



L'Arche Zimbabwe

Report 2020/21



In the last five years the L'Arche Community in Harare, L'Arche Zimbabwe, has made a strategic decision to focus its attention on becoming more outward facing, to be of service to the wider community and to promote the core L'Arche proposition: that people with intellectual disabilities have much to contribute to society.

Community facts

- The community was founded in **1997** with the opening of **Ngoma House** – a large property at the south end of Harare, Zimbabwe's capital and largest city.
- A second house, **Brook House** (which is within walking distance of Ngoma), was opened in 2007.
- There are **23** people with intellectual disabilities in the community including a number of children. 22 of them being welcomed in the 2 houses.
- **120** adults and children with intellectual disabilities and their families benefit from the community's outreach, day-care and therapy projects.

Everyone has a gift

The community recognises the meaningful contribution that each member makes: this enriches their own life and the lives of others.

Trymore's welcome

Whenever a person comes to L'Arche, it's likely that Trymore Gunyere will be the person who welcomes them, always saying, with a huge smile:

"Welcome to my home, I'm Trymore."



Community leader, Time Baluwa says: ***"He finds joy and comfort in sharing the hospitality he lives each and every day. It is his and the community's gift to others who pass through. Trymore invites us all to break boundaries and enter into mutual relationships that are transformative."***



Concillia's Poetry

"Making meals every day is my passion" says Concillia Chitatu. Concillia's words are not always easy to understand, but her enjoyment of talking and her eloquence in the kitchen is undeniable. Each day she takes fresh vegetables from the garden and transforms them into mouth-watering salads. Her preparation of lunch and dinner each day for her community is nothing short of poetry in motion.

Unifying Joshua

Joshua, a member of the Ngoma house, has a special gift for bringing unity to those around him – just by his presence. Time says "Joshua has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair. Because he is non-verbal, at face value, some people may think that he cannot do much without the support of others. On the contrary, Joshua has changed the lives of many people who have passed through L'Arche. Joshua has a unique ability to communicate through facial expressions. When members are in a moment of desolation, Joshua will console them, brightening up everyone with his warm smile. He unites all the house members and celebrates with them in moments of happiness. Joshua is a sign that the community is a place where everyone is welcome and each person can meaningfully contribute to its growth."

