



Community Engagement Newsletter

November 2012

Grahamstown offers pockets of education excellence. Unfortunately, educational excellence does not extend to most of the schools in our community and St Andrew's operates amidst an educational crisis in our city, province and our country.

The reality of the state of primary school education in poor schools in Grahamstown became apparent when we were not able to identify a single boy who met the standards of one of our corporate scholarship donors for entrance into College in 2013. The challenge is massive and the action we take as a school and as a community is vital to the success of the children with whom we work.

'Nec Aspera Terrent' is lived out on Crawhall when batting out for an unglamorous draw, and in the Maths Centre when linear programming just looks like a bunch of lines.

We are not short of difficulties.

It is vital that we see the size and scale of difficulties that others face. We must not retreat too quickly into our comfortable existence after engaging.

Good Shepherd Outdoor Education



Mnr Ferreira reported as follows:

"On the weekend of 21 and 22 September a group of 12 St Andrew's College boys took 37 Good Shepherd School Grade 7 learners on a sleep-out and a hike at Hobbiton-on-Fairewood. Thanks go to Mr Josh Paton and his friendly group of instructors for their willingness to work with us and their generosity of spirit. The weekend included hikes, games, cooking, braising, soccer, team building exercises and the use of a high rope course.

Thanks to all the Good Shepherd and St Andrew's College teachers who assisted with this adventure."

24 4 :)

The Grade 11s of the President's Award Committee soon realized that this event would be difficult to organize due to the fact that it was taking place so early in the term, on the same night as the DSG ante-matric dance and the university boat race challenge in Port Alfred. This event has grown significantly and includes supporters on five continents and the participation of so many of the broader Grahamstown community. From sales of 24 photographs exhibited by an OA, to 24 smiles from a former teacher, there has been a ground swell of activity. Who could have

thought: white-dressed girls from the dance, squired by suited partners promenading between eleven and midnight around and around Lower Field. The use of social media has meant that we have increased the reach of the 24 4 :) brand. The matrices of 2013 have promised to take us even further.

We have been amazed by some remarkable acts of generosity. We learned that a Grade 6 girl at a Johannesburg school made a donation of R400 of her "birthday money" to 24 4 :).

Child Welfare and both the national and provincial offices of the President's Award have congratulated the organizing committee.

It is difficult to highlight individuals to thank, as so many people made meaningful contributions to the success of the event. I know we could not have been as successful without the whole school's co-operation. The event would not have been possible without colleagues agreeing to help "supervise" the event, in particular, Mrs Chandler, Mr Nupen, Ms Pettingale, Mr Searle, Ms Letcher, Mnr Boshoff, Mr Wright, Ms Salzwedel and Mr Gushu.



Paul Edey together with Gillian van Oldenborgh and a friend participate in 24 4 :)

Thus far the campaign has raised in excess of R20 000 for orphans and vulnerable children. The bulk of the money will pay school fees for children from the Child Welfare Safe Houses.

It is wonderful to remember Smiley in this way. We came together as a community, we did some good and we had some fun.



From serious runners to serious strollers, 24 4 :) was a great, feel-good community event

Church Square Sleep-out

Ms Salzwedel writes:

"A Community Engagement event which took place on Saturday 29 September required some members of the school to be out in the cold and in tune with real life. With nothing but two boxes each to fend off the night's chill, a handful of Grade 10s and 11s and four staff members huddled together on the paving around the Cathedral. St Andrew's aims to equip learners with leadership skills that embody humility and a level of responsibility; this experience encouraged these young men to empathise with Grahamstown's poor in the most practical way possible. Leaving their iPods and cellphones at home and having no food for comfort gives a person room for thought. Thanks to Mr Barnard, Fr Gary Griffith-Smith, Miss Taylor, Mr Andrew, Mr Edey, Mr Marx and Miss Salzwedel who were involved in the event."

Michael Strever (Grade 10 Armstrong) provides an account of the evening:

"We arrived at the Grahamstown Church Square on High Street at about 8 o'clock to stay the night and experience what people, who are underprivileged and have no roof over their head, experience. We were given two cardboard boxes

to sleep... and the concrete floor. After walking around for a while, we settled down and stories came out - everyone seemed fine at this stage. We then attempted to doze off and everyone was confident that they would actually sleep the whole night but the worst was yet to come. The restlessness kicked in and everyone started to get agitated from the hard concrete floor that they were sleeping on. The worst was kept for last to add the cherry on top. THE COLD! At about 1 o'clock, the temperature dropped, and the bitter, icy wind came up and this was not nice! The wind together with the cold was biting your skin, making you shiver and come to realize how hard this experience really is.

At the end of the night, we all got about one hour of sleep and realized that what we had just done and experienced was a harsh reality for people who live on the streets. We did this in Spring, imagine Winter, you can't really come around to think what they go through. In the end, we all realized how privileged we are to have a bed and a roof over our head, and how we actually take these things for granted. So, we all overcame a hurdle. Yes, we struggled to get over it, but we did it in the end and reflected on who has to jump hurdles everyday of their life."

Academic extension

The Rhodes University Community Engagement students, so ably led by Sandisiwe Dial, a former participant of College's Saturday School, have continued to tutor selected Grade 10-12 pupils in Accounting, Maths, Physical Sciences and Life Sciences. The decision to move this programme onto the Rhodes campus has simplified Friday afternoons, as we no longer juggle venues, but it has meant we have, by and large, lost touch with the participants themselves.

