



## Home from Home End of Year Report: December 2020

This time last year, none of us could've predicted what this year was going to bring. As I reflect on the year and begin this report, I am filled with awe and pride that we at Home from Home have come through to this point with all our 36 families intact. The children, foster mums and support staff team, have worked bravely and tirelessly, under extreme conditions, to ensure that our loving families remain so. At the start of lockdown our foster mums decided to stick it out for the six to eight weeks expected, without assistant help and so ensuring social distancing is maintained for their families. When this turned into six months we were definitely seeing the results of this extreme commitment and our support staff team were also 'burning the candle at both ends' in their efforts. Now as we face the second wave of Covid-19 in South Africa, we can't be tempted by the usual frivolity of this time of the year and drop our guard. We need to dig deep for that extra resilience that we know is there to see this through but also, to be sure to notice the many moments of beauty and miracle that erupt each day in our work. The announcement of a young man in our Transition home that he was permanently employed; one of our young upcoming artists selling all his pieces at a local art exhibition; 2000 hand stitched masks that were made for each of our children and staff and sent all the way from the USA using at least six different courier plans; the thank you card sent to HfH office staff by one of our 16 year olds who received her first cell phone; the group of teenagers getting their first part time jobs and contributing to their first savings; the admission of our youngest child at two years old and the happiness expressed by her with her experience and acceptance into real family. These are the miraculous things happening daily that need to be noticed and celebrated in order to develop the resilience and resolve to face the next phase.

### Organisational update

- **Staffing:**

Our relatively new Financial Manager, Londo Masiagwala, who began in January 2020 has adapted brilliantly to learning the ropes of Home from Home, but also navigating the development of a budget before Covid, and then needing to re-work a new budget for differing demands that were brought by this pandemic. His calm and thorough approach has been a great influence to have amongst our staff and within management.

Although the staff team has been quite stable with little movement in the year, we will very much miss Margaret Scharein, our Winelands Metro Social Worker, who has been a tower of strength in that region for our homes. She leaves in December to embark on completing her Masters and we wish her well in this research which will include our work at HfH.

- **Leadership transition:**

It will be two years in February 2021 since Pippa and Jane stepped back from leading HfH and Vicky Smith (Programme Manager) and I took the reins. I believe this transition has been most successful because of a few key aspects. Firstly, has been the involvement and wisdom of the Board of Trustees. They have been extremely committed in offering their time when needed to give support, but also, their wisdom in allowing the active involvement of the Founders for a time after new management took over. Secondly, has been the support of our Founders who

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have been willing to be involved at every opportunity but also been so gracious in standing back and allowing the new leadership to make our own path. Initially this assistance was formally going to be for one year, but with the unique circumstances developing for HfH and the world, the Board adjusted this to a further graduated involvement for a second year. With this second year coming to an end we believe that it is important for Pippa and Jane to always be involved with HfH, even if it is in a less formal capacity. We are therefore, very pleased that they have both accepted our invitation to become the first Patrons of HfH. A third key aspect of this effective transition of leadership has been the strength of managers that we have been fortunate to appoint at HfH. Vicky, our Programme Manager, in overseeing all our direct services, or core work to our children and families, has needed to show immense levels of creativity, resilience and people skills in navigating this period successfully. Londo, our Financial Manager, as indicated above, is also proving to be a very valuable find for our organisation. With the three of us forming the management of HfH and having worked together for one year now, we are strengthening as a team and our leadership is improving with it.

#### **Strategic Planning:**

With the transition of HfH's leadership at the beginning of 2019 and that being the last year of the previous 5-year strategic plan, it felt most appropriate to have our strategic motto for 2019 being, *"Dreaming to grow by cementing the basics"*. 2019 was seen as a period of establishing the new leadership and core aspects of the work in setting a good foundation for longer strategic plans to be built in 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic at the start of 2020, clearly scuppered any of the fledging plans we were starting to build, and our strategic focus became necessarily short term and very flexible. The team responded very well under these conditions as our Covid-19 updates during the year would have reflected. Training staff and homes for Covid regulations, adapting our work to make our 'essential services' possible and accessing the additional resources necessary to protect and enable our families to function in these strange conditions, were the key areas of our response.

