



Message from Rigby

Once again, a big thank you to our valued friends and partners for reading this Term 1 Feedback Newsletter. This is our way of keeping you all up to date and informed about the amazing things that are happening here at Bridges.

In many ways 2022 was a kind of 'prototype' year as we built and shaped our Educational programme for the most resource-poor and under-performing schools on our doorstep. We used the time to develop our curriculum in a way that took into account the varied and unique needs and challenges of individual schools. The results were inspiring and gave us the confidence to grow our intake from 23 school camps last year to 34 school camps planned for 2023. Gratefully we have already received funding commitments for 14 of these camps! Of course, our current challenge is to find sponsorship for the remaining 20 camps.

NOW FOR SOME REALLY FANTASTIC NEWS!

Over the past 2 years we have seen Bridges emerge from the early challenge of a quest for viability into a more sustainable economic reality. We are so grateful for this shift. With the valued help of our growing family of partners, we have managed to weather the storm that has come the way of 65% of non-profits since Covid visited our shores. Against this backdrop, I am thrilled to report that earlier this year we received a donation (from a longstanding friend's overseas trust) of \$1 MILLION towards paying back the capital debt still outstanding to the original sellers. Friends, this is a 'game-changer', given that we have managed to reduce our debt from R18.5m to R4 million, whilst maintaining a small reserve and simultaneously having over R3m to invest into a number of small to medium size campus improvements/projects. In about 3-4 months' time we'd love you to consider visiting Bridges to see the stewardship of these resources on display. Please join us in celebrating this milestone moment!

As you read the rest of this update, you will become aware of numerous stories of schools, students and educators being infused with a fresh sense of hope as Bridges fleshes out the mandate entrusted to us as and to our dedicated staff teams. It takes a team to fly a dream, and our team continue to spend their lives selflessly in transforming lives, one school, one student and one educator at a time!

In closing, we feel freshly poised over the coming decades to write new chapters in the Bridges story. From the onset we committed ourselves to 'A HUNDRED YEAR VISION' of pushing back the despair and hopelessness in the educational space in the greater Cape Town area. With your help we will continue to do this. Thank you once again for standing with us in this exciting and noble vision.

Rigby

Chairman of the Board



Overview of Term 1 Camps

CAMP #1 *PREFECT LEADERSHIP CAMP WITH GRADE 7 PREFECTS FROM ALL PARTNER SCHOOLS*

No. of Learners: **105**
No. of Educators: **6**

We kicked off the year with our very first Prefect Camp in January! Prefects from all our partner schools were invited to a camp where the LEAD model was introduced and explored.

L= Looking out for others.
E= Endurance.
A= Attitude.
D= Discipline.

Our partner schools do not have leadership growth plans in place, so this was a wonderful opportunity for young leaders to be nurtured and developed. These leaders could then return to their school environments, better equipped to lead by example and set a positive tone for the rest of the learners.



CAMP #2 *ELNOR PRIMARY, GR 7, ELSIESRIVIER*

No. of Learners: **57**
No. of Educators: **2**

This was the first group of learners to return from 2022! They were the Grade 6 group from 2022 and the good connection between learners and coaches was evident from the beginning of camp as they continued to build on foundations laid last year. The learner's participation in all camp activities and marked improvement in behavior, since last year, was noted by the coaching team.

CAMP #3 *JOOSTENBERG PRIMARY, GR 7, JOOSTENBERG VLAKTE*

No. of Learners: **69**
No. of Educators: **4**

This camp was this Grade 7 group's first camp at Bridges. For most of these learners, it was the first time they had been away from home, or their community, so it was a very exciting new experience. The Prefects who had been at Bridges earlier in the month, helped pave the way for an enriching camp experience, by leading by example and assisting their peers in activities. Overall the camp was successful and the feedback from the learners showed that they learned more about values on camp, than they would have at home or school.



CAMP #4 ALPHA PRIMARY, GR 6, DURBANVILLE

This Grade 6 camp was with the returning Grade 5 learners from 2022. The immediate observation from the coaches was the children's excitement and sense of togetherness from the first session of the camp. The 'self-awareness' taught in the Grade 5 programme was further developed toward 'social awareness' in this Grade 6 programme and the progress was evident. There was a sense of excitement and anticipation from the coaches too, as they observed this growth and improved learner participation. There were a few behavioral issues that needed to be dealt with, but the Educators were engaged and assisted with this. The learners had a good camp and reflected at camp closing on their personal and social development, which enabled them to work with and get to know each other better.

