

The Outcry! May/June 2012

Alan and Sheena Gaston are working with children in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

www.zaninibantwana.wordpress.com

Going north ...

Much of our thoughts and energy has been taken up in the past months with getting the necessary documents for travelling to the UK. It has been quite a palaver.

It is not the volume of work that is the problem. Rather, it is the unpredictable and frustrating nature of the trail. We applied in January to get the permission we need to get Nzuzo out of the country. Despite many phonecalls and E-mails, by the start of May nothing had happened and we realised we needed to take action. We literally drove our social worker to the government department where they could not find the file and we had to start again from scratch. We spent about 4 and a half hours on the process that day.

Alan made several more trips to the government office and, finally, the day before our visa appointment in Durban, he went to the office and literally sat there for 3 hours. Eventually he was told to come back the following morning and collect the signed document. This happened and we *just* made the visa application interview on time. Happily, this all worked out, but it was an extremely time-consuming and emotionally draining process.

By now, both Alan and Sheena have got their South African passports, Henhry has his UK visa, Nzuzo has the letter of permission to leave the country and his UK visa. We are now just waiting for Sihle's Irish passport to be renewed ... and retirement.

Zanini Bantwana

We have really enjoyed our visitors this year and the latest, Janet and Muriel, were great hits - not only with our family, but also in the hospitals. Muriel was here for 10 weeks and was part of the family. "Moo-ree-al", as she was called by Nzuzo, was a firm favourite as a knee to sit on, a person to read books, play games, give hugs, etc. We loved having her around.

Muriel worked with our team to develop their skills and the range of activities they offer the children. She was brilliant in the hospitals. She loved the children and with her background of special needs was able to teach and engage at their different levels. Janet, too, gave of her time generously and although on holiday, spent a lot of time in the hospitals. Each visit, we feel, brings something different to the team and to our family. We are very thankful for this input into our lives and work.

With donations Sheena was able to buy some lovely colourful children's book and bring them onto the wards in time to celebrate World Book Day in April. The children in the wards and, indeed, our team come from homes where there are no books so they were all very excited.

This week our team has been asked to present the theme of Child Protection in the hospitals. We have the freedom to present this in a Christian context so Sheena was able to write the programme incorporating Bible stories. We are thankful to have these opportunities and to be salt and light in the wards.

Please pray for the mother of the girl of 5 who has just found out that her daughter is HIV positive. Pray for an orphaned girl of 8. She was removed from her abusive foster family by a social worker who was then killed in a RTA as she drove the girl away. She now has no-one.

Our backing group ...

We are very encouraged by support we get which comes in different ways. Recently our 2 eldest boys ran the Belfast Marathon to raise money for Zanini Bantwana. Thank you, Matthew and Peter! We hope you have recovered - we are very proud of you!

Every Monday morning in our team meeting in Edendale hospital we thank God for those who are interested in the ministry, for those who pray and support us. We hope to have the opportunity to meet up with many of you during our time back in Northern Ireland. We are trying to get organised so that we can make effective use of our time in NI, yet not go back to South Africa absolutely exhausted. So far our plans for our trip to NI look like this:

Dates and details

Sheena and Nzuzo arrive on June 12 from South Africa. They will stay with Sheena's parents in Coleraine while Sipho, Sihle and Henhry finish SA school term and come with Alan on 28 June. We all fly back to SA on 28th July.

Week 1: 28 June - 7 July in Belfast seeing friends and getting ready for Peter and Katy's wedding. Do drop in and see us!

- **Saturday 30 June @ 2-6 p.m: Open House** at Muriel's, 75 Greer Park Avenue, Belfast 8. Come and chat!
- **Sunday 1 July** speaking in **Fitzroy Presbyterian Church @11a.m.**
- **Friday 6 July** speaking at **Janet and Chris Morris' Prayer Group;**
- **Saturday 7 July** celebrating Peter and Katy's wedding.

Week 2: 7 July - 14 July: family time in Belfast.

Week 3: 14 July-21 July: family time in Castlerock. (Many thanks, Autersons.)

Week 4: 21 -28 July in Castlerock. Do drop in!

- **Sunday 22 July** speaking in **Macosquin Presbyterian Church @ 11a.m.**

Saturday 28 July leave for South Africa.

Contact details: We won't be using E-mail, but you can get us on: 07896620865. Or you can get Sheena in Coleraine on 028 70320817; us in Belfast at 1A Old Coach Road, Belfast 9, Tel: 028 90627428; Open House - 75 Greer Park Avenue, Belfast 8, Tel: 028 90642218. Our Castlerock address is 12 Castlewalk Mews, Castlerock BT51 4GD. Looking forward to hearing from you!

Re-entry ...

June/July includes our winter holiday, not our long summer one, so the children's terms will have already started when we return to SA. Sihle and Sipho will miss nearly 2 weeks of school and Henhry will miss one. Pray that they can settle back and catch up quickly.

We look forward to the trip very much. At this stage we really feel ready for a break! Please remember us as we take off in one culture and land in a completely different context. Sheena and the children have not been in NI for 2 years, so it may be a shock to the system.

Pray for protection for our emotions. The hellos and the times spent with family and friends are super. The goodbyes, however, are tough. So a whole mixture of emotions lies ahead of us and our families. Please pray for us as we get ready to come and go.

Much love,

Alan and Sheena, Henhry, Sipho, Sihle and Nzuzo xxooxx