

Message from Rigby

Warm greetings once again and thank you for reading this brief message. I love that I get to simply intro this report and let the stories of hope and transformation speak for themselves. So here goes...

Our amazing team of highly competent staff continue to surprise with their dedication and creativity. Seriously, these guys are incredible. The growing number of beneficiaries (both students and educators) are regularly verbalizing their personal and collective 'WOWs' to their experience at Bridges! These WOWs are captured in the feedback you are about to read about.

Before, we get there, here are some powerful reminders from Madiba that feed the 'why' behind the 'what' of what we do here at Bridges through our Educational Programme:

“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children” Nelson Mandela

“Our children are the rock on which our future will be built, our greatest asset as a nation. They will be the leaders of our country, the creators of our national wealth who care for and protect our people.” Nelson Mandela

There is no better way to prepare for tomorrow, than by investing in learners and educators today!

Many people define legacy as that positive influence that lives on in the institutions we have built. This may not be wrong, but here at Bridges we see legacy as way more than that. We see it as that powerful experience of transformation that lives on in the lives of the next generation.

We are passionately committed to this vision. Your partnership with us helps keep this dream alive. For this we are deeply grateful.

Together in pushing back despair... one life, one school and one educator at a time,

Rigby

Chairman of the Board



Team News

Each term we spotlight two Bridges team members, this term we get to know Claudine and Siya;



CLAUDINE COOPER
*Camp Facilitator and
Content Writer*

Claudine is a freelance learning facilitator and has extensive experience as a corporate trainer and learning coordinator. Claudine, who facilitates our camps on a contractual basis, has invested above and beyond in our work with great commitment and compassion. She has been instrumental in our implementation phases and assists the team with content writing too.

Her passion for learning and a deep compassion for children and youth, also resulted in the self-publishing of her first children's book, "Crispin and the Lockdown." This book captures a story of bravery and what she believes about the future of children and youth; she inspires hope.

At camp, if Coach Cooper is not facilitating or catching a few moments on camera, she is usually seen with one of two kids underarm, and everyone knows she's bringing more than just her coaching skills... she's in full Mama Bear mode.

Siya, who matriculated in 2014 at the Bridges Academy (previously on the Bridges Retreat site), is a young man whose story has come full circle. Whilst growing up as part of the Orphanage and Vulnerable Children Support Group (OVC), he realised that he had a part to play in the community. With the same support he received, he felt that he wanted to give back and make a difference in the lives of other children.

Coach Siya, as he is known on camp, has served children from Bridges of Hope (under the previous owners of Bridges Retreat) for 7 years, and the Rainbow Dream Trust for 1 year. Although he joined the Bridges Outdoor Education Team in May this past year as volunteer, Siya's passion and commitment has exceeded even his own expectations. He has become a vital part of the team through the energy and joy he brings to everyone around him.

"Putting a smile on a child's face, means a lot more to me than anything." Coach Siya.



SIYABONGA MDZANGA
*Volunteer Camp
Facilitator*



Overview of Term 3 Camps

CAMP #1 DURBANVILLE CHILDRENS HOME

No. of Learners: **46**
No. of Helpers: **9**

The Durbanville Children's Home was invited to Bridges during the July school holiday. We wanted to give children that had no place to go during the school holiday, the opportunity to experience the love of God through participating in our camp programme.

The learners had an amazing time and connected well with our coaches. For many children, the hike was the most amazing experience because they were able to experience nature, while feeling safe and connected with those in their group.

One of the learners shared that he was separated from his sibling and family as a result of his parents abuse and he never thought that he would feel safe again. In his words, "...coach, Bridges coaches are now my new family."

The supervising adults that attended the camp from the DCH, said that nothing like has ever been provided for their children at the home before. The adult helpers who joined the camp reflected that they too had learned how to better listen, understand and work with children through the Bridges camp experience.



CAMP #2 DISA PRIMARY GR 5 & 6, BONTEHEUWEL

No. of Learners: **102**
No. of Educators: **9**

The third term kicked off with Disa Primary School's combined Grade 5 & 6 camp, in July. Although the camp was combined, we separated the learners into their various grade specific groups with relevant activities for each group. The educators were inspired by the therapeutic play methodology, experienced during the life skills part of the camp programme. They reflected that curriculum takes priority in education and time for extra activities is very limited. Educators learned how to better combine learner social emotional development in the classroom context, as they saw this modeled on camp.