No. of Learners: **83**
No. of Educators: **4**



CAMP #5 RIVERLANDS PRIMARY & CHATSWORTH PRIMARY, GR 5, MALMESBURY

This was our first Grade 5 camp combining two new schools from the same community in Malmesbury, Riverlands and Chatsworth Primary Schools. When the Education team engaged the learners at the pre-camp school visit, it was clear that they had never participated in a camp programme before and had never been outside of their community except for going to town in Malmesbury for shopping. When the learners arrived, their enthusiasm was astounding and they were captivated by the beautiful surroundings at Bridges. One learner asked why there were so many Table Mountains! There were some behavioral issues that needed to be dealt with. However, there was a glimmer of hope when the Grade 5's came to ask for forgiveness and committed to improving their behavior. The learners expressed such gratitude to Bridges for meeting their basic needs, 3 meals a day, a bed, a shower, and a safe space to play.

No. of Learners: **107**
No. of Educators: **7**





CAMP #6 SIMONDIUM PRIMARY, GR 7, WEMMERSHOEK

No. of Learners: **80**
No. of Educators: **6**

This was a generally good camp, but there were some discipline issues that needed to be handled and two children arrived on camp needing medical attention, so Brent took them to the Simondium clinic to receive the necessary treatment (as it was beyond the scope of our trained first aiders). Drugs were also found with this group. The Educators know of some of the children that use drugs and come to school high, as their way of coping with life. This is very distressing, but our team was able to engage with the Educators and manage the situation. We know that even though there are many social ills that plague the lives of these learners, that their experience at Bridges was a highlight and that seeds have been sown for continued personal and social growth and development. We are here to serve the poorest and most vulnerable children in society, which includes dealing with issues that they face on a daily basis.



CAMP #7 WES EIND PRIMARY, GR 5, GROENDAL FRANSCHHOEK

The learners from this group were a pleasure to work with and posed very few challenges. Participation was intentional, learning was evident and although some of the life skills activities were challenging for these young children, they displayed what the programme aimed at achieving; 'being aware of themselves and 'identifying their strengths and weaknesses.' The Educators added value by being visible and supportive on camp.

No. of Learners: **61**
No. of Educators: **3**

CAMP #8 CASCADE PRIMARY, GR 6, MITCHELLS PLAIN

No. of Learners: **96**
No. of Educators: **6**

This was a big group but our coaches handled this well by dividing the group into smaller teams for activities. For the most part this group was well behaved, although the team had to deal with a few issues – there was some snack stealing amongst learners and an incident between a learner, who wanted to throw a rock at his teacher... all these issues are distressing, but part of reality and are excellent opportunities for our team to engage and coach both educators and learners. Brent was able to gather all the coaches and educators and talk them through the incident in a constructive way.

Apart from this, a great camp was had by learners who expressed gratitude for the wonderful experience.



CAMP #9 BONGA PRIMARY, GR 7, GUGULETHU

No. of Learners: **74**
No. of Educators: **4**

From a high-level overview this camp went very well, with most of our Xhosa speaking facilitators lead-facilitating activities, with other facilitators and volunteers supporting them. It was communicated to the learners beforehand that they could bring their traditional wear, to use at the talent show. Some of them brought items, and everyone was engaged in dancing and performing during the talent evening, which they thoroughly enjoyed. It was a well behaved group, with low disciplinary issues. The learners were able to continue building on their 2022 camp experience.

Feedback from the Principals

"This programme has given our learners the opportunity to get out of the community, which would be a first for most of them. When I walk into a classroom and the teacher asks them to stay quiet, they all raise their hands, which is something that they have learned on camp. Most of these kids only learn values at school. So for this programme to have an extension of those values, and then we see it in class, that is amazing. Not all the children get it, but this programme is trying to change the world, one child at a time."

Mr Mark Agulhas Principal, Elnor Primary school Elsie's River

"We had a Grade 5, 6 and 7 camp last year, and our prefects attended the Prefect camp earlier in this year. Subsequently our prefects are driving values and started running the assemblies alongside educators; there is no need for me to be involved. There was one 15-year-old learner who had disciplinary issues, but we decided to still send him on camp. Then I heard that on the last day, he received recognition for excellent behavior at camp. This made me and the teachers realize that we need to support interactive opportunities within the class for learners like him. This was a learning for us as a school, because sometimes we do not know how to support learners like him. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to be part of this programme. I wish more schools can participate."

