



Issue 8 | Dec 2020 | End of Year Letter

What are these times of crisis calling from me?

Do what calls your heart...

Dear Friends of The Sophia Foundation

“How can I make things better?” This was the question asked in The Sophia Foundation end of the year letter of 2019. Little did any of us know that the year 2020 would be unlike any other, that the world as we knew it was about to change and much of it would need to be re-imagined. In the constellation of social challenges, many of my colleagues and I have asked with greater urgency “What are these times of crisis calling from me?”

We have each had to respond in our own particular way and what has been an inspiration that has tempered the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic is the great outpouring of support and compassion from Capetonians, who have reached out in so many ways to relieve the suffering of those in need. Henry Longfellow believed that situations that call forth our coping abilities are “celestial benedictions” in dark disguises, sent not to try our souls but to enlarge them. Our partner organisations have been testament to this as they have stopped, shelved their year’s program, regrouped and changed track to meet the immediate needs of their particular communities.

Angela Katschke, the Managing Director of Butterfly Art Project and Janna Kretzmar, the Founder and Director of Earthchild Project write about the response of their organisations to the COVID-19 pandemic below. They share the lessons they have learnt, and what has enabled them to adapt as organisations, as they have creatively responded to the callings of their communities and performed small miracles with grace, compassion and open hearts.

The University of Stellenbosch has had to make many changes, adjustments and adaptations in response to the outbreak as they migrated from campus lecture rooms to online with little warning. Their primary focus has been to do everything possible to ensure their students could complete their academic year and the University remains sustainable. The rewarding journey of The Sophia Foundation with Stellenbosch University continues albeit in a different form, as you will read below.



BUTTERFLY ART PROJECT

A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO ONLINE AND FOOD SUPPORT

The fear of the pandemic in combination with the humanitarian crises the lockdown brought to our communities were a bitter cocktail. The Butterfly Art Project is grateful that The Sophia Foundation responded to our call for urgent support in August with a generous grant towards our funding shortfall and crises-related expenses.

Despite the hardship and many health challenges for body, mind, soul and spirit, the BAP team continued to serve the organisation's beneficiaries without interruption. 176 Community Art Facilitators were inspired, encouraged and supported to bring art and crisis relief to 4497 children and youth in 83 different communities in the Western Cape.



But every crisis brings learning and, in the end, a harvest. Let us share our **2020 harvesting highlights** with you all:

Challenging times test our habits and established structures. The BAP team pulled together to create stability for each other. We had weekly online team meetings to support each other through our emotional wobbles, times of anxiety and grief. This crisis granted us the opportunity to learn more about teamwork and the importance of love and care at the workplace. This was collective learning and an investment we can draw on in years to come.

"I felt supported knowing I am surrounded by a group of people who planned well and were focused on how the organisation could effectively serve beneficiaries. I was scared at first, but that soon passed as I was made aware of more facts about the virus and that I would not be alone, that my colleagues would be there to support me and each other." Charles Jansen, Team Leader BAP



Zoom.us became our friend as it became the new medium for us to reach our Community Art Facilitators (CAFs) safely and at low cost. Even our **10th birthday** in October was an online event and allowed our friends and supporters from all over the world to celebrate with us. In future times, beyond lockdown, we will make use of this way to communicate as it allows us to serve CAFs who cannot easily travel and enables us to more easily reach further afield into other provinces.



“The impact of COVID-19 lockdown drastically affected our arts in psychosocial support. The BAP Zoom webinar online art training and mentoring workshops made it easy for me to transition into a new normal. I learnt new art skills and felt emotionally held by the facilitator and group.” Phumzile Rhakosa, Community Art Facilitator

In our home community of Vrygrond, food relief was needed as people could no longer afford to buy even the most basic groceries. We distributed food parcels and food vouchers to vulnerable families, prioritising grandmothers who are single parenting. This involved many hours of community engagement and many home visits. The BAP team is much more informed now about the individual life situations of the children they serve.

“Sir Sikelela came to my house when we weren’t allowed to go to school in lockdown. I was very happy as he showed me that Butterfly cares and they gave me groceries and activities for me to do with my brothers and sisters at home. It made lockdown easier for us and my mom was happy too.” Junior age 7

We experienced support from many directions.

This was truly a time of looking out for each other and exercising generosity. Ben Fellis and Sonja Niederhumer gifted us with free online graphic facilitation skills training. The BAP team can now communicate visually on big posters about their activities and programs. A long-needed and appropriate skill considering that all us butterflies have a great visual understanding of the world.



We are very aware that the effects of 2020 will be carried over into 2021. More healing, sorting and growing will be needed. But for now, we will have a summer break to recover, breath out, attend to our own health and recharge our inner batteries for a happy new year. Angela Katschke



EARTHCHILD PROJECT

A MINDFUL COMMITMENT TO CREATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

While the first term of 2020 was one filled with big wins and many positive moments, the term sadly ended as none of us could have imagined with the country going into a hard lockdown. The impact of this on our programmes and on our children in particular has been far reaching, and the challenges of 2020 have been unlike any previously faced by the organisation. We have had to push ourselves creatively, emotionally and physically to come up with alternative ways to reach our earth children and the teachers, to ensure that we stayed connected and could support them during these incredibly difficult times.



