

## **Thussanang stirs the emotions and focuses the mind**

For some time our Foundation has wanted to explore how we could help the Thussanang Centre for Disabled Children in the small community of Huhudi near Vryburg South Africa. Our close relationship with Windermere School in Cumbria gives us a great opportunity to work in partnership with them to put a grant project together. A team of students and staff from the school led by our chairman, Jo, went out to Thussanang in August to work with the Centre staff and students in a hands-on project and at the same time to assess grant opportunities. A key member of the team is Andy Bond, the Reception and Pre-School Teacher at Windermere School, and we asked him to tell us about his and the team's experiences at Thussanang. This is what he had to say.



*"It has now been a few weeks since I landed back from my first trip to South Africa and more importantly my first visit to Tiger Kloof. I have had some time to reflect on my time there and think about how to put my experience in to words (something I thought I would find easy).*

*On the 3 August, Jo, a group of sixth form students from Windermere School and I travelled out to Vryburg to begin a very exciting project which I am immensely proud to have been a part of. As mentioned in previous blogs, the Thussanang Centre for Disabled Children is a marvelous and inspiring place in the small community of Huhudi. I quickly realised how much this place meant to the charity and to all who had visited previously.*

*From the moment I arrived and stepped out of the minibus to a sea of smiles, hugs and friendly handshakes an overwhelming sense of pride and happiness came over me and I wanted to get cracking with our plans.*

*For the past 8 months, as a team, we have used our knowledge and skills to look at how we could make a difference to these fantastic children and the dedicated team of volunteers who work at the centre. We took on the huge task of planning, preparing, resourcing, delivering and evaluating a small scheme of work with activities and tasks which would allow the children to*

*develop their own knowledge and skill-set at a level that suits their current needs.*

*The team decided that the first day should take the form of a Sports Day. In preparation for this the previous day had been spent planning, testing out resources, adapting them to suit particular children and making a final check to make sure we had everything we needed (this very quickly became a daily routine for the rest of our stay). Well... I have never in my years teaching seen a sports day quite like this! The children were amazing! There was tons of enthusiasm and joy in equal measures. This was rounded off by a presentation of medals and plenty of high-fives.*



*As a group, we were buzzing from the enjoyment all of the children got from our first day of games and activities and I am proud to say this continued for the duration of our visit. As the days passed, the children had the chance to really show us what they could do and how well they could do it.*



*The biggest challenge a child with any form of disability has to face is the people around them who talk about what they can't do and not focus on the importance of what they can do. The children thrived in the opportunity to show us their talents, whether that be drawing and colouring, their skills with a basketball, the speed at which they can run or their love of sharing and listening to stories. I watched carefully as children who had never shown any interest in sitting and listening to a story, sat calmly and quietly captivated by the puppets and props.  
... if he won't come to class then we will go to him[/caption]*

*It just goes to show that not everybody learns in the same way... My favourite moment from the trip was with a child who would not come out of his hide away hole at the top of the climbing frame. One of the students was determined to make sure he got the same chance to take part in the learning as the others and so took the activity to him and carried it out in*



*the boy's safe space. The next day the child was out of his space and joining in with his friends. All it took was one moment of careful thought to give this child a chance to be like everybody else.*

*It was a privilege to work with such a highly dedicated and enthusiastic bunch of students who gave every last thought to each activity they carried*

*out. It was a further privilege to support them and provide them with alternatives and new ideas when tasks and games needed to be changed or extended.*

*I had many emotional moments during our, what seemed to be, short stay in Vryburg. None so more than the moment when we shared with the staff and volunteers who are working at the centre our plans for the future.*

*We proudly handed over of all the resources, planning and equipment we took out there with us knowing that we had only just started to make a difference to these children.*



*We will be returning to Thussanang very soon... with big plans for a bright future ahead."*

**In February, Windermere School will be returning to Thussanang to see how the Centre has progressed and at that stage we at the Foundation can put together a grant proposal to cement the good work that is underway.**