

KING GEORGE VI CENTRE – August 2017 Newsletter

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A fantastic preview of the show: <https://youtu.be/2IBfNTpQ0kE>

"Magnificent, wonderful, marvellous, spectacular, remarkable, phenomenal, prodigious, breath taking, extraordinary, unbelievable, amazing, stunning, astounding, astonishing, awe inspiring, staggering, formidable, impressive, supreme, great" comments on the show!

What a week we had! It will be difficult to put it down on paper – you had to be here for the full impact. We would like to thank everyone who helped us celebrate and to all those who flew in from all over the world to join us. It was a crazy, busy, chaotic, amazing, awe-inspiring and fun week. We had to overcome so many obstacles to reach our goals but then isn't that typical of our everyday lives anyway and isn't our motto – never give up! At one time we were told we couldn't have a march because Mugabe was coming down to Bulawayo, our marching band cancelled, we couldn't find a sound system, kaylite packaging was banned in Zimbabwe just before our lunch for +500 people, the drum majorettes' costumes weren't ready, everyone at KGVI was passing around chest infections – the challenges just went on and on but in the end it all came together.

Our first event was on Tuesday which was the free show at the theatre for schools and for senior citizens. Had we done enough practising as for the previous two weeks and even into our big week the children were writing exams. Odd moments had to be snatched to perfect each act and so many people were battling infections and had to take time off. Anyway there we were at the theatre with one hour to go and we were told that the sound system we had hired wouldn't be coming as they had double booked. Farai and his team had to fly around fixing up the inadequate KGVI system which we had used for our dress rehearsal the previous day. We nearly managed to fill the theatre with six or so schools represented and some of the Bulawayo senior citizens including 18 from the old people's home that our Interact Club has been supporting. The show was chaotic and we finally realised that those directing the children were working on a different programme to our sound team. We muddled through and we had a very understanding audience. The performers were amazing; it was us adults who were messed up. As we kept changing the order of performers those behind the scenes were desperately changing costumes to try and keep up. It was so bad it was funny! We were encouraged by one of the older ladies shouting from the back – *"don't worry we are loving it"*! Afterwards Precious and the Interactors had organised tea and cakes for the old people but first we had to try and find chairs for them as most of them were very infirm and couldn't stand. It was heart-warming to see the children who had been performing on the stage rushing around serving tea, cake and love to the very old people from the home. I suspect that for them at least the cake was more exciting than the show! Despite the chaotic show we knew where we had gone wrong and that the main show on Friday would come together.

Wednesday gave us a chance to put the final touches to all our planning ready for the main events on Thursday. Cakes were iced, meat prepared, costumes altered and the kitchen prepared for feeding the huge KGVI family the next day. Esther from the States spent the

day battling with all the difficulties presented by Zimbabwean ingredients and iced a three tier cake for our assembly. In the evening we had a get together with heads of department, Management members and our overseas visitors. The KGVI team prepared a traditional meal and the 40 odd people enjoyed catching up and socialising. For our eight visitors from Jabulani Kids Zimbabwe it was their third or fourth time back to KGVI while for those from UK and the US it was a first or second visit.

Thursday was a crazy but amazing day. Our drivers quickly and efficiently moved everyone to the City Hall ready to start the march at 9 am. We were addressed by the Mayor and then delayed by the band while they tried to fix their main drum. I have to add here that most of the problems we faced came from our outside contacts not from our own teams! We set off half an hour late but actually made up the time arriving at KGVI just after 11. Our drum majorettes looked amazing in their smart new uniforms and borrowed hats and never stopped performing from beginning to end. Our long procession marched around the City Hall and then through the parks and down George Avenue picking up the little ones and the more vulnerable of our children at the nearby hockey stadium. No one complained, no one was sick or injured and very few dropped out. Soon after the walk started I was joined by Charlotte who linked her arm through mine. I thought she may have been worried about being out on the streets but it seems she was worried about me and was determined to help the 'old lady' – she even helped carry my water bottle!

Back at KGVI lunch was served to all the children and staff. We had decided to do it ourselves as the outside caterers were too expensive and not even good quality anymore. How did our kitchen team manage to prepare lunch for over 500 people and still make it delicious! Every person at KGVI had been assigned to a team to help with some aspect of our celebrations. Mrs Goora had handpicked her cooking team and the serving team also did an amazing job serving so many people so quickly. By 12.30 we were all squeezed into the hall with our invited guests ready for our special assembly. We kept speeches to a minimum as this event was to give an opportunity to those children who were not involved in the main show. We had six amazing poems including a very moving poem signed by one of our deaf juniors, Debra had organised some of the very little deaf children to sign the Lord's Prayer and we had a very cute rendition of Barbie Girl by the Gavhera twins. For the 'car' they used one of the special mobility carts which had just arrived from the States. These are called PET carts and are a great hit with the children. We had a wonderful staff choir who had been trained up by Betty from the speech department. The choir members had had to practise whenever anyone could spare the time so it was probably the first time everyone had managed to come together at the same time.

