needed to be obedient and go where the Spirit led her. Within three weeks of that phone call we were sitting in her office in Eswatini and they were saying that, if the kids were there, they'd be able to assist with their documentation. They also reached out to a senior immigration officer in Eswatini. However, there were two big problems. On arrival at the border with the kids, they wouldn't have passports, so the border guards would not allow them in. Secondly, our court order says we are foster parents but it says that we can't travel outside the country with them.

We needed two things: a leave of absence and then something that would allow us to pass through the border. We were able to get a one-time pass that allowed us to cross into Eswatini but we wouldn't be able to get out. To get out, we would need the papers. In order to get the leave of absence we had to deal with immigration in Nelspruit, who told us that it would take weeks or even months. But we didn't have that time. We had a specific window when we could travel. We were given the name of a head social worker in Mpumalanga province and she is a woman of God. She listened to our story and said, "I will ensure that it is signed off by the department head and you'll have it by the end of the week". God is using the right people. We received that leave of absence at 12pm on the Friday afternoon, less than 48 hours before we had to leave.

I had a friend who messaged us and said that she was praying for the Red Sea to be opened. By God's grace, we were able to pass through that border on September 24th without any issues. We were initially supposed to meet our social worker on the Monday but she had messaged a few days before to say her husband was in hospital, and that she would have to get someone else to oversee the documentation process. She said she would have someone meet us on the Tuesday. We still went on the Sunday and we decided to take some time as a family to explore around Eswatini. On Monday, we got a message from her, saying, "you'll never guess, but I've been so busy this afternoon, my husband knew how important this case was to me, and the immigration officer I have been working with said that they were only available on Monday, so let's do this".

Within a few hours on the Monday afternoon, all of our kids had birth certificates. On Wednesday at 2pm, the kids heard their names called and they were presented with their passports. We kept saying to God be the glory because it was only possible through Him. He opened so many doors and paved a way and parted that Red Sea. We went to the South African High Commission. We were originally told that it would take eight weeks for the study visas to come through and yet, two weeks later, we received the permits. Our children are now legally in South Africa. Yes, we'll need to apply for new study permits for next year as the older ones look to obtain further education but we are trusting God. He has led us this far; how can we not trust Him to take us further.

God has been moving mountains. He is our miracle worker, promise keeper, and we are so thankful that you have been journeying with us. Thank you for your prayers, concern, asking what's going on and how the kids are doing. We appreciate that. We celebrate together."



OCTOBER GATHERING REFLECTIONS

Every year, Hands at Work leaders from across Africa gather in a central location to reflect on the past year's challenges and successes. It is also an opportunity to plan and dream for the year ahead. This year, the gathering was held at Kachele in Zambia. Volunteers from the Hub in South Africa travelled by vehicle to attend the gathering.

Nevermind, African Leader (South Africa, Maintenance Team):

"I was grateful to be asked to travel to Zambia for the October Gathering. I had a great time travelling up because in the car we could laugh, sing and play games. We got to know each other better. We asked each other questions about our lives and were able to pray for each other. Sometimes I go into a community and I get busy and don't engage with the children. I don't plant the seed and act as a brother or father to the child. We want to see the children grow and say that 'I've been loved'. I want to reposition myself; my spirit, my body and my heart. How do I receive things? How do I value my colleagues? I want to go out of my comfort zone and give more of myself. It shouldn't matter where I am.

Someone who impacted me was Victor from the Chisamba Service Centre. I learned that he often works outside of working hours. He saved his money so that he could buy a bicycle which he uses to visit the children on the weekend. It's not his community but he's going to spend time with the youth and children even though he has to travel for five hours. It was amazing to meet him and see his dedication."

Virginia Tshabangu, African Leader (South Africa), Hazyview Service Centre Coordinator:

"For us in South Africa, we are so blessed to have the 0-5s programme, but we have a lot of challenges. At the gathering, I was so jealous to hear from different people as they were sharing about how it was going in their area. I want it to happen in our communities as well. I was reminded that we need to communicate the vision with the Primary Caregivers so that they know what's happening at the Care Point. It can be hard when the children are hearing something at the Care Point and then they go home and hear something totally different. The child is going to be confused. My commitment, coming away from the gathering, is to be more intentional about sharing the vision of the 0-5s with the Primary Caregivers so that they can understand why. Also, we want to help them understand that the Care Point isn't only a place for their children but it is also a place for them. A place where they can hear about Jesus and find healing from their strongholds."