With the lifting of restrictions and some normality coming back to our work, we have started to put longer term strategic planning in place again. We began with some team building days and then incorporated some strategic planning in the latter part of this year. This has mostly been focussed on specific plans for 2021 and some broader ideas for the future. After our financial year end on 28 February 2021 we plan to set up a formal process of establishing a three-year plan going forward. This will begin with a project together with the Henley School of Business from Reading University (UK) in March 2021. Their MBA students will be working with a few selected NGOs in the Western Cape, to assist in developing organisational strategy. We are excited about engaging in establishing some longer term strategic plans but, are well aware that with the second wave of the pandemic developing, we cannot cement any plans yet.

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## Highlights of the Year

- **Establishment of a Transitional Home:**

With the seed funding from a generous donor, we were able to start our 'Evelyn Connolly Transitional Support Programme' at the end of 2019. This has been and is, a critical development for us where the population of children is increasing and we will have over 50 children in our care over the age of 16 years in 2021. The overall programme currently involves three aspects; 1) Active preparation of the 16+ age group for the transition out of care; 2) The training of foster mums and staff in the best practices for preparing this age group and; 3) The establishment of a home to support those of our young people who need to move out of their foster care homes and require accommodation support.

Although Covid made the roll out of the whole programme impossible, the establishment of the transitional home went ahead and we had four young people starting out in the home from the beginning of 2020. We believe this to have been a resounding success with three of the four starting without jobs, but all having jobs by the end of the year. Three have moved out already and one will be staying on next year. We have a number of candidates for next year and believe the house will be full. Our hope is to get the funding to open another transition home in one of our neediest areas, Khayelitsha, and to continue growing our Transitional Support Programme.

- **IT connectivity for our Homes:**

We received a wonderful response to an appeal during the lockdown time for all our homes to have computers and be connected to the internet. With a number of donors responding positively and thus securing the funding for this project, we began phase one in the Khayelitsha area, with seven homes and the ECD centre fully connected. There were some teething problems and Covid limited our implementation for a while, but we have just completed phase two, where we have over half our homes (20) now connected. We should be completed with the rest of the houses in the first part of next year. With or without Covid, this has been a very necessary development for our homes firstly, for the educational support it brings, but also, for the added support that is possible to provide for the children and foster mums through virtual platforms of Zoom/Teams.

- **Fundraising developments:**

At the end of 2019 one of our trustees who is a fundraising expert, helped in developing some very specific fundraising strategies and some of these were;

- With Pippa's involvement becoming less, it was crucial to increase our fundraising capacity. This was achieved this year with the initial part time employment of Tanya Townshend and her successful role in our division has resulted in an increased role being approved until end of 2021.
- An overhaul of our website was completed in November and is now up to date and offers a whole lot more like, latest stories of our children and families, as well as reports. Please go and have a look if you have not already at <https://homefromhome.org.za/>.

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- Updating our CI (Corporate Identity) which also happened in the second part of this year. Where there have not been many changes to this, a significant change is our by-line to "HfH, Providing a second chance at family".
  - Increasing our activity on social media. Our increased capacity in the team enabled greater activity on social media platforms which we also invite you to visit, i.e. Facebook; <https://www.facebook.com/HomefromHomeSA/> Instagram; [https://www.instagram.com/home\\_from\\_home\\_sa/](https://www.instagram.com/home_from_home_sa/)
  - The fundraising efforts and loyal and added support from funders from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic have been amazing and critical to us managing this time. The additional costs needed to provide for our families has been significant, but we have been well supported and so were able to provide most of the added support our families needed.
- **Art project initiative:** An organisation called The Orange Art Project has begun an art initiative with fifty-five of our children from eleven of our foster homes. Here qualified artists and art students give of their time to teach and encourage our children to engage in art. This started in June of this year and mostly involved painting and drawing thus far, but has been a great success with our children loving this form of expression and producing wonderful pieces. A highlight to come in early February 2021 will be an art exhibition of all the pieces produced. We look forward to more funding support for this project so more of our children can be exposed to expressing themselves in this medium.

