

June 2012.

Dear Friends,

The South African constitution enshrines the rights of children: Basic rights to a name and nationality from birth; to family or alternative care; to basic nutrition and shelter; to basic health care; to protection from neglect, maltreatment, abuse or degradation and protection from exploitative labour practices. Matters so fundamental, one would have hoped they should not even have to be named- but not so here! At the beginning of June, South Africa had "Child Protection Week" to highlight these very fundamental requirements of a civilized nation.

This is not a happy, positive letter. It is intended to present the harsh realities of living in our country of such contrasts. The 1st world side of South Africa can proudly and rightly compete on the global stage, while the 3rd world side, where Phakamisa chooses to engage, struggles with these most basic needs.

A name, a family, basic shelter? As Mbalenhle, one of our wandering teachers, was going to her class one day, she crossed a small stream and found a little boy, crying in the bushes nearby. She stopped and asked him what his name was. "Lutho" he said. (Lutho means nothing). Then she enquired where his Mom was. "Lutho", he replied. "Where is your home?" she asked. "Lutho," he said. "You can come and live with me," she replied.

Of course it was not that simple. Despite furtive searches, his mom was not found- and no one knew anything about either of them. Mbalenhle *has* welcomed him into her family and the Social Welfare Department has agreed to her fostering him. She named him Lutho Nthando (Nthando means love) and has applied for a birth certificate for him. It seems his first three basic needs are being met by a Phakamisa teacher who happened to find him!

Busisiwe, one of our Caregivers, requested prayer and support for an 18 year old girl, Thabi, who has recently entered her life. Her parents and grandparents have died leaving her homeless. She moved in with her uncle's family, but they hid their food away from her, because they do not have enough to share. She has a 16 month old daughter, who is so malnourished and weak that she cannot stand, let alone walk. Thabi asked Busisiwe to look after her daughter so she could attempt to complete her school education. She gave her the baby's bag with 2 bottles in it. One contained plain water. The other contained very runny porridge, diluted with water not milk. There was nothing else in the bag- not even nappies. Thabi herself was going to school hungry. Of course, Busisiwe fed the baby and Thabi, but she has 11 people in her own family to support. She is concerned Thabi will resort to

prostitution to support her daughter and herself. She is also afraid Thabi might abandon the baby out of sheer desperation. A family or alternative care? Basic nutrition? Basic shelter? Protection from neglect, maltreatment, abuse or degradation and protection from exploitative labour practices?

Sakhile is 4 years old. He is in Noma's class. He has had a very smelly discharge from his ears for 3 months. Flies are attracted to it and he cannot hear properly. His Mum apparently took him to the local clinic but his condition only worsened. At Phakamisa, it was assumed the clinic was unable to help, so in consultation with a doctor, we gave him a 7 day anti-biotic with careful instructions to his Mum on how to administer it. *Two weeks* later, he was still having a spoonful of medicine now and again, so of course his ears remain heavily infected. His Mum will not take him back to the clinic. Basic health care? Protection from neglect?

F.T. is one of our caregivers who cares for a 5 year old girl. She assumed responsibility for her when she was 14 months old. Her 'granny' had locked her up in a house alone and gone out and this precious 14 month old baby was raped. The Social Welfare Services arranged for F.T. to foster her. She has had a major operation to repair her severely damaged, little body, but incontinence remains a way of life for her. She lives happily with her Gogo F.T. who worries about what she will think about herself when she grows up. Protection from abuse?

This past week, the staff and participants on the various courses of Phakamisa, have pledged to "be the change we want to see in our world", to quote Mahatma Gandhi, by offering protection in whatever way we can, to the children. Undoubtedly our Caregivers and Educare teachers have a critical role to play as they are right there at the rock face and Phakamisa has a critical role to play in supporting and resourcing them.

As a church ministry, as caregivers, as wandering teachers and as individuals we cannot eradicate child abuse in our country, but we can effect change in our own small spheres of influence- one child at a time, by loving and loving and loving again.

Let us not say WHY, WHY, WHY, but rather HOW. WHAT, WHERE, WHEN. How can I help? What can I do? Where can I be used? When will I commit myself?

From one who wants to change and be changed, in love and with love.

Glenda

Glenda Howieson (Co-ordinator)

Should you wish to support Phakamisa, please see our web site: www.phakamisa.org or contact Glenda using the details on our letterhead.