

Message from Rigby

Dear friends, partners and donors, it's a joy to be in touch once again. It's an even greater joy to bring you encouraging news of measurable progress on multiple fronts here at BRC. As you read on you will hear stories of remarkable progress in the fleshing out this compelling vision.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr: "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step toward the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

It's my privilege to invite you to witness and applaud the progress and efforts of our campus staff and Education team as together they continue to "build this island of hope in the sea of despair."

We also applaud you our partners and donors for your continued and sacrificial generosity. Thank you for investing in the forward movement of this vision! On behalf of the many young lives and teachers too, we thank you. What a joy to see them leave our camps gripped with a fresh sense courage and a renewed sense of future!

Together in hope,

Rigby

Chairman of the Board



Team News

In the last Newsletter we introduced Brent and Ray, this term we would like to introduce two more members of our fantastic team;

JUSTINE DEMAS *Facilitator and Administrator*

Justine has a degree in Psychology, honours in Community and Social Development and Masters which she completed through a scholarship programme in the Czech Republic.

Her passion for child and youth development started with a project at school that required her to think about a scarce career. This, together with her personal story of resilience as a child, made her think deeply and she decided to pursue a career in psychology.

Justine has experience working with children with trauma, church youth programmes and working with refugees.

Everyone around camp knows her as Coach JD. Apart from facilitating, she is the driving force around all aspects of camp logistics and administration.



ZIBA MBENSE *Facilitator*

Ziba is a Pastor in the Langa community, with experience in pastoral care, counselling, preaching, teaching, leadership development and training. He speaks six South African languages- Isizulu, Isixhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, Sepedi, and English.

He continues his work as a Pastor, but also assists us on camps as a Facilitator. He is a valuable part of the team with his wisdom, kindness and pastor's heart.



EXTENDED BRIDGES TEAM

We had a great time this term as an extended Bridges Team, joining with the campus staff in acknowledging their vital contribution and high standards on the accommodation and food front, which is always mentioned as an absolute highlight by the learners who attend camp! The campus staff are an integral part of the Bridges Education Camp Programme.



Feedback

CAMPS

Term 2 has seen the completion of 5 more action packed, life impacting camps at the time of writing this, with a 6th camp planned for the last week of Term 2.

The term started off with a Grade 7 group of 70 learners and 5 educators from Elnor Primary in Elsie's River, Cape Flats. The learners and educators were deeply moved and impacted by the experience as you will see from the feedback letter we received. Brent was also invited to a special 'appreciation tea' that the school held in Bridges honour, to say thank you for the experience.

We then hosted 69 Grade 7 learners and 8 educators from Simondium Primary, followed by 103 Grade 6 & 7 learners and 6 educators from Wes Eind Primary in Franschoek. It was great to welcome our first two Cape Winelands schools as our heart is to be a blessing to the surrounding under resourced schools in the valley too.

Bonga Primary from Gugulethu came on camp with 102 Grade 7 learners and 7 educators mid-May. The team did well to adapt the camp schedule around rain and wind and kept the learners busy with some great indoor activities. The team didn't let the rain on the second night of camp stop them from creating the usual campfire experience- they adapted and made a pretend fire in the shed, a big pile of wood decorated with fairy lights to create the 'gees' and campfire activities could go on with the rain pouring outside!



We then hosted our first Grade 5 group from Alpha Primary in Fisantekraal. This was our first grade of younger children. They had a wonderful experience at Bridges and were blessed with beautiful weather.

We will wrap up Term 2 with another Grade 5 group from Cascade Primary in Mitchells Plein.

We have seen how the Grade 5s are better behaved and more receptive to learning on camp. The coaches have noted that the values and skills development has landed well with these younger visitors who will be able to keep progressing in their development when they return to Bridges for their Grade 6 and 7 camps.



Feedback (continued)



IN OTHER NEWS

Catherine completed a very informative Child Protection Policy workshop offered by Valcare (an organisation that supports nonprofits operating in the Cape Winelands area). Child Protection is an area that we have put a lot of care and attention into, but it will always be an area of continued focus and improvement.

Catherine also completed a 7-week Theory of Change course and Monitoring and Evaluation course through Valcare, which has been very valuable in helping us develop our Theory of Change for the Bridges Educational Camp Programme - specifically around our output indicators and outcomes which will help us to measure the success of our programme as we develop and grow.

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

One of our donors connected us with Ben and Trey, two volunteers visiting from a servant leadership internship in the USA. They wholeheartedly participated in one of our camps and brought so much energy and passion. They reflected afterwards on how the camp had also deeply impacted their lives and experience of South Africa. This is an avenue that we would like to further develop- partnering with organisations who would like to send volunteers to Bridges as once off Facilitators to strengthen and support our team and develop themselves in the process.



PHASE 1 OF THE OBSTACLE COURSE COMPLETE



The completion of our rope obstacle course has been another highlight this term. This was the brainchild of Ray, our Programme Coordinator. The obstacle course has been incorporated in the camp programme and is the framework for much teamwork, skill development and fun!

Feedback (continued)

WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

We are also very excited to announce that the Bridges Retreat website has been updated to include a tab about our Educational Programme and we have officially launched our Education Programme Facebook page and Instagram account which you can like/follow and share to get regular updates!



