

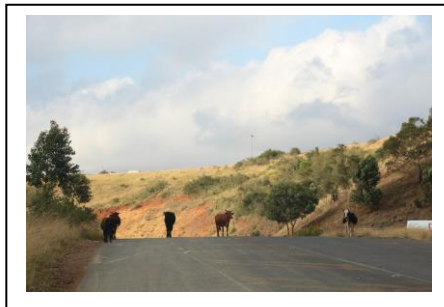
# EASTERN CAPE SCHOOL VISITS REPORT

Uitenhage, East London, Umtata, Mount Frere and Bizana

20 June – 22 June 2022

## OVERVIEW

We haven't been on school visits since the Covid-19 outbreak and this was our very first visit specifically to the OR Tambo and Alfred Nzo Districts in the Eastern Cape. A few days before we were to embark on our trip, our direct flight to East London was cancelled (Comair/Kulula suffered the same fate as previously did SAA & Mango). We were forced to settle for an afternoon Safair flight out of Cape Town to Port Elizabeth, where we picked up our hired car, drove to Uitenhage and was able to spend some 45min at Solomon Mahlangu High School. At about 4pm we took to the road for the 3+hr drive to East London, arriving at our accommodation just after 7pm. Our day two stop over would be in Umtata – also a 3+hr drive from East London. The trip proved to be quite an eye-opener in terms of relying on Google when assessing travel distances and times – we totally underestimated conditions of the roads and the amount of cautious driving the trip would entail. Potholes, cattle blocking the roads, long-haul trucks either speeding up behind you or crawling along the steeper stretches, added hours to our travel time. Much to our dismay, we unfortunately had to be constantly vigilant of the time we allowed ourselves to spend at each of the schools we visited.



The drive from Umtata to Mount Frere, over the very aptly named “Misty Mounts” proved to be not only painstakingly slow, but rather nerve wracking – to the point of being quite frightening. For a nail-biting period of about an hour, if not longer, we crawled along in mist so thick that we could not see the terrain to the sides of the car and literally only 5 – 8m ahead. If it was at all possible, we would have much preferred to pull off the road and wait for the mist to lift. We were warned of potholed roads from Mount Frere to Bizana, but found this stretch more manageable – there was evidence of fresh repairs having been done, in fact, we passed two young men of about 18yrs of age with spades seemingly randomly filling potholes in the road.



On the last day of our visit, we were told that it was a mere 3hr drive to Durban from Bizana, but what was not taken into account was that it would take us hour or more, along gravel roads with cattle grazing along the way, to get from the outskirts into Bizana itself and depending on the speed we could go it would then take us the estimated 3hrs. Suffice it to say that when we hit the tarred road that was the N2, I averaged a speed of 140km per hr in order to have us make it for our flight back to Cape Town in time. Getting into Durban in peak hour traffic, the skies having darkened and the rain pouring down certainly did not help to calm down already frayed nerves. With very little time before the boarding gates were to close, I hurried to return the hired car whilst Ntuthu and Miche rushed to get their luggage checked in.

Despite the long drives over challenging stretches of road, we managed to visit all the areas we planned to cover i.e. Uitenhage, East London, Umtata, Mount Frere and Bizana. It was a wonderfully worthwhile visit – the joy, the excitement and the warmth we were received with at the schools we visited affirmed that indeed *“the purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better for our fellow-man, for it is truly in the giving that we receive”*. It was heartwarming to find that our bursars were all present to meet with us, despite our arriving after the school day was done and despite the fact that with exams having been completed, there was no need for the learners to be at school. They all queued up for photos and dished out hugs and wanted to make sure we took some of the delights that were prepared for our visit, and they did not hesitate to have us videoing them expressing the impact of the ASF support on their lives. Our only regret is that we could not spend more time at the schools, more time to have conversation with our young bursars – more time to guide and encourage and field their very many questions, more time to engage with our bursary representatives and their colleagues that so warmly welcomed us.



## DAY ONE (20 June) – SOLOMON MAHLANGU HIGH SCHOOL, UITENHAGE

This is one of our Ambassador Schools, where our Shared Value Partner – Mark Shuttleworth, supports the 78 bursars that are currently enrolled on the ASF Pgm. More than 300 learners have been supported by the ASF over the past 5yrs. SM High is situated in the Kwa-Nobuhle Township in Uitenhage (Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality). The school’s current learner enrollment is 1353 with 42 dedicated educators. Despite the impact of covid on learning over these past 2 years and the additional social challenges that the learners and the broader community faces (drug, alcohol and domestic abuse, plus the now increased rates of unemployment), the school always produces good matric results and in 2021 they obtained an outstanding 80.5% pass rate.

