

NET VIR PRET

PROGRESS REPORT – SEPTEMBER 2019



The River Redfin Show on stage at the Baxter Theatre

Cradle of Creativity Festival

The highlight of 2019 so far has been an invitation from the **International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ)** to perform an adaptation of our 2018 **River & Redfin Giant**

Puppet Show at the Cradle of Creativity Festival at the **Baxter Theatre** in Cape Town.



The **Centre for Humanities Research** at **UWC** funded the venture and a cast of 23 comprising 5 puppeteers, 5 actors, 5 musicians and 8 riel dancers set off to Cape Town in the last week of August for the weekend event. **Aja Marneweck** assisted by staff member **Sudonia Kouter** directed the adaptation.

The show was meant to be performed outdoors and indeed there were two performances in the garden on the Saturday, but Sunday brought rain. By chance the Baxter Main Stage was available for our afternoon performance and director and cast had a frantic 45 minutes to adapt for the new setting. This they did admirably and the audience was warmly appreciative.

Grootvadersbosch

The 2018 River & Redfin Show which drew attention to the plight of our unique species of Redfin Minnow which faces extinction also led to an invitation to participate in the **Silver Mountain Music Festival** at the **Grootvadersbosch Conservancy** during July.

The Conservancy protects a critically endangered forest of fynbos and renosterbosveld and is home to several unique species not found elsewhere including a forest emperor butterfly, a ghost frog and a dwarf chameleon and their work is very dear to our heart.



Project Hope building the fish puppet

Staff member **Herman Witbooi** was commissioned to design a giant Redfin Fish puppet for the occasion and he built it with the help of the **Project Hope** youngsters. The fish together with the **Mali** puppet, kindly on loan from **Xanthe Williams**, paraded before the astonished audience while the **Johannesburg Festival Orchestra** under the baton of **Richard Cock** were joined by three of our young musicians, **Dylan Hess** (vocals), **Brandon Dyanti** (keyboard), **William Esau** (percussion) and their teacher **Gari Crawford** (guitar) in a rendition of our **River Song** from last year's show.

The Chess Club

A new venture has been the hosting of a Chess Club which drew its initial membership from players at the two local schools. The number has swelled and there are now 60 players. Led by Peter-John Takelo, the Club has had a busy year, participating in tournaments in Swellendam, Caledon, Mossel Bay and Hermanus. Five of our



players were selected to represent the Overberg in the Provincial trials - **Rhoda-Leigh Claassen, Warren Pekeur, Aiden Pekeur, Jacquin Hendriks and Zadrian Stander.**



A Barrydale tournament was held at our premises in May and players also challenged the village to pit their skills against them one Saturday morning. A final tournament is planned for late October where 80 players are expected to attend.

Interns Play

Our Interns are tasked every year with developing a play around an issue of social concern and this year's incumbents chose to look at classroom bullying. Their 40 min. play was directed by **William Michaels** and toured 24 schools in the Overberg in August playing to highly appreciative audiences. Writing about the experience, one of the actors, **Julio Malan**, says: "It was really difficult in the beginning, especially the way you had to internalise and act out the role of the character you were playing. But we just got better and better and the time came when we forgot our shyness and nervousness. The schools we visited and their learners were very positive about the play and they were grateful that we had travelled so far to visit them. I learnt a lot in the process and I have to say that just knowing that you might have done something to change a child's life is the best feeling ever."



Holiday Schools

Preparations for this year's December Giant Puppet Show got going early. We soon decided to continue to engage with theme of conservation which has occupied us in recent years. Called **The Last Season**, this year's show will feature a visitor from



another universe who is drawn to our planet because that is the only place where life seems to exist. This being will drop down in Barrydale to find an apocalyptic scene where life has all but

disappeared. Humans have gone, and all the animals and the vegetation. Only some insects have survived and they are tending the last remaining plant..... The story develops from there.

So that our youngsters can be fully engaged, the theme for the **Easter Holiday School** was **The Planets**. The 129 youngsters attending learned about our celestial neighbours and in groups were tasked with constructing a play about the planet of their choice together with masks, puppets and models for performance on the final day.