Setting up school feeding schemes. Lockdown had the devastating impact of stopping the school-feeding scheme that many children in our focus communities rely on for their main meal of the day. Our team responded by setting up feeding schemes at four of our schools in Khayelitsha and Lavender Hill. From April to August, we worked with the school principals and kitchen mamas to help feed an average of 300 children per day - 17000 meals in total.



“We were the only school who continued feeding the community throughout lockdown and EarthChild Project helped by making it possible. So many people are hungry because they lost their jobs and even before Covid didn't have employment, but because we are passionate about uplifting the community, we were able to do it together.” Acting Principal

Creating online groups for learning and resource distribution. We set up WhatsApp groups and adapted our themes and lessons to offer online classes to all our Extra Mural Clubs, Hiking Clubs, Young Leaders and Alumni, as well as for our Living Classroom Teachers. Creative and engaging activities such as upcycled art projects and random acts of kindness were included that could be done at home. In addition, we used these groups to distribute resources such as food garden kits, reusable sanitary pads and food vouchers. Here you can watch our **Term 2 update video**.



“We want you back. The teachers need your support and the children need yoga!” We were thankful our Principals called to say this, and to continue our work in Term 3. This feedback highlighted the significance of our long-term relationships with the schools and the extent to which they value our team and our work. Although schools opened, closed, then reopened, we continued to offer in-person classes throughout this time. From yoga and gardening, to outings and leadership workshops, our team was at the schools every day, bringing a calm and positive presence to the very stressful and challenging school environment during this time. With the closing of the schools in August, we saw the healing power of nature as we took children and teachers on weekly hikes with mindful activities in the mountains.

Healing and healthy family food gardens. Our home gardening kits were a huge success as parents, teachers and pupils gave feedback on how healing it was to start their own gardens and what joy it brought to produce their own food. We have now piloted the Family Food Garden Programme, in partnership with GreenPop and Urban Harvest, and in September, the first 60 families received their new container gardens and worm farms. They are now participating in weekly WhatsApp follow up lessons and after 3 months will receive a new batch of seedlings.



“I felt lonely, sad and frustrated during lockdown. The only thing I was doing was to eat and sleep. But when BAP mentioned that they are introducing us to planting I smiled and for the first time I had something to look forward to everyday. I would smile every time I water my garden, but now I’m smiling even more because I’m harvesting!” Teacher



Introducing yoga and meditation to support teachers. During lockdown, we offered teachers regular yoga and meditation classes. The response was so positive that we have initiated weekly in person yoga classes at all our schools, as well as a monthly teachers hiking club. The entire staff including the principals now regularly attend these activities, something that has never happened before in our 14 years of working in schools! Here you can watch our **Term 3 update video**

Celebrating and sharing lessons learned. Throughout this challenging time, we have learnt many lessons as we have pulled together and seen what we are capable of. Being a small and close team has enabled us to be flexible and agile in the face of constant change. We certainly are emerging stronger, more resilient and more committed than ever to grow and improve our programmes. One unexpected benefit of 2020 has definitely been the incredible commitment and increased involvement from our children and teachers which we hope to sustain and grow in the years ahead. Janna Kertzmar

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

EMBEDDING LEADERSHIP BEYOND JUSTLEAD! PROGRAM

Prioritising flexibility and creativity. As you will have read, one of the hallmarks of being able to navigate successfully the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been flexibility and the ability to respond creatively to enable a transition to a new normal. This happened with the JustLead! Program at Stellenbosch University, sponsored by The Sophia Foundation. With 3 cohorts still to go and in consultation with the management of the University it was decided to discontinue the JustLead! Program and to meet the more immediate needs of the University. Of specific concern is the so-called “**missing middle**” group of students who do not qualify for NSFAS funding but whose source of income has been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They are unable to pay their University fees. The balance of our funds will be used to offer bursaries to 20 third year students next year. One of the core beliefs of The Sophia Foundation is that it is only by knowing oneself that one can fulfil one’s true potential as a human being. A condition of the funding is that recipients attend an Inner Leadership program. This will take the form of a full or half workshop each semester which will focus on self-awareness, self-management, empathy and social awareness.



“We expect even more students will move into the “missing middle” category – unable to access state funding and yet incapable of affording the costs of university studies because of the impact of Covid-19 on their household income.” Pieter Swart-director fundraising



To our trustees, partner organisations and all the friends of The Sophia Foundation, thank you for your continued support and encouragement. This has been a year of uncertainty and change that has demanded your courage and resilience. The words of Joanna Macy seem particularly relevant.

“Out of this darkness a new world can arise, not to be constructed by our minds so much as to emerge from our dreams. Even though we cannot see clearly how it is going to turn out, we are still called to let the future into our imagination. We will never be able to build what we have nor first cherished in our hearts....”

You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart; effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable, and it is enough....

Gratitude for the gift of life is the primary wellspring of all religions, the hallmark of the mystic, the source of all art. It is a privilege to be alive in this time when we can choose to take part in the self-healing of our world.

Future generations, if there is a liveable world for them, will look back at the epochal transition we are making to a life-sustaining society. And they may well call this the time of the Great Turning.

Grace happens when we act with others on behalf of our world.”

I wish that grace will come to meet you as you journey into next year. Whilst none of us knows what the future holds, may we hold the suffering of others in our hearts and be reminded of the radical inclusivity of compassion and the power of holding all beings everywhere in loving kindness and care.

With my warmest wishes,

Lorraine

Lorraine Forbes