On the day of our visit, we were warmly received by Ms Carson who is the ASF Bursary Representative and social worker employed by the school. Despite this being a late afternoon visit, where learners had already been dismissed for the day, in addition to most learners being done with their June exams and thus no longer attending classes, Ms Carson ensured that every one of the 78 learners enrolled on the ASF Pgm were present to meet us. It was immediately evident that the learners were as excited to meet

with the *“ASF Team that came all the way from Cape Town”*, as we were

to meet with them. They engaged openly, excitedly and freely, and jumped at the opportunity to express their gratitude where they emphasized how the ASF have taken the burden of supplying their school needs from their parents’/guardians’ shoulders. In particular, a Gr11 bursar passionately gave testimony and shared that: *“since grade 8 I have been able to provide an income for my school needs and therefore my mother no longer has to take money out of her wallet for my school necessities, but I’m not even working!”* It was especially heartwarming to hear the words of appreciation from those who have been with the ASF

### 2021 matriculants & their current endeavors.

- LUCAS, Nonkosinathi – UCT, Civil Engineering
- MAXHAM, Luyolo – Wits, Astronomy and Astrophysics
- MBANGI, Liyonela – NMU, Pharmacy
- MWEZO, Ukhanye – Wits, Accounting Science
- PETROS, Themba Matthews – NMU, Computer Science
- WILLIAMS, Sivuyile Beauty – Wits, BSc Chemistry



since the beginning of their high school journey – the excitement at finally meeting the “ASF people” was palpable and seemed to validate our young wards in some way. Unfortunately, we could not stay longer than the 45min already spent as we had the long drive to East London looming (estimated at 3.5hrs), where we would rest before our next day’s visits.

## **DAY TWO (21 June) – GREENPOINT SECONDARY SCHOOL, EAST LONDON**

We decided on Greenpoint Secondary School as a meeting point, since it was en-route to Umtata. We were very warmly received by our Bursary Rep, Ms Weppelman and later joined by the Principal, Mr Martin, and a number of her fellow-educators. Greenpoint SSS, also one of the ASF Ambassador Schools, is one of the older and more established schools in East London and Ms Weppelman has been an educator there for 26+ years. The school is situated in Buffalo Flats and learners come from the surrounding communities (mostly impoverished). The current enrollment is 1100 learners (45 of whom are enrolled on the ASF Pgm) with 31 educators. The school is well-maintained, but lack even the most basic educational resources – for example, a modest school library. Educators have taken it upon themselves to revamp one of the classrooms and are in the process of turning it into a library – more of a resource center, in fact, where provision is made for a few computers that will give learners access to online research. This is a quintile 4 school where the school fees are R2400 per annum, of which the ASF contributes R1500 to those on the ASF Pgm.

The ASF is evidently known and thus acknowledged by the school management team and it was most encouraging to have the principal and other educators eager to join the meeting. The Principal extended warm words of gratitude to the ASF for the impact we have on the attitude and commitment-to-their-studies of the learners we assist – citing that “*the ones on the ASF Pgm tend to be the better behaved and performing learners*”. Our bursars were initially “quietly excited” at meeting with us, but interacted enthusiastically after a motivational chat with them on self-awareness, mindsets, attitude toward life in general and more specifically on what to consider when deciding on life-long careers. Greenpoint is one of the better performing schools in the Buffalo City Municipality and have consistently maintained an 80+% pass rate. Their 2021 cohort achieved an outstanding 93%.

### **2021 matriculants & their current endeavors.**

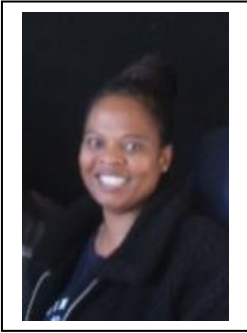
- COX, Kayleen, Studying Bachelor of Education
- GQIRANA, Khazimla, Bcom Accounting at Regent Business School
- HAMANN, Darnell Sasha, BEd at UFH
- MBUSI, Amahle, Electrical Engineering at CPUT
- MGQUBA, Jabu, Mechanical Engineering at UJ
- MNTWAPI, Siyabonga, BA Development at NMU
- NGELE, Lisa, Bcom Accounting at UFH
- VENA, Lihle, Bcom Accounting at UFH
- VOYI, Zintle, Improving Maths & Sciences, hoping to enroll for Medicine next year.



