



BRIDGES OF HOPE

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The late-afternoon sun streams across the valley and into the girls' room making a beautifully warm sun-spot on the old parquet floor. Abigail sits on my lap and we cuddle for a bit while we chat. We so enjoy the warmth and the light of the sun which reminds me of the warmth and light of the SON. That light that dispels all darkness! Our precious Jesus, said "whatever you do for the least of these, you do for me". And this is how Sharon lives her life, serving Jesus by serving and loving "the least of these".

"Bridges of Hope for Children" is a home in the Killarney Valley (near Cato Ridge) that Sharon began a number of years ago with a vision to see children, and the most vulnerable of our community, protected and empowered to lead meaningful and dignified lives. Sharon aims to provide a safe place and shower God's agape love on those who are neglected, abandoned or abused. I always imagine her sitting under the floorboards of society and catching those precious souls who are falling through the cracks. One of her boys is blind and does not speak; another has cerebral-palsy. A number of them have ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), ODD (Oppositional Defiant Disorder) and any other 'D' you can think of! Most of them suffered from foetal alcohol syndrome and early malnutrition. They are not easy children to work with and yet they are flourishing and thriving under Sharon's care.

Sharon is adamant that her home is NOT a children's home – they are a family. The kids are her kids and they call her "mummy". The first thing that strikes you when you visit "Bridges of Hope" is NOT the dilapidated house, but rather a home that is filled with love. These children are happy, settled, comfortable and adore their "mum".

"Better Together" is a catchphrase that will be familiar to those of us who are a part of CityHill in Hillcrest. Earlier this year, we heard and spoke a lot about showing God's love and being part of a community – something special, beyond ourselves. "WE" is more powerful than "ME".

Jesus expressed His love through action... and He calls us to do the same. *"If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear."* 1 John 3:17 MSG

We were challenged that faith and service go hand-in-hand and so we were urged to look around. Finding people in need is easy. It's not so easy to actually do something about that need. As we committed to showing His love through service – the power of community, the "better together", the "we", began to kick in. God stepped in (and He keeps doing it!) answering prayers (often in ways we couldn't really imagine) and speaking to us and teaching us lessons along the way. I have realised first-hand how different we are from each other and the importance of each of us using our unique strengths and talents to make a difference in the lives of those around us.

Our ladies group decided that we were going to do what we could to help Bridges of Hope for Children. At that stage we had no idea what this was going to look like, but we decided to start, to do something, and see where that led us. Our group immediately rallied wholeheartedly and the very next day some of the ladies had purchased groceries and gone to visit Bridges of Hope for Children.

Upon arrival, they were met by a fair-haired, angelic-looking lady living in a run-down house caring for (what looked like) innumerable children as well as some disabled adults and a bedridden older lady. To make matters worse there was no electricity and no running water.

It has been an interesting journey. We have been joined by a number of other life groups who share the burden we carry and have assisted in various ways. But even as we live out our comfortable lives, we often feel helpless and overwhelmed by the need ... and yet the Lord has spoken so clearly to me. We are NOT Sharon's saviour! As she looks to Him, relies on Him and trusts Him, and we hear Him and obey Him, we will slowly begin to chip away at the need. We long for a time when the family can live without a "struggle" – but that is not our responsibility. It is His, and His alone.

Sharon herself is an absolute treasure-chest of talent. She is so immensely capable and can do anything! But as we all know, one person cannot do everything. Our vision (as a group of "unqualified" people, simply with a heart to reflect the love of Jesus) is to come alongside her, support her in doing what she does, and try to take some of the load off her.

Serving others is part of Sharon's DNA. She grew up in a family who regularly fostered children and took in homeless people. It is something that she feels strongly that all Christians should be doing. She lives out Isaiah 58 vs 7: *"Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help,"* and challenges all Christians to do the same.

When asked how Sharon sees the future, her eyes light up and she begins to speak of her dream of offering dignity and significance to adults with special needs, who will never be able to go out into the world and support themselves. She would like to purchase the property that she currently rents in order to build more homes that can be set up with house parents. She would like to cultivate a well-run farm, where all the residents can help with the farming (vegetables, flowers, cows, chickens) and they can be a self-sustaining unit.

And so the sun dips behind the hill and the shadows fill the room. There is no longer physical light, but Abigail and I smile as I remind her that the light of Jesus' love never fades nor disappears behind a hill. She is safe, she is loved, she is home.