

## Killarney Girl Volunteers with Missionaries in South Africa

Since I was quite young, I have always had a longing to work with the missionaries, inspired by a primary school teacher who spent two years working in Zimbabwe. After finishing my Masters Degree in UCC, I decided that it was an opportune time to finally pursue this goal. I contacted my old teacher and she told me tales of her wonderful experience with missionaries in Zimbabwe. It was based on her recommendations that I got in touch with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at the MSC Mission Support Centre in Cork who put me in contact with the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at the Holy Family Centre in Ofolocolo in South Africa.

Having learned about their work with orphan children I thought it would be a good idea to do a bit of fundraising so that I could take a gift with



Yvonne gets familiar with the children

me to them. Thanks to the wonderful support of my family, friends, and local businesses in Killarney we raised •10,500 over a six-week period for the Centre. I paid my own travel expenses.

My work over three months in South Africa was very diverse; my training in computing and business plus my technical skills were always of use but the most rewarding work I did was that which involved the children in the Bakhita Care Centre.

The awful experiences that some of these children have endured is only heart-wrenching but they laughed and played like any other children despite the many losses and troubles which their young shoulders carry. Working alongside other volunteers I helped to improve conditions in the centre as well as spending much needed time with the children. We planned activities, often something as simple as making St. Brigid's Crosses but the children adored any excuse to be creative.

Almost all of the children at the Centre were orphans, those who weren't had only one parent, who was seriously ill. Their extended families could not afford to take any of them or else their domestic situation was too unstable for the child to remain in. Many of them had only two or three changes of clothing and after playing all day in the sand under the hot sun they would sleep in what they wore that day. Stones were their only toys.

The children all had the most beautiful nature and were extremely grateful for anything they got and loved spending time with us. Leaving them was very, very difficult to do and it really broke my heart. They are bursting with enthusiasm and talent and all they really need in life is a chance to shine.

The dedication of so many of the missionaries is amazing. Unfortunately, a lot of the good that is done is but a proverbial "drop in the ocean" but they strive on and simply do what they can each day. They make the world a better place one day at a time. They provide a support system for the local people and faith in a better tomorrow. I am eternally grateful to many of them for the life-altering experience I had in South Africa.

- Yvonne Aherne