The learners reflected on how safe they felt at Bridges and that the open space was not riddled with 'bullets flying all over' the place. After a lengthy and intentional coaching process during the activities, the learners showed trust and began to open up through conversations with their camp coaches. It was evident that learners were happy and grateful that their basic needs were met beyond expectation. A learner reflected, "I want to say thank you for giving us a warm bed, so much food and juice, and that we could shower in hot water."

CAMP #3 ELNOR PRIMARY GR 6, ELSIES RIVER

This August camp was particularly successful in terms of programme activity outcomes being achieved. Learners were actively engaged around how they want to positively impact their school and community. After a core focus on social awareness, and coaching learners in life skills that can assist them to navigate themselves through difficult situations, the learners made a commitment to improving their behaviour toward themselves and others.

The standout for this camp was that educators saw significant changes in individual learners, while being on camp. The principal has incorporated the Bridges Outdoor Education Programme in the monthly staff development training. Educators that attended the camp are given the opportunity to relay the training that they received and observed at the camp, with the rest of the staff. This school is a beacon of hope in their community, and they awarded Bridges Retreat Centre with a plaque to acknowledge the partnership and influence the camp programme has had on their learners.

No. of Learners: **57**
No. of Educators: **5**



CAMP #4 SIMONDIUM PRIMARY GR 6, SIMONDIUM

This August camp had a significant transformational impact on the Grade 6 group. The SGB invited the Bridges Education team to several parent meetings where parents were able to engage with the team around the camp programme and also around solutions to help bring about positive change in their children's lives. The principal has been 100% behind the Bridges Ed Programme experience and in so doing, has included the support of teachers and parents too, which has resulted in greater collaboration and resulting impact of the camp programme on the wider school community.

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



One of the significant changes was the learner and educator connections. The Bridges campus provided a place where learners and educators could build together, laugh together and learn together. One of the educators suggested that we take the educators through this programme too. He shared that he has never observed such positive interaction between educators and learners, specifically amongst the Grade 6's before.

This group of learners was the best-behaved group, and the coaching team was able to develop great connections with the learners. Appreciation from the learners included feedback on the amount of food they received, the warm bed and shower, the campfire story telling; and the values of trust and respect that they learned during the camp activities.





CAMP #5 BONGA PRIMARY GR 6, GUGULETHU

No. of Learners: **63**
No. of Educators: **5**



Bonga Primary Grade 6 camp, also hosted during August, was a physically and mentally challenging camp for both the learners and the educators. The majority of the children have never been outside of their community to participate in an extra mural activity before. Initially the learners seemed withdrawn and disconnected, the coaching staff applied the life skills activities with diligence and patience. It took time for the learners to start trusting the coaching team. The learners really started to engage and connect with the camp singing and dancing and the creative art activity.

Many of these learners do not get fed adequately and so the meals on camp were a real treat. One of the children were caught saving some food to take home for her siblings. As learners realised that their basic needs were being met on camp (they didn't have to think about food and safety), they could start to better participate in the camp programme and start learning from the camp experience.

CAMP #6 BONGA PRIMARY GR 5, GUGULETHU

No. of Learners: **62**
No. of Educators: **4**

This September camp saw improved participation from the Grade 5 educators and learners. The deputy principal was in attendance, and she reflected that “this programme brings hope to the children in our communities where opportunities are scarce”. She said she was grateful to Bridges for enabling the learners and educators to learn and grow as individuals and as a school.

The learners had an incredible experience and were well behaved. They learned to better communicate with others, they learned better hand-eye coordination, they were challenged to develop improved logical thinking through the activities on camp, they learned to trust their team, while developing an awareness of themselves and identifying their personal strengths and weaknesses. The coaches are looking forward to seeing this group of learners for their Grade 6 camp in 2023!



CAMP #7 WES-EIND PRIMARY, FRANSCHHOEK

No. of Learners: **54**
No. of Educators: **4**

This mid September camp saw the pool being used again! The learners were highly motivated and participated well in all the activities. The coaches noted a great willingness from the learners to serve. They assisted the coaches in setting up activities, packed away after themselves and generally showed care toward each other. The learners expressed great creativity in their creative activities where they explored their own strengths and weaknesses and what they are dreaming of becoming one day. The educators were also involved and assisted the process, ensuring that learners could get the most out of their camp experience. Learners expressed gratitude over the meals, beautiful accommodation and being able to enjoy the safe space.

