

Polokong Children's Village
South Africa
Parishes Update October 2021



Background

Polokong (which means “We Are Free”) is a children’s village, near Johannesburg. It was founded in 1991 by the Society of St Vincent de Paul (SSVP) in South Africa to provide a home for some of the children living on the streets of Johannesburg and notorious surrounding areas. The children, age 18 months to 18 years, have been abandoned, abused, neglected or orphaned and are committed by the courts to Polokong.

St Thomas More Parish has been supporting Polokong since 1992. A group from the parish visited the Village in 2012. That same year SS Francis and Thérèse, Hunsbury, joined to make Polokong a two-parish project.

Operations

The Children’s Village consists of 5 houses of 10 children, each with its own house mother. Children go to local schools and are encouraged to excel academically and in sport. There is a strong Christian / Catholic ethos. These and up to 300 other children from the surrounding area are given a nutritious meal each day; there is an HIV/AIDS programme and around 589 children with HIV are receiving counselling; a few promising children are entered into a special Emancipation Programme to go through further education. The children’s village expanded their services in 2019 to include two established children’s homes in the Vanderbijlpark area. The board of management of the two children’s homes requested Polokong to take over the 2 homes due to Polokong’s expertise and capacity to run children’s homes. The one home houses 10 boys and the other home 6 girls.

Funding

Nearly 80% of Polokong’s funding comes from the SA Government. The next largest donor is the SVP (SA and UK): in 2019 Towcester and Hunsbury collected £8,920, but this fell to £4,971 in 2020, due to the loss of church collections during lockdown. In 2021 we will have sent them £7218, but this includes two year’s Gift Aid refunds, totalling £1767. This is money reclaimed on the regular standing orders from several parishioners.

Covid 19 Crisis

Covid 19 has hit South Africa hard, and has been especially cruel to Polokong. Since the pandemic started the following things have happened:

- Early 2021 – the first cases of children with Covid 19 were reported. Luckily all recovered.
- Polokong report having financial difficulties due to loss of income as a result of Covid.
- May 2021 – the Chairman of Polokong’s Board of Trustees dies from Covid 19. He was a member of SVP (SA).
- Shortly afterwards, one of the children’s workers and another employee both died of Covid 19.
- In the following weeks several members of staff (including the Director and the Deputy Director and some of their families) all caught Covid 19 – but survived. All managers had to self-isolate.
- Due to Covid 19, the funds from the SA Government were delayed by two months, leaving them in “a very bad financial situation”.
- In July a new Chairman of Trustees was appointed.

- The AGM, due in September, had to be postponed because the auditors contracted Covid 19 and could not finalise their audit. The AGM has yet to be rescheduled.
- At the end of September the Village reported a shortfall of about R400,000 (roughly £20k, or 7% of their total income) due to substantial shortfalls in normal regular donations.
- This is the Deputy Director in October: *“At the moment we are restructuring and with the difficult times we are forced to retrench, this is very sad for all of us. Because we are only partially funded by the Department, we are in desperate need of donations. We are reaching out everywhere, but as I said I believe and I trust in the Lord.”*

Life Continues

Meanwhile there is good news. Recently they acquired a minibus, paid for partly with funds from us in UK.



This will save them money in the long run, as well as making life easier for the staff and children.

The Deputy Director’s words again this month: *“The children is still happy and doing well, it is school holidays at the moment and they are being entertained with a holiday program. In the end it is all about the children.”*

Please Can You Help Polokong?

Pre-Covid our parishes sent Christmas presents to the children consisting of packs of various stationery items. This year, Polokong have pleaded with us to send them money instead, their situation being so dire.

The most efficient way for anyone to help is to set up a regular standing order. Your donation can be Gift Aided, thus increasing its value by 25%. If you would like to help in this way (or any other) please contact the local SVP Treasurer (digby.carter@btopenworld.com). Thank you.

“In the end it is all about the children”