

Mission 5 - Airbridge to Ficksburg - June 19th 2004

Sunbeam Kids and Angels Home.



After some last minute fancy footwork by Ernie and his wife Lala we managed to get foodstuff and nappies partly donated, medicines and blankets were purchased using money donated by Air BP. Leftover energy bars courtesy Dischem and Nestea from Nestle finished the load of some 400 kg. Michelle from Tusanani came to the party with educational toys as well as her presence on this our fifth mission. Francesco piloted his Cessna 182, and Fred followed in his Piper Arrow. We had a trip on our hands!



Francesco left first in the Cessna and Fred approximately 45 minutes later, and we arrived in Ficksburg some hour and forty minutes later, with Fred arriving 15 minutes later. The flights were in a clear and smooth sky with heavy smog up to about 1500ft agl, making visibility under the TMA very limiting. The western Drakensburg loomed out of the haze as the air cleared to the south and then Ficksburg airfield was suddenly ahead.



Jack Armour, Helen-Mary, Helen-Mary's mom Tessa and dad Vernon, plus the children from Angels home were at the airfield waving us in frantically. It was great to see the enthusiasm in their faces, this was an outing and an event they will remember I am sure.



Tessa was acting reporter, Vernon and Jack were the transport directors and Helen-Mary overall director; had all items locked and off-loaded and in no time we were visiting the Angels home and treated to some tea, biscuits and cake. The home is modest and houses about 11 children from age 2 till about 11. It is a well run home with two dedicated house parents Daniel and Grace Noha and their able assistant Elizabeth. The Joughin family as well as the Armour's; Jack and his wife Claire do credible work in this community I am told.

New Facility to provide daycare for AIDS orphans

Thanks to the idealism of a young Ficksburg woman and her can-do attitude, there is now a haven for our town's pre school AIDS orphans which will allow those who care for them to continue at their places of employment or, in the case of child-headed households, to complete their schooling. The notion of opening a day care facility for pre schoolers affected by AIDS has reached fruition with the opening of a centre called Sunbeam Kids, the brain-child of Helen Mary Joughin, the daughter of well-known Ficksburgers Vernon and Tessa Joughin. The Sunbeam Kids will be housed in three rooms in Kganya House, a property on the corner of Caledon and De Villiers Streets which is also home to Wormwood and Honey, an upliftment project producing woven mats, and the OW's pre school. Helen-Mary, a go-getter who has worked tirelessly to raise funds to make sure that the Sunbeam Kids' centre gets off the ground, says that it has always been her dream to work with children. The centre will initially offer daycare to 20 toddlers between the ages of 18 months to four years and, if it later becomes possible, extend its scope to care for pre schoolers from five to six years of age.



The number of child-headed households is rapidly increasing as parents succumb to the scourge of AIDS and many of the AIDS orphans in Meqheleng are cared for by older siblings who are, in fact, only children themselves, who have been forced to drop out of school in order to look after their younger brothers and sisters. The Sunbeam Kids will offer a reprieve to these young people as their young siblings can now be looked after during the day, allowing the older children to go back to school.

The centre will also make a difference in the lives of the grannies and other relatives who have to look after young AIDS orphans as they, too, will be able to seek gainful employment secure in the knowledge that their charges are being well cared for while they are at work. Most of the children at the centre have been referred there by the OW Ficksburg. Raising funds to get the centre for the Sunbeam Kids off the ground has been a real challenge, Helen Mary says, but she has received a very generous donation from a most unlikely source, Cadbury's, which has made possible the purchase of tables, chairs, carpets, curtains and toys.



Another princely donation was that of an Olympus digital camera worth R5 000, which is being raffled as part of the fundraising for the centre. A donation has also been received from the Rainbow Pilots, three of whose members, Mike Ehrman, Ernie Alexander and Fransesco Masselli, flew in recently to hand over their contribution in person. More funds are, of course, still needed and Helen Mary hopes that the people of Ficksburg will open their hearts and wallets and purses to ensure the future of the Sunbeam Kids.