



MATJANA PRESCHOOL NEWLETTER

WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY PINKY SHABANGU AND MICHELLE BREAR

PRESCHOOLS RE-OPEN AFTER YEAR-LONG COVID-19 LOCKDOWN CLOSURE

It has been over a year since the closure of schools in Eswatini due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the 19th of March 2021 the government announced that schools should reopen. This came as great news for Matjana teachers who missed connecting with the Matjana kids in the classroom in 2020 and parents who worried about their children missing out on preschool education.

Our 2020 kids

The Matjana class of 2020 kids came to preschool just for a few months. When the government announced the re-opening of schools, they instructed all students should proceed to the next level (e.g.

Grade 1 students should progress to Grade 2), despite having completed hardly 2 months of learning for the level they were leaving. As teachers we're concerned because we know children learn best when they have the proper foundation and that they will struggle to learn advanced concepts if they have not learnt the simpler ideas that provide the basis for understanding them. For example, children will struggle to do mathematical problems like addition and subtraction, if they cannot count properly.

For Matjana Preschool, this means that our 2020 class missed out on a lot of preschool fun and education and will never have preschool graduation pic-

tures and certificates. Teacher Londi asked her son, who was one of the 2020 Matjana kids, about what will he miss the most about preschool. He said, "I will miss the swings and toys."

Although kids only remember swings and toys as fun, as teachers we know that they are also learning every time they pick up a toy or play on the equipment outdoors. "So we're really happy that our kids will be coming back to the classroom next week," teacher Londi said.

Parent's views about re-opening

On the 31st of March we organised a parent's meeting to discuss the way forward and how

THIS ISSUE

**MATJANA PRESCHOOL 1-2
RE-OPENS**

FUNDRAISING UPDATE 2

MEET THE COMMITTEE 3

we can make sure that our kids do not contract COVID-19 while at school. Parents also expressed their excitement about the re-opening of Matjana Preschool. One of the mums told us, "It is a great relief that the school is opening again. Keeping these kids at home is very difficult because they eat a lot of food when they are at home the whole time."

When kids are at school, they receive breakfast and lunch, which saves food for their families. School meals are a really important part of our project, because many families in the community don't have enough food. The eco-





MATJANA PRESCHOOL RE-OPENS (CONT)

conomic impacts of the covid-19 pandemic mean that families will struggle even more to buy essentials in the year ahead. We are expecting to receive school food from the World Food Program next week.

Parents were also happy about the prospect of their children learning again. A grandmother of one of the Matjana boys who has enrolled for 2021 said,, "There was nothing we could do about 2020 but we weren't happy about it. As children grow up, they should gain some knowledge at school which will help them in the future."

We also asked a mother of one of the girls, who started attending Matjana Preschool as a four-year-old in 2020, about how she felt that schools were closed last year. She said "I was unhappy about the duration of the school closure because kids missed a lot. I don't think the children's minds will catch things easily after such a long time at home." She added that now she is very happy that schools are opened, and she will try her best to do whatever it takes to make sure that her child is safe.

Measures for COVID -19

The Government's instruction to re-open

schools unfortunately didn't come with a great deal of support to enable that to happen.

Although there are rules about social distancing and hygiene, materials to enable these measures were not provided. At Matjana this means we have to supply our own additional hand washing stations, sanitiser, thermos and materials to demarcate distances on the floor. Guidelines about what to do were also fairly minimal, and no special guidelines were issued for preschools. So we've had to do quite a bit of working out for ourselves, with input from the parents of 16 children who have so far registered to attend this year.

We are thankful that our second classroom is ready to be occupied. It was initially intended to house a second class of 4-year-olds, so that they could spend two years learning at preschool. However, financially and logistically, we are not in a position to welcome four-years-olds this year. We are going to twist the initial plan and instead use the second classroom to make keeping a distance easier. We plan to have 8 kids in each room which will make our school able to fully adhere to social distancing in the classroom.

During the school closure we harvested rain-water, as we had received lot of rain in the

past season. We are so thankful to Friends of Matjana who donated water tanks in the past years, as it has made it possible for us to collect water in all our three tanks (which each carry 5000 litres) which will support the additional hand washing and cleaning needed to stay safe from covid-19, for some time. The water will help us to frequently wash our hands and deep clean our classrooms and kitchen regularly.

Re- opening of Matjana during the time of COVID also means that there is a need for the school to have an active committee who . Therefore, during the latest meeting parents elected five parents and teacher Qiniso as committee members for 2021. The new chair-lady said, "I have previously been a committee member here at preschool, and I hope with the support of other parents and teachers we will be able to ensure the kids in Matjana area get to attend preschool despite of coronavirus."

We are pleased that none of our kids or their parents contacted COVID-19 during school closure. We are also pleased to be back in the classroom, working out new ways of teaching in these unusual times.

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

We're starting the school year a little bit behind in terms of finances, but our teachers are happy that we've managed to pay them for most of the school closure period. A huge thanks to everyone who has continued to support our school even when we've been unable to operate- it's helped us provide decent working conditions and secure jobs for our dedicated teachers. If you're able to help us get back on track, please make a contribution to one of our accounts.



	Swaziland	Australia
Bank	Standard Bank	The Community Mutual Group
Account Name:	Matjana Preschool	Friends of Matjana Preschool
Account Number:	9110001038268	719585
Bank SWIFT code:	SBICSZMX	-
BSB Number:	66056441	932000

MEET THE 2021 MATJANA PRESCHOOL COMMITTEE



Name: Philisiwe Dlamini

Relationship: Grandmother

Role: Chairperson

Comment: Kind and always likes things to be done correctly. We think she'll be a great chairperson, as it's not the first time she's been a committee member.



Name: Nonhlanhla Nkhambule

Relationship: Mother

Role: Vice-chairperson

Comment: Straight talker whose been involved in the preschool as a parent before. We're pleased she has now agreed to help chair the 2021 committee.



Name: Khetsiwe Dlamini

Relationship: Grandmother

Role: General Member

Comment: She is full of jokes and we're sure she will liven up the school committee meetings this year.



Name: Tentile Tsabedze

Relationship: Grandmother

Role: General member

Comment: She is so polite and sympathetic. Like many other members, this is not her first time to have a child at Matjana Preschool



Name: Lindo Dlamini

Relationship: Mother

Role: General member

Comment: So cheeky and friendly. We're pleased to welcome Lindo to Matjana Preschool as a parent and committee member for the first time.



Name: Qiniso Vilakati

Relationship: Teacher

Role: Secretary

Comment: Loving and always smiling. Qiniso has agreed to represent the Matjana teachers in the committee once again in 2021.