

POLOKONG 1990-2013

Polokong (which means "We Are Free") is an orphanage, near Johannesburg. It was founded in 1991 by the SVP in South Africa to provide a home for some of the children living on the streets of Johannesburg and notorious surrounding areas. The children, age 2 to 18 years, had been abandoned, abused, neglected or orphaned and were committed by the courts to Polokong Children's Village. There, a dedicated team was committed to serving the children with love, compassion and respect, whilst integrating them with the local community.

The Children's Village consists of 5 houses of 10 children, each with its own house mother. Children go to local schools and are encouraged to excel academically and in sport. There is a strong Christian / Catholic ethos. A group of six of us from this parish visited Polokong in July 2012 and we came away with very positive feelings about this enterprise. We attended Sunday Mass in the church attached to the Polokong. This was an inspiring and vibrant service with an enthusiastic choir and a short dramatic presentation in honour of Mandela's 94th birthday.

A new and charismatic manager, Louise Coxen, came to Polokong in 2008. She has had the vision and energy to set up an additional outreach project for children from the local township. This now provides the following for the township:

- 300 children have a nutritious meal each day
- 100 children attend afternoon study classes
- 30 children with HIV/AIDS receive counselling
- An HIV / AIDS prevention programme

Given that in South Africa, education is the only passport to changing lives, Louise is now also supporting the more promising of the residents into further education. This is expensive and there is no identified funding for this Emancipation Project. Louise is hoping to raise enough funds to pay for 4 Polokong "graduates" to achieve higher qualifications in subjects ranging from geology and business studies to social work.

Please consider making a regular gift to Polokong by standing order and where possible Gift Aid your donation to increase its value by 25%. If you are interested, please contact Catherine Massey (01327 352189). massey@doctors.org.uk

SVP, St Thomas More, May 2013