## **Also in attendance were ASF Bursary Reps that travelled to represent Silimela, Ngwenyathi and Mzomhle Senior Secondary Schools.**



## **SILIMELA SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL – Ms Mdyogolo (ASF Rep) and Mr Sithole (Principal) joined us.**



Silimela SSS is another of the ASF Ambassador Schools and is situated in Berlin (Mncotsho village), which is about 50kms outside of East London. This is the ONLY high school in the area servicing seven villages. Learners come via transport provided by the Department of Education from as far as 14km away. There are many learners who still walk long distance to get to the school since transport is not provided for those living within a certain radius of the school. The school has no sporting facilities, they utilize the nearby primary school's field for inter-school interaction. The school lacks even the most basic requirements e.g. furniture. They are forced to recycle and fix the old chairs and recently received 2<sup>nd</sup> hand

desks from the nearby primary school. Water is a major problem; there are taps but they rarely function, water trucks come once in a while and therefore children still bring their own water to drink.

The current learner enrolment is 432 (48 are ASF beneficiaries) with 13 educators. Most learners enrolled at the school live with their grandparents or are from child headed households – their parents/guardians are forced to seek employment and thus live in the towns. In a number of instances, this has led to an increase in behavioral challenges (drug problem which then leads to drop-outs). The need for parents to seek employment in the nearby towns has also had an impact on the enrolment numbers at the school - annual enrolment was around 1200 (prior to 1999). However, over the years the lack of infrastructure & development has also led to entire families migrating to the towns. This is one of many deep rural schools that has limited to absolutely no resources. A consequence of Covid's rotational attendance and the prolonged school closures resulted in learners losing an extensive amount of learning time. Little wonder that there was a drastic decline with the matric pass rate, which when compared to previous years (from high 80s) dropped to a concerning 63% in 2021.

### ***2021 matriculants & their current endeavors.***

- Bobo Sinalo, BSc at NMU
- Nanto Lufuzo, Bcom at NMU
- Sicatsha Sinokuhle, UFH

## **NGWENYATHI SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL – We were joined by Ms Gqeba**



Ngwenyathi SSS is situated in the Gwiqi Location and is one of the schools with whom the ASF has a longstanding relationship. Unfortunately, a necessary pause in our working relationship was necessitated in 2014 due to a matter of non-compliance. The school was reinstated in 2019 after a meeting with the school's management and parent body, on which occasion requirements of ASF compliance was clarified. Ngwenyathi SSS is now one of the ASF Preferred Schools and we look forward to nurturing the relationship such that they will soon become an ASF Ambassador School. Their current enrolment is 807 (21 of them are ASF bursars) with 24 educators. The school recently suffered the loss of their long-serving Principal, Mrs Ntshanga, who, along with her husband, lost their lives in a motorcar accident. Unfortunately, our Bursary Rep could not spend much time with us as she had a role to play in facilitating the process of instating Mrs Ntshanga's replacement. The 2021 matric pass rate was 79%.

## **MZOMHLE SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL – We were joined by Ms Sonjani**



Mzomhle SSS is also one of our longstanding schools. The school is situated in Mdantsane Township; which is about 15kms outside of East London. Mzomhle SSS is an ASF Preferred School with a current enrolment of 1072 learners. This is a no-fee school, terribly under-resourced but with dedicated educators set on providing the learners with the best possible learning experience. Despite the many social ills and lack of resources, the high standard of education is consistently maintained. In 2021 their matric pass rate was an impressive 94%.

### ***2021 matriculants & their current endeavors.***

- Mzayiya Nanda, Chemical Engineering at UKZN
- Totyi Emihle

The welcoming atmosphere at Greenpoint SSS, the extra effort in ensuring that we got to meet and have conversation with our bursars, accommodating the 3 Reps from neighbouring schools and providing refreshments, made everyone feel not only welcome, but definitely part of a collective where the learner's wellbeing is paramount. Unfortunately, time was of the essence, since we had a 3-hr drive to Umtata looming where Zamukulungisa SSS would be our next stop, thus we had to bid our hurried farewells to our hosts.

