

SOAP – Supporting Old Age Pensioners – Harare

MARCH 2012

S.O.A.P was started more than eight years ago; many of you will recall the details and that we are a private charity who provide food parcels for pensioners living in their own homes.

Pensioners then were finding it more and more difficult to survive on the small pensions they were receiving, and some of them had no pensions at all. Having begun by providing a modest parcel of fresh vegetables and taking the time to visit each person individually we have experienced so much – including the incomprehensible and almost unbelievable - in the last few years; inflation ran rampant; the Zimbabwe dollar became worthless, basic commodities were either not available or too expensive for them to purchase, fuel was unavailable, the cost of medical insurance, medication and medical services became prohibitive, electricity and water delivery systems are broken down and supply more than erratic, rentals and any costs related to repairs and maintenance on homes well beyond reach. Zimbabwe has 'dollarized' and whilst this has halted the rampant inflation of a couple years ago and commodities are readily available it has brought with it its own difficulties for the elderly (and many others) – unless a pensioner has independent means or family support – they really have nothing.

Throughout all this, we have been able to maintain our assistance to the elderly in Zimbabwe only because of the generosity of donors both at home and overseas. As time went by, the parcels distributed became not just a life line, but a very essential means of survival. In addition, the visits made to each person has become a highlight for many of them, some of whom don't leave their homes regularly, see no one and have no family or family that have left the country and are finding their own circumstances difficult. The circumstances and situations that we see are terribly, terribly sad. We are only able to make a difference because of your generosity.

SOAP is a completely voluntary organisation; we incur no costs for administration or distribution. Volunteers personally deliver parcels every month to over 450 pensioners all over Harare as well as Nyanga, Chegutu, Ruwa, Rusape and Shurugwe. All the money we receive in donations is spent on purchasing food. We have recently moved our packing venue to a new warehouse facility in Graniteside which is provided to us free of charge. SOAP Bulawayo, operates independently from us and supports pensioners in Matabeleland.

The goods for the parcels are currently all purchased locally (how quickly things can change and how quickly we have learnt to adapt to changes!) and the cost each month amounts to approximately USD13 000.00 – each parcel contains the following: 1kg Chicken, 30 eggs, fresh vegetables & fruit, oats, rice, pasta, soup, baked beans, instant noodles, tinned fish, tinned meat, jam, peanut butter, tea, milk powder, toothpaste, bath soap, aqueous cream, and pandado. These items may vary slightly on what's available. At Christmas and Easter we try to add other items of a more 'special' nature, dried fruit, Bovril, custard, deodorant, chocolates, and biscuits.

My own delivery run last month took me from Borrowdale to Graniteside – Hatfield, Belvedere, Mount Pleasant, Avondale, Greystone Park and the Avenues. I personally try to make deliveries to different areas and different people each month so that we can gauge their needs and check up on them regularly. It struck me at the time that even though there may be some time between visits

to the same people every month – not much changes; if anything there is a general deterioration in quality of lives, particularly physically – I guess this is to be expected as time moves on and people age; sadly though their ability to now ‘make a plan’ seems to be less and there is a definite tendency towards an air of resignation. This really should not have to be the case; I am grateful that we can in some way help, both with the parcels provided (some folk can’t get out anymore to shop) and time for a visit. Their pleasure in receiving their monthly goods regularly, which they wait for and depend upon, and their cheerfulness in spite of the difficulties being faced is one of the most uplifting and humbling experiences of my month.

Thank you for continuing to make this possible; it is our privilege to be entrusted with your donations so that we can make a difference.

COLLEEN DE JONG – DIRECTOR

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Below are excerpts from letters and notes received from very, very grateful recipients:

“Thank you all once again for your dedication to all us “Oldies” – God Bless from The Flame Lilies”

“Thank you for your kind donations. We do appreciate all you lovely people who are so good to us”

“One bit ‘thank you’ to you all for your continuous support of us all. We only wish that we could do something in return. We are truly thankful.”

“To all the wonderful people at SOAP – Thank you for the help over the past years. God Bless”

“Once again we thank you for your continuous support and kindness shown to us with every delivery you make.”

“Many thanks for y our fabulous parcels – very much appreciated”

“Thank you for all the wonderful contributions throughout 2011”

“What you do for all of us at the Flame Lily is very much appreciated. The Cottage Dwellers cannot wait for the last Thursday of each month to see what they are going to get. Thank you for all your hard work.”

“For all the SOAP parcels each month. I do so appreciate all you do and honestly don’t know what I would do without this help.”

