

Soul Action in South

In July 2006 Ruth Mollart flew to South Africa to participate in a Christian education and outreach project in Durban. This ministry was sponsored by Soul Action (a UK-based spin-off from Soul Survivor), the Church of the Good Shepherd (COGS is a large church in Durban North) and Indlela (a Durban-based charity serving the local community by running a counselling service, a babies' home, and a pre-school project in Amaoti, a nearby township). Ruth spent time at the pre-school. What follows are extracts from her diary...

28 July 2006

Today we went up to Peniel Church ('peniel' means 'face to face with God'). It's in what used to be an Indian suburb. There's still a lot of segregation in South Africa, but I guess it takes time to rebuild the bridges that Apartheid burnt. COGS supports three crèches which are full of kids from Amaoti. Since it's very dangerous in Amaoti, they have brought the pre-school out here, into a safer area.

Thembi and Zanele are the main teachers at the pre-school. They are local women who were previously unemployed and have also become Christians in the past 18 months. They are incredible women whose sad stories have turned into stories of hope now that they have a future in Indlela pre-school and, ultimately, in Jesus.



Ruth Mollart is twenty-six years old. After reading English Studies and part of an MA in Theology at Ripon and York St John, she worked as a youth worker for St Matthew's Church and Alcester Deanery in the Midlands. This led Ruth on to complete a PGCE at Leeds University in 2003. Before taking up post at Grange Technology College in Bradford, Ruth went to Uganda on a short-term trip with Soapbox Trust. In July/August 2006 she went to Durban Soul Action and now works at Goffs School in Hertfordshire as an English, drama and media teacher.

Hungry girls and boys at the park



Thembi and Zanele work in a church hall with about 60 children aged from 2 to 6. As we walked in the children sang songs for us which were full of joy, although in the midst of all the songs and smiles, I noticed a tiny girl called Busi just sitting with her head in her hands. I found out later there had been a recent bereavement in her family. This is not unusual for the children of Amaoti. HIV/AIDS affects more than one in three families in the township.

During the day we organised activities for the children. It worked pretty well considering we had no Zulu and they had limited English. The children loved playing with the coloured pens (mostly by themselves), and the stickers (stuck all over themselves!). It was amazing to spend time with them, just letting them know that we want to be with them and that they are so very special.

2 August 2006

Today we went to the park to meet the children from the pre-school. It was only a small play park – a reasonable size and condition; the kind of place I would take my nephews or niece at home for half an hour. Once they saw it, they started beaming with joy and running as fast as they could. You might not think this is unusual, but it was so lovely to see them smiling and happy. I spoke to Zanele who was on the verge of tears. I asked her if she was okay, and she explained that she was so blessed to see them happy and playing. Zanele explained that most of the children had never been to a play park before.

I played with a little boy called Joshua, and pushed other children on the swings. There were about six on a see-saw at any one time, and always a steady stream of little ones on the slides. We gave the children the lunches we'd made up for them, which were soon gone. Some were even sucking so hard on the plastic sandwich bags that they nearly swallowed them. Hungry boys and girls. After lunch, they all sat together and sang some songs including *Thank you Jesus* and *Peel banana, peel*,

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Africa



peel banana, mash banana, mash, mash banana (with actions!). A little later I saw one of the girls scavenging in the bin for scraps of food because she was still so hungry. Reflection: back in the UK, who is hungry around us? Who is in need?

Joshua's story is one that sticks in my mind. He must be five years old, and is quite small for his age. He had his head shaved as he was in mourning for his mother who had died earlier that week. He's now living with an auntie. The teachers have such a heart for him, making sure that he's cared for. While we were there, he got a new jumper and hat. It's also standard that the children are fed at school by a soup run, organised by COGS, and they also go home with bread a couple of times a week. Without this project, a child like Joshua would have nothing. It's so important these children are cared for physically, emotionally and spiritually.

What we have done today is what Soul Action calls 'integral mission'. It is all about helping Christians

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to get out there and seek the Kingdom with their lives by serving the poor and marginalised; bringing the good news of God's kingdom to the last, the least and the lost.