Mrs L. Matthee Principal, Simondium Primary School, Wemmershoek

Learner Feedback

Feedback from the Grade 7 prefects on the leadership camp:

- All I want to say to the coaches they did a good job with us and I will learn more about the LEAD platform.
- I love how they teach us to trust, help and make new friends and share.
- I think that they were very good coaches to us and were leading good.
- I think they were kind to explain to the children that didn't understand.
- To do exercises with the coaches, to learn how to be a leader.
- The one thing that I learned is that you have to be self-disciplined if you want to be a good prefect.
- It was the best I never walked so far in my life before my legs were and still is very sore. This camp is the best of all camps.
- The A taught me that I cannot have a bad attitude and expect the learners to have a good attitude.
- Never give up even if you don't want to do something, achieve your goals.
- L: Looking out for my dog, E: Ending well to wash dishes, A: having a good attitude, D: have to discipline at school.
- At the camp I have learned a lot from the leadership how to be a leader and you must be kind and you must forgive.



Feedback from learners on the coaches, camp and takeaway resolutions;



- Because they are good people I love them. And they learn us.
- Because they are good people and they don't want us hurt and love us
- This my 3rd camp and I learnt to respect others and to communicate with others
- I promise myself that I will make better decisions, and pass grade 7 and pass high school
- I promise myself today I will keep trying my best and get great points at the end of the term and also I want to become a doctor
- I would say don't let other people discourage you from following your dreams
- I promise that I will be responsible young woman and become something in life to be a better person. Thank you
- I promise to myself I want to be a leader of the camp



REFLECTIONS FROM COACH COOPER:

Over the last month, there has been a significant shift taking place in the atmosphere of the camps. God is on the move, amongst the kids.

One example was during a campfire, Coach Icy sang a song which she chose sporadically, or so she thought. Whilst singing, with learners sitting around the fire, one girl started crying. I went over to her and just held her whilst Coach Icy continued singing. Next another girl started crying, sobbing really. She was shaking. I indicated for the girl next to her to half drag her to my side, so that I could hold her too. "It's okay, my girl, just let it out" I said. When Coach Icy finished her song, she came and took the second girl, put her on her lap and just comforted her.

I found out that the girl I held, lost both her parents in January of this year.

Coach Icy sang the song "miracles happen when You move".

This is just one example, but I am convicted in my spirit that this is exactly what is happening right now...miracles.

A change has come, and if nurtured, it is going to spread like a fire...in a glorious way.

ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL REFLECTION FROM COACH COOPER

While chatting to some Grade 7 learners from Simondium Primary during the first snack time, one of the boys told me that he is a prefect but wasn't on the prefect camp. When I asked some more questions I discovered that there were too many to come on camp so the learners had a voting system to select the final 20 prefects. Jadon was one of the 20, but he offered his spot to another learner who was not on the list.

"Why did you do that?" I asked. "Coach, the boy looked so disappointed, and he wasn't going to be on this camp either. I knew that I would be on the grade camp as well, so I thought why not give him that opportunity" he answered. "Wow... Jadon that was very selfless of you. Let me tell you something... doing something like that for someone else; you can only receive a blessing. It may not come in the way you expect, but watch for it. It's going to come."

I left the group and continued on with my facilitation duties. Towards the evening of the following day, Coach Brent approached me and said he wants to do something special for a learner during the closing ceremony.

I have no idea how Coach Brent got wind of this, but during the closing ceremony, he did his usual closing statements and then announced his intention to the group of learners. He started speaking about a prefect who missed out on a prefect camp to give the opportunity to a learner who would not have a camp at all this year. "That should already tell you how this boy has displayed leadership characteristics and abilities. And to honour him this morning, I want to hand over his LEAD certificate, because he has displayed the concepts contained in the course without even knowing it. Please put your hands together for Jadon!"

Jadon was completely caught off guard and moved to tears by this unexpected act of public affirmation. And so were most of us. I went to hug him and all I said was "I told you! Acts of kindness always come back."



Total Impact So Far

TOTAL IMPACT: TERM 1

- CAMPS: **9**
- LEARNERS: **732**
- EDUCATORS: **42**
- MEALS PROVIDED: **5418**



Thank You

Another heartfelt thank you to all our generous donors who have enabled us to kick off 2023 with so many fully funded camps! We are so grateful and humbled by your support and financial generosity, which has helped us to reach 732 Learners this term, with an enriching camp experience and memories and moments of impact that will last a lifetime. Thank you for being part of our team and helping us to change the world, one child at a time. *We look forward to the Term 2 and all God has in store, as the Bridges story continues to unfold.*

Please follow us on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn for regular camp updates, photos and stories throughout the term!



Website: www.bridgesretreat.co.za/education-programme/

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BridgesEduCamp/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/bridgesoutdoorcamp/