## DAY TWO (cont.) – ZAMUKULUNGISA HIGH SCHOOL, UMTATA

We arrived in Umtata around 2pm. Ms Nqeto, our Bursary Rep at Zamukulungisa diligently kept in touch and checking up to make sure that we did not get lost. Getting to a more or less close proximity to the school was relatively easy, but in being a small remote location and travelling along gravel roads, even the GPS had us going in circles. In the end, we consulted with our fellow-humans, who could point out the red roof of the school. However, finding the actual road on which to drive leading up to the school remained a challenge, but keeping the roof in sight eventually got us there.



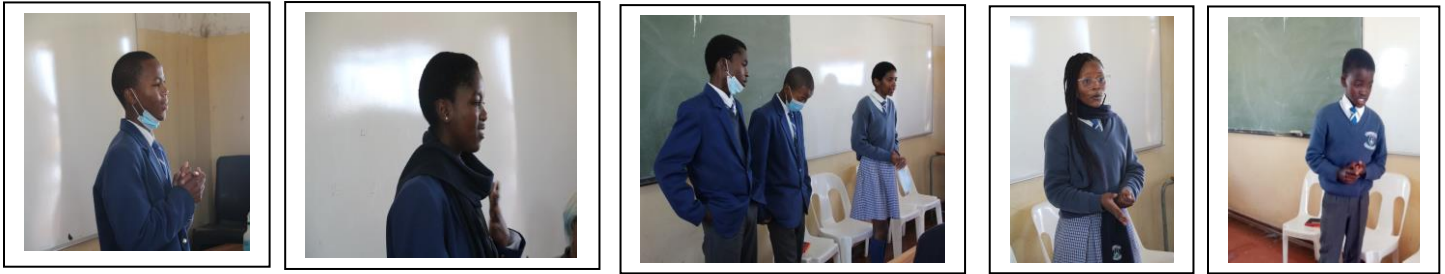
Since we did not make any stops driving from East London, as we wanted to make absolutely sure that we got to the school in time to meet with our bursars, when we eventually did arrive, we were in desperate need to use the rest room. Our Bursary Rep seemed most uneasy in directing us to their rest rooms and resorted to stating that they were too far off from the school building. On our insistence, she eventually pointed out a structure about 50m from the classrooms. Her discomfort was based on the fact that the school still used the pit ablution system and she was not sure how we would react in having to use these. However, all our Eastern Cape rural schools we visited have the same ablution facilities, some in even worse condition and therefore it was no shock to our systems. In this instance, there were taps installed next to the toilets, but hardly any water came from it. Fortunately, Ms Nqeto was waiting with sanitizer for our hands. When we got to the classroom, our bursars, the principal (Mr Dawedi), Deputy (Mr Sijaji) and 3 other educators were excitedly waiting to meet with us. This was a much more relaxed visit as it was our last stop for the day.



Zamukulungisa SSS is a rural school situated about 15kms outside of Umtata and more or less 2 kms from the N2 en-route to East London. The school buildings are well maintained, but hopelessly inadequate in accommodating the 1318 learners. In this regard parents put shoulder to the wheel and the school now boasts a number of classrooms that are actually mud structures built by the community. Every precaution was taken to ensure that the structures are solid and safe, well cemented and neatly finished off. This is a no-fee school, and despite the learners coming from impoverished communities, parents are required to make a contribution of R500 to cover the running costs not covered by the DOE. The principal emphasized that to date more than 50% of this contribution is still outstanding, hence the support from the ASF was invaluable to both the school and the individual learner. The current enrolment is 1318 learners with 40 educators. The 2021 matric pass rate was an impressive 80% (216 matriculants sat for the finals).

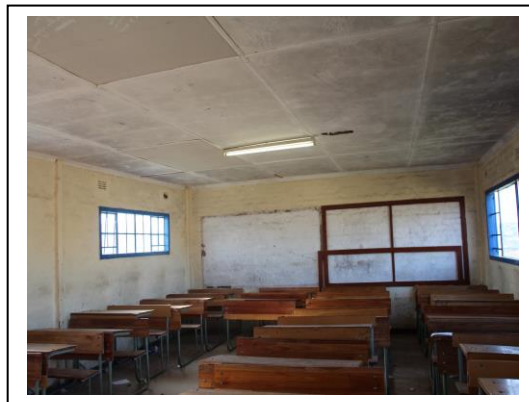
The learners at this school are from the 12 surrounding villages and every child has a unique story, mostly of struggle and poverty, to tell. However, our group of bursars were cheerful, neatly dressed in their uniforms and you could not tell that they came from poverty-stricken homes; mostly surviving off government grants and where some are, in fact, orphans or even the “child-head” at their homes. We spoke with our bursars about self-awareness, mindsets, attitude toward life in