4 August 2006

We drove through Amaoti today. It didn't look as bad as I thought it would, but that doesn't mean it looked good either. Somewhere deep down, I was probably comparing it to the slums I had visited in Uganda. It was strange because throughout the township there didn't seem to be distinct 'rich neighbourhoods' or 'poor neighbourhoods'. Everything was mixed up with huddles of homes of varying standards right next to each other: brick houses next door to shacks comprising a couple of sheets of polythene tied to sticks.

We stopped off at a crèche which had about twenty children aged from 1 to 9. It was dark and miserable. The children – who receive soup, just like the pre-school – are looked after by 'gogos' (grannies). It turns out that the 60 kids at the pre-school used to be here just ten days ago. Now, the children who are here are awaiting sponsorship, or places in local schools. There's nothing for them: no electricity, no toilets and no water to wash their hands. Yet a few minutes drive away is the 'other' South Africa: rich with the technology of the Western World.

We stayed for a short time and played together with broken and battered toys. They were shabby and cheap. The children truly deserve better than this. I distinctly remember sitting next to Katie (another Soul Action volunteer) in silence. We were both choking back the tears, trying to play with the children. Watching one little girl playing with a Barbie torso and head I said to Katie, "I just want to give her a whole doll to play with!"

I was playing with a little baby boy who was having such fun bashing something on the floor. I picked up another 'toy' and bashed the floor with him. We



Joshua with his new jumper and hat

I offered him a broken toy car, and he handed me a razor



Fun on the slide

were both enjoying this noisy game, and then I thought we'd swap our bashing items with each other to make the game more interesting. I offered him a broken toy car, and he handed me a razor. I can't tell you how I felt – my heart sank and felt enraged in the same instant.

As we drove off, Sufiso – the driver – pointed out a house near the building. The woman who used to live there was going to be a teacher at the pre-school. She was living in very tough conditions, and Indlela helped out by employing her and building the small house we were looking at. Then, one day, as she carried her own baby on her back she was stabbed to death in the street. Her daughter is now at the pre-school but doesn't have a mum, and the whole pre-school has been robbed of its teacher. What makes this okay?

We drove past some rubbish skips and I noticed there were loads of children in them, some of them toddlers. I think of the toddlers I know who are close to my heart. What makes this okay?



Soup for everyone!

Final reflections

How can there be positive change? I'm struggling with this. It almost makes it worse, knowing that there's an abundance of resources, food, shelter and space... all that and more just ten minutes down the road. Now, it's really hard not to get judgemental and ask why more people aren't helping. We must remember that when we do that, we need to ask ourselves the same questions, and I cannot honestly say that I live my life wholeheartedly on behalf of the hungry and helpless. It makes me wonder where my blind spots are. Who is it that I don't notice? Or worse: Who is it I don't

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Information

You may be wondering what Soul Action is all about. This is our vision – the stuff that makes us tick! In short, it involves three things:

- 1 Raising up Christians committed to God's kingdom dream in their lives, their localities and the wider world;
- 2 Getting together and giving away the raw materials and resources needed to change communities;
- 3 Connecting people all over the world to share prayer, money, energy, ideas and resources in the hope of bringing God's kingdom dream to the last, the least and the lost.

Soul Action offers opportunities for Christians of all ages to make a difference. To find out more, go to: www.soulaction.org

To learn more about the work of Indlela (including opportunities to sponsor a child from Amaoti for as little as £6 per month), please visit: www.indlela.org.za

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HIV/AIDS affects more than one in three families in the township

want to notice? Who are the last, the least and the lost that I walk past every day? They are there in my life: both the people and the blind spots. I'm left with questions, some I don't know the answers to. I'm left with challenges too. Am I going to make changes in my choices to give others choices?

The King will reply, *'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for me.'* (Matthew 25:40)

Am I going to stop and notice people who are in need? Am I going to live my life on behalf of the broken and hungry? What does that look like? What changes do I need to make? What changes do I want to make? I know that my life needs to reflect God's grace, because I know that only His grace can change society from top to bottom. There's got to be some change: change in me, and change in God's world.

Post Script

Thembi and Zanele are now enrolled on a year-long teacher training course. The staff now meets together for weekly curriculum planning sessions. Plans for a new pre-school building are underway so that the teachers and children can have their own classroom and facilities. Praise God!

■ Ruth Mollart



Mickey and Toni play a large part in running Indlela