The most moving of the performances was something put together by Marvelous and Jennifer Gavhera, the grade 5 teacher. To the very emotive music 'Your Raise Me Up' they told the story of the work of KGVI. It started with two girls sitting in wheelchairs who were then helped to stand and walk across the stage. I can tell you there weren't many dry eyes in the hall at that moment. They went on to tell the story of our academic and independent success with Courage and Mokhumi wheeling across in their gowns and capes, then Mrs Goora and her cookery products and finally Luckmore wheeled in with his carrier stuffed with the produce from the garden including unbelievably a rabbit and a chicken. Luckmore was looking very smart in a jacket and tie and the pride on his face just beamed out. What a very special tribute to everyone at KGVI.

The assembly also gave us the opportunity to acknowledge all our long serving staff with certificates. We were 48 staff ranging from 10 years' service to 40 years from Peter Mazambane, altogether over 700 years of service! How amazing to have both Precious and Samantha in the ten year category! Finally we cut the cake and made sure everyone had a taste before packing up totally exhausted but very pleased with the day's activities.

Friday was all about preparation for the show including finding a good sound system and printing new programmes in a different colour so we wouldn't repeat the previous mistakes. Moving 62 performers and all the back-up staff to the theatre was a mission but everyone was there on time and Farai had set up the improved sound system in less than an hour. The kids were made up, the costumes were on and the music ready. By 6pm exactly we were ready to start and it was the audience coming in late that delayed our start! The show was all about songs and dances from the past six decades; from the 50s to the 2000s to represent our 60 years of existence.

It's difficult to describe the show – I still can't believe we pulled off something so professional. It was faultless with one smooth amazing performance following on from the next. Each decade was introduced by someone born in that decade carrying the chosen listening device at that time so ranging from long playing records to mobiles. We had some pretty interesting costumes for each decade as well! Apart from the wheelchair dance (Cha cha cha) which started the show the majority of our dancers were deaf. As we watched the little ones perform the Twist and a flawless but very complicated Hip Hop routine by the seniors it was difficult to believe that most of the dancers couldn't actually hear the music! Yes, we had some good coaches but they all agreed on how talented our dancers are. Our deaf school leavers amused us with their own special rendition of the Bump Jive. They had all padded themselves out in strategic places – you have to see the photos to really appreciate this. Our deaf seniors had also insisted on sign singing two of our songs with Prudence joining them to sing Eternal Flame. For me one of the special aspects of the show was the mixing of abilities in so many performances, for instance Sakhile who is not deaf joined the sign singers and in most dances there was a non-disabled dancer in the crew, a group of four wheelchair boys singing were joined by the non-disabled form 1 girls and our four wheelchair dancers were joined by our two attachment students, a teacher and a therapist – this is inclusivity at its best!

It was good to have Prudence and Marvelous join us and to hear Prudence's beautiful voice at full strength again. We also brought Vernon back to sing an Elvis Presley song for the 50s and then later he joined Prudence in singing a love song in Shona. Even for those who couldn't understand the words the sentiment of the song was clear in the voices and the movement of the two wheelchairs around each other. We finished off the show with two songs from the new Liyana. This was five of the original Liyana joined by three present students who blended well to produce the old magic. One of the new players was Wandiswa, the non-disabled son of our one of our teachers. Against advice the school agrees to bring in O level students who have failed in other schools usually through behavioural issues. Wandiswa is one of the success stories as he has fitted in so well with our students and has enjoyed being part of the band.

The show ended with everyone on the stage and with Tapiwa leading both performers and audience in our famous song *Never Give Up*. Right now this song has an important message not only for KGV I but for everyone in Zimbabwe. What a week we had, leaving everyone exhausted but content. We certainly celebrated our 60 years of ability!

We would like to thank everyone who supported us either by coming to join in the celebrations or by fund raising with half marathons, golf marathons or just by donating. The very large KGV I family were all able to come together and enjoy ourselves before turning once again to the realities of our beleaguered country. Our theme for the 60th was *KGV I Forever* but I still think our previous year's theme is more telling – *Still Not Giving Up!*