Similarly, the Winter School, focused on the **Insect World** and youngsters made puppets and masks to accompany their plays about insects. The second week of the Winter Holiday School moved to the **Vleiplaas Farm School** where farm children got the chance to be involved.

The Eco Warriors

In 2017 **Prof. Les Minter** and **Flora Cameron** brought our attention to the polluted state of the river which flows through our village and the resulting threat to our unique species of redfin minnow. Our **Young Leaders** responded by banding together in an effort to clean up the river on Wednesday afternoons and the issue provided the theme for the 2018 Puppet Parade.

This initiative received a great boost when early this year local resident **Reuben Hart** posted a pic of litter piled up against a school fence on social media. Our director **Peter Takelo**'s response was "It will be cleaned up



tomorrow!" and a meeting between the two led to the founding of **The Eco Warriors**. Since then the group has grown from an initial 8 to over 40 and they meet once a week to collect litter in the village. The Warriors are taught about environmental issues and they enjoy enormous support from local residents who have provided Wellington boots and equipment. Their work has made a noticeable difference to our streets and the river and

they are currently working on a project to create a succulent garden which will welcome visitors as they drive into Barrydale.



Satellite Library

Thanks to the much appreciated efforts of Barrydale librarian **Rina de Villiers**, we were privileged to be selected by the **Provincial Library Service** as a site for a Satellite Library which means that our youngsters





Tannie Rina and her young readers

can now have direct access to books. The library was opened in March by the Mayor, **Councillor Nicholas Myburgh**, with the Deputy Mayor, other Councillors and officials from the Library Service in attendance.

The Aftercare Programme

Every afternoon during school time, up to 55 children between the ages of 4 and 11 crowd into our Aftercare Playroom. Run by staff member **Donna Kouter** with the help of **Clarisa Jonas** and the Interns, the Aftercare Programme offers a range of activities on different days, including a reading club, drawing and painting sessions, play acting, cycling and games.



All youngsters also spend time under supervision in our computer room with the interactive **Eduplay Programme** which teaches Maths and Languages and a meal is provided every afternoon. Donna says the Aftercare Programme is where the Net vir Pret journey starts for young people who enter our doors and indeed we have witnessed many youngsters who have grown up with us and progressed from the Aftercare into our teenage programmes and then gone on to tertiary study as young adults.



adults.

Donna says, “We provide a safe space where children receive the opportunity to learn, play, explore, and express themselves and interact with others without any pressure or prejudice. Because there were no early childhood activities to support development during their formative years, many of our children lack basic skills like cutting with scissors or gripping a pencil properly. Some have difficulty in basic reading and writing. But with us they receive ample opportunity to gain competency in these vital skills which they will need to advance in school and later on in life.

“I have experienced many mornings when, preparing for the day, I find the room feeling empty, even cold although the sun is shining outside. But the moment, those small feet come in and patter across the hardwood floor, a light and warmth enters with them and stays long after they have left for the day. I believe that in the same way that the children bring warmth and light to the Aftercare, so Net vir Pret brings joy, warmth and light into the life of each and every child it touches.”



The Craft Studio

Led by **Cherie Dirksen**, the Craft Studio operates on three afternoons a week. An innovation this year has been the busing in of youngsters from the farms so that can also participate.



The Studio has been focusing on using eco-bricks to make a variety of objects, among them robots, zebras, rockets and cats.

A second focus was to raise awareness of our responsibility for the animal world and the posters produced will be part of the Studio's exhibit at the **Barrydale Library** in December.

The youngsters entered a competition to design outfits for a new range of African 'Barbies' which are being launched. Two of our students were selected for prizes.



The Pottery Studio



Also meeting three times a week under the leadership of **Jean Bittkau**, the Pottery Studio has had a busy year with a production spanning not only pots and mugs but also planters, little animals and the alien alongside.

The Studio will also exhibit at the Library in December.



The Music Studio

The Music Department has come a long way since its beginnings 6 years ago before we had our own



building, when classes were held in Derek's living room. We were lucky to have 3 exceptionally talented young people who, with their teacher **Gari Crawford**, formed the group **The Jazz Monkeys**.