CAMP #8 & #9

We still have another 2 camps planned (at the time of writing this newsletter), for the rest of September, Grade 5 camps for Elnor and Simondium Primary Schools.



Learner Feedback

This term, we want to specifically highlight the impact of the camp experience on the learners we serve. Here are some things the children had to say about their camp experiences- captured in their Camp Journals;

- “I learned that I can depend on and trust my teammates”
- “To never give up”
- “I learn to trust my team better”
- “I learned to make new friends”
- “Communication is very important in a grade”
- “I learned that everyone has different strengths”
- “Support your teammates”
- “Work in a team, respect others”
- “The creative art activity made me think about my dream to be an artist”
- “To have respect”
- “This is the best camp I have ever been to”
- “The camp had a special meaning to me”
- “They served us great meals”
- “Thank you coaches”
- “I like all my new friends and I would always come back”
- “Thank you for everything”



Learner Feedback (continued)

Campfires are usually a highlight at each camp, as children and coaches gather to sing and roast marshmallows over an open fire, while coach Ray tells a story. During this past term, he told a story about a little frog who conquered jumping to the top of a hill, achieving a milestone that had never been done before. For generations none of his peers, regardless of size, could reach that goal. However due to his deafness, this frog was unable to hear others' dismissive and negative comments, leading to the moral that you should not pay attention to what others say when pursuing your goals.

One of the learners, reflecting in her camp journal about what message she was leaving camp with, wrote that the story of the deaf frog and not listening to negative words over her life, had impacted her most.

REFLECTIONS FROM COACH CLAUDINE:

On the second day, while I was facilitating some activities, I noticed a boy standing to one side, while everyone else in his team was completing the activity. I whispered in another facilitator's ear and asked why the boy was standing there, and I was told that he did not want to participate or be involved in any way. When I looked at him more intently, I sensed with overwhelming emotion that this boy was struggling with rejection. I then made a point of gently bringing him back into the team and the activity, making sure that I show him that I do "see" him, and value the contribution that he will be making to his team. I kept validating him as the day continued, and asked him to help me here and there, and then acknowledged his help. I could see that this meant something to him, and he started telling me snippets of his family reality, the ways he sees it anyway. By the last day, we had built up a connection, and as we parted ways I encouraged him with words of affirmation, and belief in his abilities regardless of what his circumstances may say to the contrary. I made a promise of prayer, which is the only support I could offer and promise.

Two weeks later, I checked in with a teacher at his school to see how he was doing. She then confirmed how he had been passed from one family member to another, which affirmed the rejection that I sensed at camp. However, she also told me how he made a remarkable change in behaviour and class performance. He no longer gets called to the principal's office for poor behaviour. Both the teacher and the principal confirmed this. It was at this point that I sent him one of my books, with a message reminding him that I am keeping my promise of prayer and that he can achieve anything he wants because I believe in him. We, at Bridges, believe in him. She told me that he was so surprised at receiving a gift and kept asking if it was really for him.

Something had shifted for him which is evident with the behaviour change, and with this in mind, and to really cement our belief in his ability and well-being, we invited him to come back as a volunteer on the camp we hosted for an orphanage in the July holidays. Without hesitance, he accepted.

For two and a half days, he served other children as a volunteer alongside us. It was evident that he still had a long way to go because of the trauma he had, and was still experiencing at the time. However, it was clear that he felt validated further, because of the opportunity that was given to him.



Total Impact So Far

TOTAL IMPACT: TERM 3

- CAMPS: **7**
(with another 2 still planned)
- LEARNERS: **464**
- EDUCATORS: **42**
- MEALS PROVIDED: **3 542**
(x7 per camp, excluding snacks)

TOTAL IMPACT 2022

- CAMPS: **18**
(20 by the end of Term 3)
- LEARNERS: **1 396**
- EDUCATORS: **101**
- MEALS PROVIDED: **10 479**
(x7 per camp, excluding snacks)



Thank You

A special thank you to all our generous donors who have enabled all of the above to take place this last term. Thank you for being an extended part of our team, we really appreciate you all and are grateful for your support, without which none of this impact would be possible!

We look forward to Term 4 and all that God has in store for Bridges, our team (which includes you!) and for the schools, teachers and learners that we serve.

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/