

Rehoboth – Children’s Village

2006 Update on children’s village houses in memory of Sam and David

On New Year’s Day 2006 I, together with my daughter Alex and son Michael, visited Rehoboth.

Following our visit, I set out below my personal observations and thoughts. It is not intended as a comprehensive overview of all aspects - general news and updates can easily be obtained by visiting Rehoboth’s website at www.rehoboth.org.za. The website is excellent and it is very easy to subscribe to their regular newsletter.

The beautiful physical location

I was struck by the beauty and serenity of Rehoboth and its physical surroundings.

Rehoboth is located on the side of a low gentle valley with a river and small dam at the bottom of the property. In the distance, over the other side of the valley, is the Oribi Gorge. They had obviously had very good summer rains and Rehoboth and the surrounding areas were verdant and lush.

Prior to the establishment of Rehoboth, the land had been used as a farm. The main house, where the managing couple Alfons and Yvonne live, is the former farm house. It is a spacious and airy and surrounded by a lovely garden with numerous well established and impressive trees, which attract a wide range of colorful and tuneful birds, and carefully attended flowerbeds .



Rehoboth now has a well established physical infrastructure. In addition to the main farm house, there is a separate office building with flats for visiting volunteer helpers, the ones when we visited being Tamara from Holland and Zoe from Australia. There is another residence for the farm managers, Ryan and Reece Sullivan, who were celebrating the birth of their child only a few days before we were there. Then of course there are all the foster homes described below.

Rehoboth houses

There are now a total of six (6) houses completed, currently housing 19 children. A few points that struck me about the houses:

- Each house has been designed with significant input from Alfons and Yvonne. They are sunny, compact and light and have a warm and welcoming feeling. The designs continue to evolve particularly in consultation with the housemothers whose ideas and inputs are used to make improvements.



- The houses are very comfortable and well furnished. Each house has a television and video and a modern kitchen and bathroom. There is electricity provided by the national grid and running water.



- Apart from one house, which has been partly donated by Coca Cola, the other houses have been funded primarily from either Boomerang donations or direct contributions or the houses in memory of Sam and David.

The children

Meeting the Rehoboth children was, together with meeting Alfons and Yvonne, the most uplifting and inspiring part of our visit.

I had been prepared to find the children subdued and restrained, given all they have been through and the sickness they currently have. To my amazement and joy, they were in general energetic, entertaining, curious, inquisitive, cheeky and warm and welcoming.



As we went around I asked Yvonne the history of the various children we had met. To see them in such a happy and loving environment was not much short of a miracle when you heard their stories; one had been found abandoned down a long drop toilet, another had been brought by her mother before her mother died as her mother wanted to know that her daughter would be safe and loved and not open to sexual abuse which is all too widespread, yet another had suffered terrible burns (accidental) and was only now beginning to walk.

Alfons and Yvonne

Another highlight of the visit was meeting Yvonne and Alfons. They are a truly remarkable couple, and it is indeed humbling to meet such dedicated people who have achieved so much.



As they explained, it seems as if their careers before Rehoboth had been designed, unknowingly to them, to prepare them for Rehoboth. Yvonne is a qualified veterinarian and in a former life spent 6 months at Dubbo Zoo in Australia researching artificial insemination for red kangaroos (!) as well as spending 3 months in Kenya doing post graduate research on a particular aspect of the warthog.

Her medical knowledge is invaluable in terms of monitoring the children on a regular ongoing basis, supervising the dispensing on medicines, particularly the anti retroviral drugs, and facilitating the general medical care.

Alfons has a background in commerce. After graduating with a commercial degree, he worked in finance and then in for several years in the information technology business, which he puts to very good use at Rehoboth including computerized systems throughout, production of promotional videos and DVDs. But his real interest and training was project management. When you see what he has been largely instrumental in achieving at Rehoboth one realises that this is his real forte.

Future Developments

One of the exciting aspects of the visit was finding out first hand the current and future plans.. These include:

- Planting macadamia trees. The land has been terraced and the soil prepared for a 250 macadamia tree plantation which is to be planted in the very near term. The trees take about seven (7) years to achieve full not production and will provide long term a good source of renewable income for Rehoboth;
- Construction of the remaining five (5) houses. The land has already been cleared for this and a significant portion of the funding available.

- Construction of a medical clinic room and related facilities. The concrete slab has already been poured and further work was about to commence. . This will enable the children to be treated on site rather than having to be taken to the nearby Murchison hospital.
- In the medium term, converting the first house (which is significantly larger than the others) into a hospice. This will enable those children who become terminally ill to receive palliative care in the loving and supportive environment of Rehoboth rather than be moved elsewhere where there is not the support and companionship.
- A new swimming pool was to be installed within the next few days. An outside swimming teacher visits Rehoboth on a weekly basis and gives the children swimming lessons.
- Putting in a soccer field. Typical of Alfons, he is already thinking ahead that as the children get older their play needs will change. So he has identified an area to level and create a soccer field.
- The “uncle/aunty” scheme Yvonne is implementing. She has encouraged local people to adopt a Rehoboth child by becoming a surrogate aunt /uncle. This will involve them taking the child on outings on a one on one basis, eg to the shops or a movie or for a meal, which is special for them to be treated as an individual.
- More community integration. Already local children attended the crèche and a few of the older

children are attending school in the nearby village.

- The most exciting and ambitious long term plan is to acquire the adjoining land. If this came about, it would double or treble the land Rehoboth has and provide an opportunity to create a long term economically independent and sustainable agricultural community. It would have a combination of livestock and crops, plus possibility of low scale economic tourism on the land overlooking the Oribi Gorge. An additional benefit is that it would also offer long term employment opportunities to the Rehoboth children – one of the current issues is what the future holds for Rehoboth children who become healthy and are able to lead full and active lives, given that many of them no longer have any close links with their original community. We look forward to participating in their fund raising efforts for this once a basic agreement with the land owner has been reached.



Alex and Michael's impressions

I asked Alex and Michael for their impressions:

“When we (Mikey & Alex) went to Rehoboth we got to see the luxuries which these kids live in. While passing other houses in Durban and seeing the state in which a lot of these houses looked like, than going into Rehoboth and seeing what a great lifestyle these kids have was a great experience. The orphans in Rehoboth are very lucky; they are given such love and care.

We didn't expect Rehoboth to be so great. All the kids are happy, cheerful and playful. You can tell they have a really lovely time there. There are farm animals which the kids visit and play with, TV's for movie watching, classrooms for learning (which are complete with a computer). The orphans really seem to enjoy it there.”



Concluding thoughts

I have focused above on the positives. There are many hurdles and obstacles facing Rehoboth and it would be misleading to give a false impression that it is all plain sailing. On the contrary, there is the ever present need for funding and issues with stifling bureaucratic red tape. This means that there are spaces available now for more children, and thousands who would love to be there, but an inability for them to be processed expeditiously so they are left languishing. Allied to that is the wider society in which Rehoboth operates which faces an Aids epidemic of unimaginable proportions plus very high unemployment and attendant crime and breakdown in family structures.

In spite of all of this, or maybe because of it, what Rehoboth has achieved in overall terms is truly remarkable. It is a thriving and dynamic community providing love and support and the possibility of long term opportunity to children whose lives would otherwise be very short and totally desperate. Its success is an inspiration to many and shows what can be done in spite of seemingly insurmountable problems. I feel humbled and privileged that our family and friends have a continuing involvement with it. We very much look forward to staying involved in it as it develops and flourishes.

Jonathan Trollip
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