Many of the participants at the St Mary's Development and Care Centre have found the work too challenging, and there is a real need to segregate extension from consolidation and remediation. Having forged the partnership with St Mary's and three new schools, we are reluctant to let it go, but know that we need greater time and energy in planning activities.

The stability and consistency provided by Ruth Griffin, a community volunteer, to the academic extension classes happening at the Design & Technology Centre has seen some amazing progress, with many of the Grade 7 children moving on to the High School of their choice. We have recently had some of the children move onto Grade 8 English and Maths exams, as the Grade 7 work is not challenging enough.

Our boys are also real beneficiaries of these experiences. Quite apart from the ability to sign off service hours for President's Award, they come away feeling like they have made a real difference, because it is an authentic experience.



Sebastien Plutsick tutoring Maths to Liema Siwa from the Good Shephard School



Claudia Chandler running a GIS workshop for senior pupils

St Mary's immersive Learning Experience

This year we have invited 20 children from St Mary's Development and Care centre to spend the week of their Spring holiday immersed in learning at St Andrew's. I am writing this as I anticipate the arrival of 10 volunteers from other schools who have given up their school holidays to work on this project as part of the Gold President's Award Residential Project.

We will be doing mornings of literacy, physical education and numeracy, followed by lunches at DSG with the Junior School boarders and afternoons of practical problem solving in the D&T Centre. "Sweating our assets" during term time has been a challenge, and many lessons have been learned by organizers, participants and volunteers alike. A real highlight for the participants was meeting Sizwe Ndlovu and James Thompson, London gold medalists, and the automatic scrubbing brush made in a "tinkering" session using parts scavenged from an old record player.



St Mary's Immersive Learning Experience participants worked on numeracy, literacy and practical problem solving lead by volunteers from the President's Award

This programme would not have been possible without the synergies developed between St Andrew's, St Mary's Development and Care Centre and the President's Award provincial office. Ten volunteers from other schools gave up their school holidays to work on this programme as part of the Gold President's Award Residential Project

House Projects

The idea of Houses, dorms or groups of friends tackling community engagement projects is taking root. Often there is significant support from a teacher, but it is the boys who do the job, and get the satisfaction. Sam Easter wrote as follows about one of the house projects:

Mullins Makeover

"The school wasn't much more than a few walls and a cement roof when the 30 odd of us arrived, which soon changed. The owner of the school was there to greet us at 8 and remained there watching us do our jobs through the course of the day. We gave both the inside and outside a layer of cream paint before giving a second layer to the inside. Ethan and his crew set out to build the blackboards for the kids to draw on and to set up a drainage system from a tap to the road which was leaving water to soak into the ground without flowing away. Once the second layer had dried out, our artists set out to draw the outlines for the alphabet, numbers from 1 to 10, emotions, weather and the South African flag with some other artistic touches added here and there. We all then began adding some colourful flavour to the walls and to the wooden blocks for the kids to play with.

Lots of laughter was heard and many smiles seen throughout the day, indicating the amount of fun had by all of us. I certainly had the most fun I have ever had on a President's Award project and I would be very happy to spend another few Saturdays doing more projects similar to this as I'm sure the rest of us would."

St Matthew's

We had such positive reports from recent interactions with St Matthew's, with real optimism for a substantial improvement in Grade 12 results this year. In October, we will host a return "day exchange" with Grade 10 and 11 pupils from St Matthew's spending a day visiting classes and being exposed to a different kind of school, just as our pupils did when they visited for a day. Anna Jacobs, Thomas Hagsphil and Xolani Jonono will also be travelling to St Matthew's to work on preparation of the matric Maths and Maths Literacy classes.



Martin Chandler was awarded with Honours for Community Engagement and Service.



Andrew Keeton (left) and Mathew Archer were awarded gold President's Awards

Conclusion

Less than 4% of pupils who enroll in the International Award For Young People, known in South Africa as The President's Award, complete the Gold Standard. The Award requires the individual to learn a new skill, participate in physical recreation, participate in an adventurous journey, give at least 72 hours in service to others and move out of their comfort zone and engage in purposeful activity for a week in a different community. It requires dedication and determination, but is ultimately a hugely fulfilling and empowering undertaking. Gold Standards were awarded to Mathew Archer and Andrew Keeton this term. Both continue to lead projects, as members of the South African Gold Holders' Association, Mathew, as the Portfolio prefect for Community Engagement, and Andrew in taking over the St Andrew's Academic Extension team at St Mary's Development and Care Centre.

Martin Chandler has been the Community Engagement prefect for 2012, having served for four years on the President's Award Committee, and has led by example of service to others. Martin has been a very involved boy, playing two demanding sports at 1st team level, participating in every dramatic and musical production this year, and in musical ensembles. Martin's commitment to Community Engagement was acknowledged in the first ever CEMA (Cultural and Extramural Activity) Honours for Community Engagement. Martin is a boundary breaker, but also a deeply thoughtful young man, who has taught many that engaging with others is fun, edgy, and doesn't have to involve sack-clothe and ashes and mournful faces.

I have faced some personal challenges this term and have been overwhelmed by the care and support from our community. So many of the activities took place because other people stepped into the front-line which allowed me to be in the background. When I accepted the position of Community Engagement Officer, I expressed my hope to the Headmaster that to see Community Engagement become part of most of the boys' lives at College, that we'd see authentic engagement starting from boys' initiatives, and we'd see a shift from "nice-to-have add-on" to being a part of each facet of the school. Nearly two years later, there has been significant progress. I owe so many debts of gratitude for all who have journeyed with me and face the difficulties with me. *Nec Aspera Terrent.*

Warm regards

Tim Barnard