This group went on to perform (and compose)



the music for our annual giant puppet show and although they

have moved on to tertiary study, they are still involved and joined us in the performances at the Baxter Theatre described above.

We were soon to discover that there were plenty of other young people with similar talents and music students now come in for tuition on four afternoons a week. As with the other programmes, the studio is now also available to children from the farms.

An innovation this year has been the partitioning of the Music Room to allow for the establishment of a



Recording Studio which will enable us to document and promote our young musicians. Interested students will also learn valuable computer and programming skills. We have acquired a computer and a 4 input sound card and Gari has provided a small monitoring system, software and additional microphones and the Recording Studio is up

and running. Local young musician **Ashwill Malan** has joined us, teaching the brass instruments that have been donated.

Gari is pleading for help with acquiring a few vital items the studio needs - cabling, headphones, a headphone amp, drum and vocal

microphones. He says they have decided on their first two projects. One is to capture and document the

musical hits from the December Puppet Shows stretching back 6 years, and the other is to produce a Riel Dance Album which captures the work Peter is doing with our youngsters.



Project Hope

Our project for out-of-school youth in conflict with the law continues to flourish. Under the leadership of staff member **Herman Witbooi**, 16 youngsters attend a daily full-time programme which aims not only at keeping them off the street and out of trouble, but also at developing their literacy and numeracy, their social and emotional skills and at providing them with technical skills which can lead to employment.

The change in some of the youngsters is remarkable. Boys who were withdrawn, secretive and emotionally troubled are transforming into confident young adolescents who are discovering their own self-worth and dignity



and have hope for the future. Our deep thanks are due to retired special needs teacher **Andries Truter** who has a special rapport with the boys and who is responsible for guiding their development in literacy and numeracy. Essential support has also come from Intern **Daylon Pienaar** who works alongside the boys every day and is a role model

for them.

Input from Dutch volunteer **Jan-Willem Witte** has been crucial to the development of the Project. Coming to spend time with

us twice a year, Jan-Willem has helped us define the outcomes we are trying to achieve and how these can be attained and measured. We now have individual profiles for all participants which measure



progress in different aspects of skills acquisition as well as progress in social and emotional learning. Jan-Willem has developed a special relationship with the youngsters and his caring and positive attitude is much appreciated.



Work at Project Hope has focussed on carpentry and the boys have learned to produce bird feeders, dog kennels, foot stools, garden tables, trays and picture frames. They now display their work regularly at festivals and carnivals where sales have been brisk. The organisers of the Matric Ball at the local high school came with a commission to construct props for the Ball on the theme of Check-Mate. They have also planted a varied succulent garden and are propagating plants for sale.

They and Herman have been given responsibility for the design and construction of the set for this year's Giant Puppet Show and they will also build the space ship which brings the alien visitor to us.

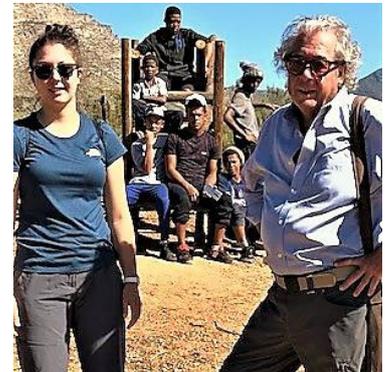
Finally, it has to be said that none of the youngsters have fallen foul of the law in the past year.

A Visit from the Browning Family

In August UK donor **Gordon Browning** brought his wife **Sue** and daughter **Frankie** on a trip specially to



visit Net vir Pret. They were with us for four days and also saw the Baxter show before heading off for the airport and home. Gordon became involved with NvP as a result of a chance encounter with our Administrator when he and Derek were the only audience on a cold Saturday night for our emerging jazz band, the **Jazz Monkeys** who were performing at the local hotel. Gordon has donated generously since



that encounter and we were delighted to be able to show him and his family at first hand the work he is supporting. The Project Hope youngsters took them on a hike through our World Heritage Wilderness Site to the waterfall and they spent time with the pottery, craft and jazz studios and also the Eco Warriors. We greatly appreciated their visit.