#### Priorities of focus going forward

- **Development of the Transitional Support Programme:**

As mentioned above, regarding the aging population of our children at Home from Home with many approaching the time of 'aging out' of our care, it is critical that we develop our programme for preparing them for this difficult transition. The good development of a Transitional Home and training for staff and this aging out group this year, requires further development with a focus on work readiness. Unemployment levels in this country have been climbing and stats SA indicates that amongst the youth (age 15 to 24 years) there is a staggering unemployment rate of 57,4%. We will need to be doing a lot more to ensure that those of our young adults leaving us are better prepared to be positively contributing adults in our society. In this regard we have sent out numerous proposals to support a Work Readiness Programme for all 16 year+ age group in 2021.
- **Increasing the capacity of the staff team:**

Since the start of the new leadership tenure at Home from Home it was abundantly clear that the staff team believed that the levels of work required to achieve the quality we wished for, outweighed the capacity that the team had. In response, management has focussed on 'working smarter', i.e. clarifying roles and establishing new job descriptions; developing more standard operating procedures; lowering tolerances for indifferent performance and streamlining management. These have made a difference and increased the capacity of the team, but in growing our programme of transitional care and wanting to reach another level in the quality of our general model implementation, we will require additional support. The obvious, but more costly, options for this support are to create new positions, but we have

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begun with a Volunteer/Buddy system that we hope to develop further in the new year. In this regard we have two volunteer/buddies, Nasiphi (Social Worker) and Albertina (Social Auxiliary Worker), who have been doing a fantastic job at supporting our programme team since September.

- **The economic crunch reducing funding support:**

Home from Home has had the most wonderful response to the pandemic from our supporters. Not only were additional funds received to support us, but material donations increased dramatically and many donors allowed us to relax the restrictions on their funding in order to use these where there was greater priority at this time. We also continue to receive many messages of support and commitment to pray for our organisation. This has ensured that we were able to continue adequately supporting all 36 families and maintain the necessary support staff team on full salaries throughout this period. We are so grateful to all of you for this critical support.

Going forward however, we do have some concern in seeing the effects of the economic crunch on our loyal donors. Already there has been some significant support to the running of at least five of our houses, that has been reduced and in certain cases, withdrawn completely. Each of these loyal donors has met with economic difficulties which has made it impossible to continue their support. We can absolutely not imagine the situation of having to close a foster home, but we will need to ramp up our fundraising efforts significantly to prevent this. With the probability that other funders will also be under economic pressure in the year to come, we will need to find additional support.

### Thank You

As we approach 2021 we are definitely less sure about what the future may bring than we were this time last year. But last year we were naively planning for 'things as usual' and through the shock of needing to navigate Covid-19, we are now more flexible and able to respond to changes. We are now more ready and expectant of surprise and see how assumptions of the future can be dangerous.

It has been so hopeful to see how, when the 'chips are down', people have come together in greater acts of support and kindness. From many corners of society, it has felt like this pandemic has re-awakened our humanity where we are reaching out of our insular lives to participate more in community. As the now famous principle of Ubuntu so clearly reflects in the definition; *Umuntu, ngumuntu ngabantu. A person is a person through other people.*

We at Home from Home have felt so part of a caring community/family of people who support us. We would like to thank you all for the Home from Home community we have created together and that by God's grace, this work will continue and flourish in the growth of our children.

With gratitude

Peter Marx, Executive Director

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