general and how to go about deciding on their life-long careers. Initially they were a bit shy to engage, but they soon warmed up and jumped up in numbers to have opportunity to speak. In their expressions of gratitude to the Fund they emphasized that they feel “seen and heard, happy that there are people who are showing an interest in their lives, people that could guide them in a way that their parents might not be able to, and about the much-needed relief as their parents/guardians now no longer have to worry about how they will manage to pay the required school contribution”.



Some of our Gr12 bursars are the first in their families to reach matric and they shared, with much emotion, how the financial assistance and guidance the ASF provided served as a motivation for them to keep going. Their tears flowed freely as they affirmed their commitment to continue doing their best to achieve their dreams. We could barely hold back our own tears when one Gr12 bursar emotionally shared that: *“I am such a burden for my parents, but then I got the bursary and it has been such a great help for me. This has helped my family...”* We intrinsically understood what she meant in stating that she was a burden for her parents – it was more a “burden” in how they would be able to ensure that she successfully passes matric and is then able to follow her dreams, than simply being a burden that they wanted to be rid of. After about 2 hours of emotional sharing, of fielding our bursars many questions, of delightful engagement; we availed ourselves for photos and thereafter was served a hearty meal (free range chicken- specially slaughtered for us that very morning 😊).

The learners also had lunch provided by the school’s nutrition program, which is said to be *“the only thing that the government at least diligently delivers on”*. The learners are able to enjoy a meal every day, consequently they attend until the last day of school as, for many, this is their primary source of food security. **This, too, was quite a humbling visit – one that had us realise that not only “should we count our blessings, but that we should make our every blessing count”.**



### **DAY THREE (22 June.) DEEP RURAL AREAS OF MOUNT FRERE & BIZANA**

This was to be the last of our 3-day school visits and we had planned on visiting two of the more rural areas where we had enlisted three new schools that the ASF had not previously worked with. The aforementioned, Zamukulungisa SSS in Umtata, was one such newly enlisted school. The first area to be visited entailed a 2hr drive from our accommodation in Umtata (to Mount Frere) and the 2<sup>nd</sup> required a 2.5hr drive (to Bizana). Thereafter we envisaged making our way to what we thought would be a 3hr drive to King Shaka Airport in Durban – this turned into a close on 5hr drive chasing against the clock, at times at a maddening speed of 140kms per hr – the last half hour or so speeding along in the pouring rain. But, thankfully we safely made it in time for our 6.30pm flight back to Cape Town – home sweet home ❤️

## DAY THREE (22 June) – ST GEORGES HIGH SCHOOL, MOUNT FRERE

We booked out of our accommodation at 6.45am. The drive from Umtata to Mount Frere took us over Misty Mounts. Never again would I want to do that stretch of road – we might as well have driven it blindfolded so heavy was the mist. It was painstakingly slow and nerve-rackingly unpredictable. We found ourselves crawling along at a snail's pace, unaware of vehicles behind us and suddenly being confronted with the bright lights of long-haul trucks or smaller vehicles when they were almost upon us coming from the opposite direction. Driving required so much concentration that by the time we broke into the sun about an hour or so later, we all suffered with somewhat of a dull headache. We arrived at St Georges about 45min later than anticipated, at which time an educator had to go in search of our Bursary Rep, Ms Sabelo.



This allowed us some few minutes to walk around the school yard and enter into conversation with, for example, some of the educators that were sitting outside marking the June exam papers and a parent that was busy cooking rice (food scheme for learners). The ASF Bursary Rep at St Georges High School is a Ms Sabelo. Being new to the ASF, she focused more on ensuring that the School Governing Body members and Mr Mjikelwa, the Principal (Acting) were present to meet with us. It was evident that the purpose of our visit seemed to have been misunderstood and the welcoming party was somewhat taken aback that we expressed disappointment at not being able to meet with our actual bursars. Once we explained the need to share first-hand with our bursars what we expect from them, and our wanting to share some words of motivation, encouragement and experiences we had with our bursars at the other schools, a suggestion came from the floor that an attempt be made to contact our bursars and have them possibly make their way to the school. Unfortunately, we had little time left to spend at the school.



