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VHUTSHILO MOUNTAIN SCHOOL

3RD TERM HIGHLIGHTS

2023

Vhutshilo Mountain School is located in north eastern South Africa and focuses on educating, supporting, and empowering HIV positive and vulnerable youth. The school itself offers full day classes with meals for pre-school-aged children. We also run support groups for HIV positive children and teens and skills development programmes for people of all ages.



ON JULY 18

On July 18, after three weeks of winter holidays, our students returned. Our enrollment now totals 108 children: 6 in grade 2, 14 in grade 1, 27 in grade R, 32 in pre-school and 29 in toddler class. Since our return, besides the regular daily activities, teachers and staff have been busy attending Department of Education workshops and learners have been busy representing VMS in local competitions.

Our teachers and students are managing and balancing extracurricular activities so as not to disrupt the process of teaching and learning.

Our teachers are dedicated to giving our vulnerable children the best education. Our children are beginning to read and write as young as 3 years old. We salute our teachers. Words are not enough to thank them.

In the classroom, the educational program is progressing well with grade R to grade 2 having a 100% pass rate. As well, we continue to ensure our children are safe at school and at home and that those with health challenges are receiving necessary treatment.

While we have met all the standards the government sets for schools, we still have not received any government funding. We continue to fight for the government subsidy.



School competitions

On July 28 Nzhelele East Circuit hosted school competitions for primary schools. Eight schools competed in the following categories: Spelling Bee, Creative Writing, Creative Reading, Emergent Reading, and Mathematics.

Our students and teachers excelled. In grade R, Phathu took 1st place in emergent reading and Trinity took 1st place in creative writing. In Grade 1, Nduvho took first place in creative writing and Wanga took first place in mathematics. In Grade 2, Mohau came in 2nd in creative writing and Mukhethwa 1st in mathematics.

On the 11th of August, students went to round 2 at Mandala Primary School. VMS learners did an outstanding job taking first position, again, in the circuit cluster where only the best students were competing. Next we go to the 3rd round, the Circuit finalist at Makhado, on the 25th of August.

Mother's and Father's day



On May 15 we celebrated Mother's Day with learners attending school dressed like their moms or grandmothers. And, on Father's Day, June 8, learners dressed like their fathers or grandfathers. Many of the children dressed up like their grandparents, since the majority are staying with them. Watching the children rehearse their parents or guardians characters was so much fun. We remain grateful to all the men and women who care for and raise our parentless children.



Pyjama Day

Education is not just about passing on theories from teacher to child but also to develop social skills and to teach learners to be sympathetic and caring to others. On the 22nd of June we hosted a Pajama Day where all learners, together with their teachers, attended school in their clean pajamas. The purpose of pajama day was to teach children to share space with each other and strengthen both teacher to child & child to child relationships as part of the teaching and learning process. Teachers and children spent the day in the comfort of their pajamas relaxing, playing, snacking and watching movies. The children reported they really enjoyed the time bonding with their teachers.

Road Safety

On June 7th a delegate, Mrs Magidi, from the Department of Transport provided training in awareness and road safety measures. Children learned about road safety, how to follow road signs and safety rules. Many thanks to the Department of Transport for such an important and necessary lesson.



Birthday Celebration

At the end of the term, we celebrated the birthdays of all the children born between January and June, with birthday cakes, snacks and a chicken lunch. Students also had their pictures taken, documenting their special day. Thank you, VMS family, for creating beautiful memories for our children.

Afterwards, learners were sent home with large food parcels for their 3-week school holiday. Those families in need of more support are provided with fresh vegetables weekly.

We are so fortunate that what we plant grows so well. It is rewarding to grow our own vegetables and we also encourage community members to plant and grow their own gardens, even with the water challenges in our community. In the month of July we harvested 106 cabbages!



MANDELA DAY

Our school prepares our learners to be productive members of society. As a way of honouring our hero, Nelson Mandela, whose birthday was Tuesday 18 July, community members, staff members and children went out into the community and cleaned up the surrounding environment for 67 minutes, one minute for every year of Mandela's public service. We believe commitment to serve others echoes the values of compassion and progress and it is, of course, important to keep the streets in our community clean. Together, we will



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LEARNERS VACCINATED

As a community school we work very closely with the Department of Health to ensure all the children get medical attention, as needed. On June 6, all our learners received the measles vaccine. We are so grateful for Siloam Hospital and Fondwe Clinic for always visiting our school and helping to keep our children healthy and strong.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM

On July 5 we hosted a support group for youth living with HIV/AIDS. This meeting was arranged after receiving a call from area caregivers that many youth had stopped taking the ARV treatment. Eighteen young people attended the meeting, sharing with and encouraging each other to remain in treatment. The youth related lack of support, especially psychological support, as a concern. They explored the various life challenges they face: lack of employment opportunities, peer pressure, and depression.

A few also reported feeling so discouraged they started drinking alcohol. They discussed alternatives, encouraged each other to remain in treatment and reach out to each other. Two members of the group came close to dying from stopping their treatment. They had TB, a CD4 count of 30 and both were in the hospital for a month. They are now getting treatment and recovering well.

All the youth agreed that taking medicine is very important and were encouraged to communicate with their elders and peers. As a result of the meeting, VMS has also begun conducting home visits to encourage and support these families and their youth. The meeting was facilitated by Khathu, and our plan for the meeting in September will include both health workers and social workers.

As you can tell, we have been busy. The work we do is important to our students, their families and the community in which we all live. Thank you for your ongoing support that allows us to continue.

Sincerely,