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

Facebook: www.facebook.com/BridgesEduCamp/

Instagram: www.instagram.com/bridgesoutdoorcamp/



Feedback from Educators

We have received so much positive feedback from participating Educators who have been impacted by the Bridges Camp experience. Below is some feedback from Ms Frederiks, Educator at Wes Eind Primary, Franschhoek, on the impact of the camp;

“The camp was beneficial for both learners and teachers. Learners now have the ability to work in a team, I have seen this firsthand because previously group work was a headache but now they are more respectful of each other’s opinions and work well together. I have noticed that some of the learners have more confidence, and they have the courage to do things. There was a mindset change with our learners which I am unable to explain, their way of thinking is now different. This experience will be cemented in our learners’ minds because they have never had this experience before, and Bridges made this possible.”

And her reflections on the impact on Educators; ***“This added value to my growth as a teacher, I have realised there is still a lot to learn. The expertise of the coaches was remarkable, and their energy was off the charts. I have realised the power and importance of encouraging my learners to preform and do better. This camp had a holistic approach, physical, mental and emotional development was noticed.”***

Feedback from Educators (continued)

Brent received this very encouraging message from a grateful teacher after one of the camps, which we wanted to share;

“Good evening, Brent. I have been emotional since we dropped the kids off at school.

When I spoke to a bunch of children before they left school this afternoon, I asked them what their favourite part of the retreat was, and so many of them spoke about the amount of food they received, sleeping in their own bed, being away from gangsters / gunshots, having a shower, being able to play outside (safety), etc. It broke my heart that some of them were exposed to “normality” for the first time, and then had to return to sleeping outside somewhere without any of the basics that they had at the retreat.

I expected the kids to mention specific activities that they found most enjoyable, because I know that they had the time of their lives. Instead, they were most grateful to have their basic needs met.

This camp was life-changing for them in so many ways. I know that this experience was deeply inspiring for them, which I am so grateful for. I always try to convey to my learners that the community they live in isn't normal when compared to the rest of the world, and they should work hard to eventually get out of it. This camp was the best way to demonstrate what normality is, and what life they could have.

Mrs V asked me to do the thank you at the camp, but I knew I wouldn't be able to get a word out, because it means more to me than you'll ever know.

Thank you so so much for this spectacular opportunity. I appreciate the work you guys do immensely and am so thankful that you invited our learners to experience this.”

Educator, Elnor Primary.

You can also read through the beautiful thank you letter we received from the Principal at Elnor Primary School, at the end of this Newsletter.



Total Impact So Far

5 Camps (Term 1)
5 Camps (Term 2)
Total: 10 Camps

350 Learners (Term 1)
466 Learners (Term 2)
Total: 816 Learners

20 Educators (Term 1)
31 Educators (Term 2)
Total: 51 Educators

Plans for Term 3, 2022

We have had requests from schools to run camps over the Winter holiday, so this is in the pipeline. The team will also have a team Indaba over June/July to revise the Programme and plan for the rest of the year and 2023. We have a full Term 3 planned, with many more school camps scheduled!

We also have a generous donor who is going to be sponsoring toiletry bags for learners attending camp.

In Term 3's Newsletter we will be sharing more detailed feedback from our Learners and hearing what they have to say about the impact of camp on their lives. Watch this space.



Financial Overview

We have a few promising fundraising proposals in the pipeline and are waiting to hear back about these which will help us reach our outstanding fundraising target for 2022. As always, we are full of hope and confident that the Bridges story will continue to unfold.



Thank you

Thank you again to all our generous donors for partnering with us in this startup phase. You believed in our vision before there was anything concrete to show. It is so wonderful to be able to look back at this point already, the first 6 months of the Camp Programme being operational, and to have impacted so many young lives already. Just imagine what the future holds. Thank you for pioneering this vision with us. The impact on each of the 816 lives already ripples out into their classrooms, schools and communities. Let's keep going!



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20 April 2022

Camp Director
Bridges Retreat Centre
Franschhoek

Dear **Mr Brent du Toit**

NOTE OF APPRECIATION

We hereby wish to express our sincerest appreciation to the owners, camp directors, coaches and support staff at Bridges Retreat Centre for affording our Grade 7 learners a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity when they visited your organisation this month. Your acts of generosity are beyond measure, and have impacted the lives of our learners in more ways than one.

Our learners benefitted remarkably from the camp, and we wish to highlight some of the pinnacles of their experience.

- Most of our learners have never gone beyond the confines of Elsies River and the surrounding Cape Flats region.
- Many of them have never experienced outdoor exploration and recreation, other than walking aimlessly in the streets, and have never been on a camp.
- Many have never been exposed to positive group interaction and fun-filled team-building initiatives outside of school.
- Many learners have spoken excitedly about having had their basic needs met for the duration of the camp, specifically mentioning being able to sleep in their own beds, being able to shower, and eating multiple times per day.
- Few of our learners have had the opportunity to participate in such a plethora of life-changing activities. They are different since the camp. Some of them have never experienced the love and care which they received from the camp facilitators and staff.
- Most of them are not accustomed to being treated in a dignified manner other than in school.
- Most of the learners have never been in a gang-free, drug-free environment where their immediate safety is not at risk.

At our recent Parent Meeting, parents of our Grade 7 learners could not stop celebrating the impact that the camp had on their children. We are deeply appreciative to you and your organisation for awarding our learners this spectacular opportunity, and for making their experience one that they will never forget.

Kind regards

MM Agulhas
Headmaster