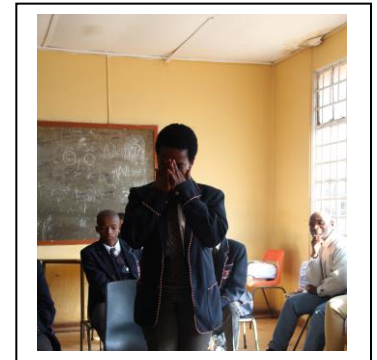
We had also arranged for our Bursary Rep, **Mr Mvumvu from Zinyosini Senior Secondary School in Ntabankulu**, to meet with us. Zinyosini SSS is located about 30kms outside of Mount Frere and going there would have taken us in the opposite direction to Bizana, which was to be our next stop en-route to Durban. Zinyosini SSS was strongly motivated for by Ms Yonela Hobe, a social worker from Dreams (an NGO) that works in collaboration with the DOE to provide life skills to learners in rural schools of the Alfred Nzo District. To say that this is an under-resourced school serving some of the most impoverished communities is an understatement. Yet, despite the lack of resources, this school is one of the highest performing schools in the Alfred Nzo District. In 2021 they had 150 candidates that sat for their final exams and achieved an amazing 98% pass mark. Mr Mvumvu, accompanied by Ms Mzolisa Mthethandaba (from Dreams), excitedly shared that all the bursars on the ASF Pgm were now completely kitted out, head to toe, in new uniforms. We look forward to nurturing the relationship with this particular school and promoting them from being an ASF Preferred to an ASF Ambassador School.

## DAY THREE (cont.) – AD TSAYINGCA HIGH SCHOOL, BIZANA

This, too, is a quintile 1 school, which means it is acknowledged by the DOE as an institution serving learners that come from some of the most impoverished communities. Albeit the school buildings were relatively neat and well-maintained, it was hopelessly inadequate in terms of accommodating the 1781 learners (40 educators) currently enrolled. Little wonder that the class sizes range from 90 to 105 learners in a class. “*We moved the desks out of this classroom so that we could comfortably meet with you, but when we are busy teaching our educators cannot even walk amongst our learners – there is simply no space*”, said the principal.



The importance of the visit was strongly emphasized by Mrs Phungula (Principal) and proceedings ran according to a neatly typed out agenda that was handed to invited guests working directly with the Dept of Education, Members of the SGB and Ms Yonela Hobe (the DOE Social Worker that motivated for the ASF to consider bringing learners of the AD Tsayingca and Zinyosini schools into the ASF Pgm). After the ASF Team addressed our bursars, speaking words of encouragement and motivation into their lives, they enthusiastically responded with individual words of appreciation and a short performance highlighting “their home circumstance & ASF impact set to background music”. One of our bursars struggled to hold back the tears as she shared: “*I can’t even find the words to speak: I am just so grateful, I am so happy. This is the first time that I have my own blazer...*”.



Our having been immersed in environments where abject poverty, grossly under-resourced schools and the city dwellers’ taken-for-granted basic infrastructure such as easy access to electricity, water, transport, well-stocked shops etc., had us toggling between emotions of sadness, anger, frustration. But then you reflect on the hearts of those you encountered, and you cannot other than feel humbled and enriched by their enthusiasm and their resolve to grab hold of every opportunity that comes their way to better their circumstance. Despite unacceptable numbers of learners being crammed into classrooms, the undeniable dedication of both the educators and the learners at this school continue to produce excellent results. In 2021 the school produced an outstanding 85% pass rate and can proudly lay claim to the fact that 187/326 of their matriculants achieved bachelor passes. As much as we would have loved to, we could not join our bursars and hosts / visitors at AD Tsayingca High School in enjoying the prepared treats; the drive to Durban lay ahead, thus we left with sandwiches and cooldrinks in hand and to loud cheers of “goodbye’s and travel safely” bidding us on our way.





The 3-day trip was a rather emotional journey, filled with disillusionment, many tears, some frustration, moments of mirth and bucket loads of sincere sharing, and it is in our experiences of these where we were all in agreement that the long hours of driving, the scary trek over Misty Mounts was well worth the effort and that the work of the ASF makes every difference.