The Palissander Choir

We were privileged to host the world renowned **Palissander Choir** from Pretoria on 30 August when they travelled to Barrydale and performed at the VG Church in our township. The theme for their concert was Water which resonated strongly with our own concerns and the 30-srong choir opened with a resounding rendition of a Kenyan River Song, followed by intriguing original and innovative songs about water.



The **Barrydale Golden Boys** also sang, **Selanvor Platjies** rapped three of his poems, the **Vleiplaas Spiritual Dancers** presented an item and our **Riel Dancers** brought the evening to a close by inviting the choir to join the dance.

It Begins At Birth

The PETS Foundation has been in partnership with Net vir Pret since 2012. The Foundation has concentrated on developing programmes for in-service teacher training (INSET) and Continuous Professional Development, most notably an alternative approach to current practice commissioned by the Western Cape Education Department (WECD) and situated at Net vir Pret. This resulted in the development with the help of local teachers of three on-line courses in Afrikaans and English for the teaching of Fractions, Decimals and Percentages which have been accredited for CPD points and available on <http://trainingteachers.org.za>



Dr. Michael Rice engages with local teachers

PETS has promoted early literacy development in multi-lingual settings with the support of Net vir Pret, and on numerous occasions has conducted writing skills workshops, and assisted with an oral history project recording local community stories, now lodged in the Barrydale Public Library.

PETS most recent contribution to teacher development is **It Begins at Birth**, a refresher and enrichment course in Afrikaans and English for practising teachers and Early Childhood Development practitioners which supports children's early literacy learning in our multilingual country. This eight module fully interactive course is available on-line in Afrikaans and English. The course material was researched and tested with staff from Net vir Pret and teachers from several multi-grade classrooms at farm schools outside the village.

Other News

Many of our children come from indigent homes and there is need for a regular daily feeding scheme which provides hot meals. This was generously kick-started by a donation from **Ann Harries** (via EDSA) who together with Peter Takelo was responsible for getting Net vir Pret established. Briyani, spaghetti Bolognese and vegetable curry are regulars on the menu, feeding up to 100 a day.

Mike Clarke and **Lisa** and **David Hooley** contribute to the feeding scheme by bringing wholesome soup on Wednesdays and the **Lunchbox Fund** provides nourishing foodstuff to feed to the 150 youngsters attending our Holiday Schools.

Conrad Lattimer saw last year's December Puppet Show and was so impressed by our riel dancers that he offered to provide them with special hand-crafted kudu shoes. 32 pairs of these arrived this month to the delight of the dancers.



Stefan van Niekerk and the **Caltex Garage** provided much appreciated hot-dogs for everybody on Youth Day.

Chriselda Ruiters representing **Pep Stores** came to meet our young girls and presented them with Pamper Packs.

Net vir Pret hosted **Prof. Lisa Wegner** and colleagues from the **Dept. of Occupational Therapy** at UWC to assist in the collection of data for their rural youth health research project.

In a labour of love, local author **Leslie Howard** offered to undertake the mammoth task of translating the oral histories our Interns have assembled over the years with a view to publication. **Tales of the Elders** presents many fascinating stories from the past and we look forward to making it available soon.

Batro Mars guided us in setting up a **Miss and Mr Net vir Pret Mannequin Parade** during the year which gave youngsters a chance to present themselves at their very best and was much enjoyed by all.

Funding

It is in the nature of NGO work that, financially speaking, you sometimes have to sail close to the wind with the rocks not far off. Because of shifting funding patterns, this has been the case with Net vir Pret this year.

We were due to run out of funds several times over the past months, but this was averted each time with emergency funding from the **King Baudouin Foundation**, a surprise donation from the **Rivera Charitable Trust**, and substantial support from **Gordon Browning, EDSA** and **Rosemary de Waal**.

Smaller donations from well-wishers also played their part, among whom were **Rene Weinum, Zoë Wicomb, Peter Simon and his circle of friends, Albie Sachs, Geoff Budlender, Diesel & Crème** and **Bob Wolf**.

Funds are running short again at the time of writing but we do have two appeals in process and we hope that these will bear fruit.

