

## LÈSOTHO DURHAM LINK REVISITED

*Back in February, with covid restrictions beginning to be scaled down, Rob Bianchi (LINK executive officer) made his first visit to Lesotho for two years. Regular frequent contact with Joseph had kept us in the loop but he was still curious to see what changes had happened in the interim. What follows is an edited summary of his report to the LINK trustees:*

Arriving in Lesotho I was very impressed by their Covid procedures. Everyone wears masks pretty well the whole time, hand sanitisers everywhere. Honestly it was a bit unexpected and talking to Basotho I think they are a bit surprised how well they have followed all the protocols!

Two years since being at the LINK I really noticed how much trees and plants have grown giving a really mature feel to the site. They have survived Covid pretty well and the place is in good heart, and I think I can say that I feel more positive about the LINK and its future now than I have on almost all of my previous 50 visits. Why?

### Finances

They have come through the last 2 years quite well, with a good surplus in the bank, the books have been well audited and groups are returning to use the centre.

### Centre

The grounds have never looked so good, and the buildings are in reasonable state of repair. Duke does a great job of maintenance alongside Neo who has been living at the centre with Duke for the last 2 years. They have plans for developing the centre which will include making and refurbishing a larger kitchen, making all the backpacker rooms ensuite, upgrading and repairing the hall and building a Lapa ( large covered seating area with drop down sides) This work can start in the next few weeks so that they can get the brickwork done before the winter.

### Staffing

Due to the impact of covid the staff team had to be reduced, so Joseph's team comprises Martin as activities manager, Khotso the accountant, Duke the site manager, Neo assistant site/activities, Alice in charge of hospitality, Thembi, Joseph's PA, and Mpho, project manager at Mohatlane. The cooking and cleaning is done by casual staff. They hope to appoint a youth worker. So, it is very much a slimmed down but, on the whole, a very good and committed staff team.

### Activities

In November Lesotho TV recorded a programme at the LINK which, as far as I can gather, is the Basotho equivalent of Blind Date. The net result is that it has put the LINK on the map, every weekend since has been really busy. The other factor is that, to go to South Africa, a covid test is required, it is quite expensive so people are looking for entertainments within Lesotho. The weekend I was there was full of family groups. They have also got a Facebook page which is leading to a lot of interest. One group brought a bouncy castle and trampoline ( on the shopping list for the LINK now! ) and there was a stream of children heading down for canoe trips or abseils. I assessed the best ever group of 6 trainees from the activity club for their advanced canoeing skills award, they had a real enjoyment of the water as well as good skills - a rare combination in Lesotho. They are helping Martin on a casual basis with running the activities.



Family day at LINK site

## Vision and purpose

They acknowledged the need to look after the core work and redress the balance between commercial and strategic development work. To this end they plan to appoint a youth worker to the LINK who would oversee the child centred projects such as CHH and develop work and training with Sunday schools and church based youth both at Mohatlane and elsewhere in Lesotho.

## Diocese

The relationship with the diocese has never been better thanks to the work that Joseph has been doing through training and clergy conferences. On the first day I was able to meet Bishop Vicente for 45 mins before she went off on her travels. She seemed refreshingly relaxed in our meeting. We very briefly covered things like collaborative leadership, embracing the diversity of the Anglican communion, giving some of the history of the church in Lesotho. She could be the best thing that happened to the diocese in a long while but no illusions about the challenge she has!

## Ha Mohatlane

They are feeling the loss of not having a warden or someone to head the agricultural project. However, the former head of the primary school is willing to do the job of warden for expenses and men from the village are willing to take on the agriculture. The vocational school is still attracting impressive numbers from across the country, it has a good reputation. The eggs are proving very popular, but they are getting to the point when they start replacing the layers. The place does need some repair of its infrastructure, such as water pipes not working, fruit trees are growing nicely but the place looks a bit unkempt and desperately needs the agricultural programme to start again. It was also good to see the clinic open again run by a nurse/ midwife.



Temporary warden and children's worker at Mohatlane



Rob has blood pressure tested at clinic

## Christian Education

Despite Covid they have still been able to continue training using the fund from SSM. They are working with lay ministers, clergy and others, training includes Langham, TEE, clergy conferences and training for Sunday school teachers. Joseph intends to schedule a meeting with the Bishop in the next few weeks to talk more about this area. She seems keen to train those who have been ordained without training.

So, I think overall this was a very positive experience. The staff seem happier with some very good additions, they have a renewed sense of purpose, clear responsibilities, and a mandate to develop their own areas. There is a clear programme for developing the centre and the staff are committed to that programme. It looks like a better season for working with the diocese and hopefully with much more support from the diocese for Christian education.

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