Hanne Snyman, African Leader (South Africa), South African Regional Support Team:

"Throughout the gathering, we talked a lot about graduation and the impact that it has on our communities. There are mixed feelings around graduation. I was reminded that we all need to be on the same page in understanding the heart of graduation. If we're all confused and we go out to the communities and speak to churches and communities with a divided vision of what it looks like and what it should be, then we also cause confusion in the communities, and that's not where we should be. During the week, the example of breastfeeding a child was spoken about. When we go into a new community, it's like having a newborn baby that needs to be breastfed – it is very important for the baby to be strong and get the right nutrition. As the baby gets older, other things need to be introduced; there may still be breast milk but the baby also gets solid food. Then, as the baby develops, they need to be weaned and taken off breast milk so that they can get all that nutrition from solid food. It was such a beautiful example because you don't want a child of six years old to be breastfeeding. When we go into a community, it's not healthy for them to be dependent on us the whole time and that is not our vision. Our vision is to go into communities and be a prophetic voice for the church, to build up a community and to be able to leave and see them flourish without us.

That helped me to look at the picture of graduation in a different way. Another thing shared was that when we keep breastfeeding one child, there's no space for another one. It's so important that we wean one child off, so we can make space for more babies to come, so that we can feed and grow them as well. It's not simply Levy's responsibility to share about graduation, we all need to take that ownership. When I go into a community, what is in my heart as I interact with people there and share the vision? Do we realise that we want people to grasp Jesus as the centre? Because if we leave a community and they don't know Jesus, then we've failed. It's great that they have food, but it's not going to give them everlasting life. We need them to understand who Jesus is and depend on Him and the other stuff will fall into place. When we go out into the community, do we go with the urgency that maybe this is the last time that we will be able to interact with this person? Do we trust the Holy Spirit and are we in tune with what God wants to do so that they can grasp who Jesus is, so when we leave, we leave the community stronger? Not everyone is going to have the conversation, but all of us have a part to play and are responsible for trusting God to show us how we can make sure that this vision works."





Care Worker Elizabeth with Priscilla in Kamaila Community, Zambia

PRAISE AND PRAYER REQUESTS

Praise God for the Maranatha Workshops and Care Worker Revivals that have taken place. Pray that God will continue to do deep work in the life of each person who attended.

The roads within Africa can often be unpredictable and, at times, unsafe. Thank God for the way that He has kept us safe this year and pray that God will continue to keep people safe as they travel.

Pray for each of the regions across Africa as they finalise budgets and preparations for the upcoming year. Ask God for wisdom and discernment as they plan.

Pray for the severe flooding that has occurred across our three communities in Ilaje: Amokoko, Eagles Wings and Temitope. Pray that God will keep our people safe and provide a way forward.

As war has started again in and around the communities of Katembe and Luhonga, please pray for the children, Primary Caregivers, Care Workers and the Goma Service Centre. Pray that God will be their strength and hope in the midst of the fear and uncertainty.

As we conclude this issue of the Hands on Deck newsletter, Prag Mwenda, African Volunteer (Zambia) shares:

“As we end this year, we want to remember that everything we read today is about our children. We want to share the story of one-and-a-half-year-old Priscilla* from Kamaila in Zambia. When the Care Workers found her, she was extremely malnourished. Her mother struggles with the abuse of alcohol and is very broken. She decided to start drinking because she thought that would solve her problems. Every day she would leave Priscilla at home, alone. But in the midst of this tragedy, God has been doing something amazing. The Care Workers and Chisamba Service Centre team found her and have been caring for her so well. When I was visiting, I thought that Care Worker Elizabeth was Priscilla’s mother, simply because of the way that Elizabeth interacted with and cared for her. Each day, the Care Workers go to Priscilla’s home and bring her to the Care Point. This is the reason that we are here, for children like Priscilla. Please let us pray for our Service Centre and Care Workers. They work so hard. Pray that God will give them strength as they fight for the children. We can’t forget and lose sight of what God has called us to do.”

TAKING OWNERSHIP

Sylvia Chitenge, African Leader (Zambia), Luanshya Service Centre Coordinator

In September, Sylvia participated in the September Leaders’ Gathering at Kachele, with other leaders from across Africa. The focus of the Gathering was to ‘understand the times’, looking at how we need to practically reposition in light of that, looking to Jesus and choosing humility, servanthood and how we do this through love and unity.

“One of the things that we talked about was graduation and now I understand it better because we are linking it with expansion. I am to communicate it with Care Workers because I believe it. Recently, I had a Coordinators meeting with the Care Workers and I shared more about graduation. It works so much better to understand it fully, otherwise I go into the community that’s been chosen to graduate and I tell them we have to graduate you, without actually understanding why. But in this case, I was able to speak to all the coordinators and explain the vision of Hands at Work and graduating communities. And the Care Workers understood it because I spoke from a place of me believing it. I wasn’t saying oh, leaders or the Regional Service Team told me to – it was personal.

Another thing that stood out to me was the idea of ownership. If I don’t take care of things, for example if I don’t take care of the dishes at my house or at Kachele, then I can’t tell the Care Workers to clean the dishes at the Care Point. We need to take ownership of the things God has given us before we expect others to take ownership. Psalm 24:1-2 says, ‘The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.’ As this verse says, God owns everything, and God owns us. And so we take ownership of His world to bring Him glory. All this has had ups and downs but it has brought a lot of spiritual growth where we have all had to totally depend on God in everything and not on our knowledge and understanding.”