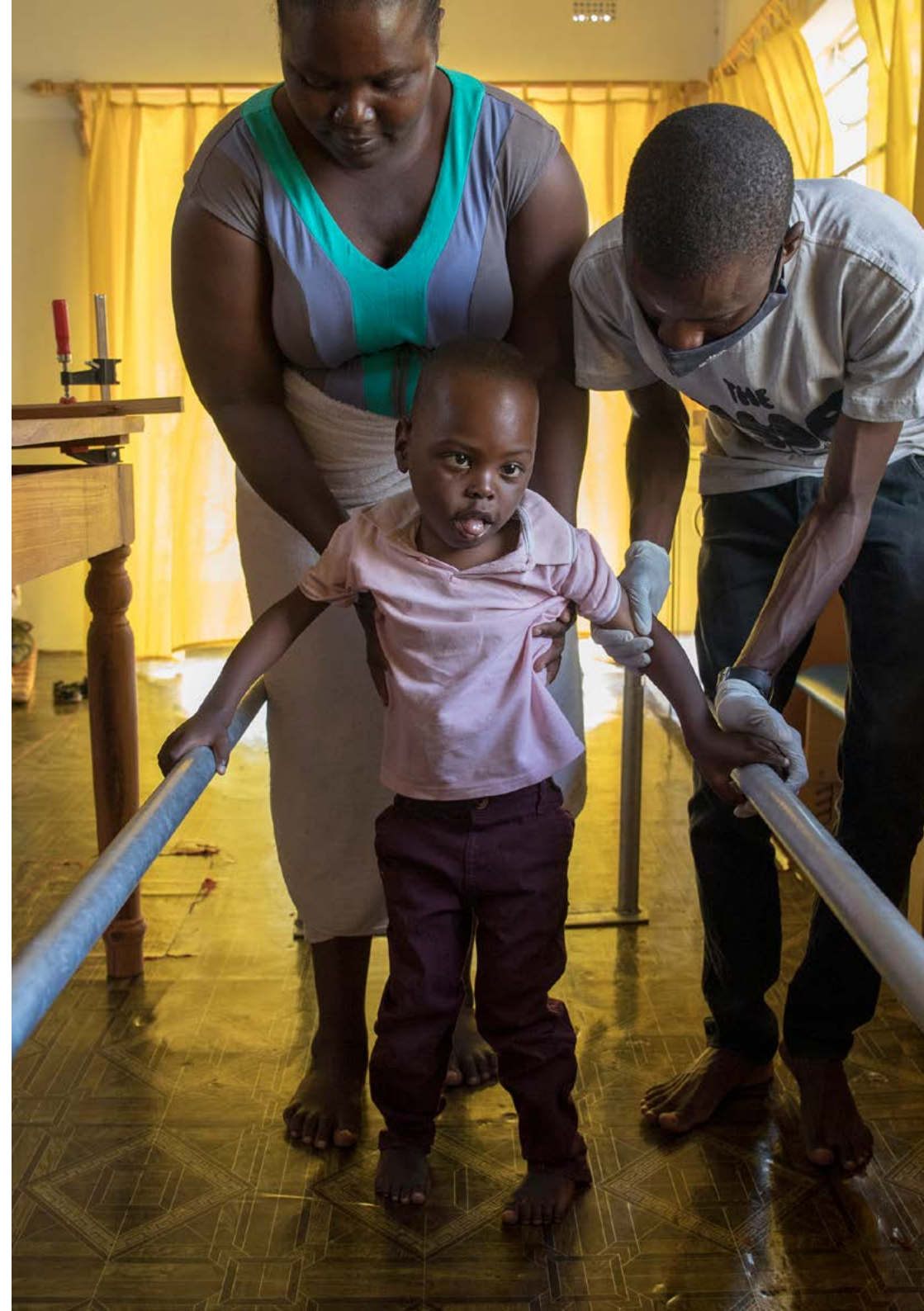


Education and Therapy

Much of the activity within the community is now focused on two buildings in Ngoma's grounds: these now serve crucial functions not just within L'Arche Zimbabwe but also for the broader Harare society, as day-care and therapy centres.

The day-care centre was created in response to a lot of young people in and around the community who require an education catering for their individual needs. At the day-care centre, children and young adults with intellectual disabilities learn basic language, math, and other foundational skills. The program is open to any child with intellectual disabilities from Harare or beyond. It has already proved a great success. For instance, Benon Mafaniso, a twelve-year-old who lives in L'Arche was transferred to a nearby school for children of all abilities as a result of his academic achievements.

The second building became a therapy centre and it was officially opened in 2019. An occupational therapist and a physiotherapist use state-of-the-art equipment to provide individualized care to people with intellectual disabilities through massage, exercise, and other therapeutic practices. The therapists have made incredible strides to improve the quality of life for adults and children with intellectual disabilities. In the spirit of L'Arche, sessions are open for people with intellectual disabilities from anywhere in Harare.



The dignity of work

People with intellectual disabilities experience a sense of fulfilment, productivity and purpose from participating in the work projects which also contribute towards community income.

In largely rural Zimbabwe, agriculture is a cultural touchstone and the community excels at growing cabbages, carrots, onions, tomatoes, and maize. Two core members, Tino Dzenga and Enock Sixpence, oversee the garden daily, exercising their green fingers and thumbs. Excess vegetables are sold in the market. L'Arche Zimbabwe also has a carpentry workshop as well as a mill for grinding maize flour and other products for its customers.

2020 saw a major new addition to the L'Arche Zimbabwe community: 950 chicks! People with intellectual disabilities are raising chickens through their whole life cycle. The success of the program has been largely thanks to the daily efforts of the whole team led by Judy Mafuratidze. The community consumes some of the chickens, while most go to the market.

The community also has a range of craft activities designed for all abilities, whether that's dipping candles, sewing clothes, or designing beaded purses. Again, the sale of all of these products enhances the dignity of the people who made them and generates valuable income toward community costs.



"No matter the topic, the broadcasts carry the same message: for those who don't yet understand the potential of a person with intellectual disabilities, come to L'Arche to see what people with intellectual disabilities can contribute."
Time Baluwa, Community Leader

Reaching out

There's an all-too-common belief across Zimbabwe that people with intellectual disabilities should stay on the side-lines. A belief the community is working hard to dispel through a number of initiatives.

To change the country's narrative around what it means to live with a disability, L'Arche frequently works with radio stations to educate listeners. Recently it featured on ZiFM Stereo and Capitalk 100.4 FM.

In partnership with the Special Olympics, the community co-hosted a seminar on Sexual Reproductive Health in November 2020: this partnership enabled them to reach a far wider audience.

On a smaller scale, but part of the same bid to promote inclusion, the community started a social soccer team, creating opportunities for people with and without intellectual disabilities to meet outside their usual spaces.

L'Arche has also been partnering with well-known artists, organisations and influencers of popular culture. In April 2019, Leonard Mapfumo, a beloved Zimbabwean musician, visited the community. After his visit, Leonard tweeted to his thousands of followers: *Disability doesn't mean inability!*

Today's biggest challenges



Financial Context

According to the World Bank, July 2020 saw inflation in Zimbabwe peak at 838%. The pandemic and its impacts are disrupting livelihoods, especially in urban areas, and have so far added 1.3 million people to Zimbabwe's extreme poor. Estimates suggest this number reached 7.9 million in 2020 – almost 49% of the population.

Prices of most goods and services are still rising month on month and there has been a significant rise in income tax. The banking sector has also increased charges substantially. For the community, this has been compounded by the loss of income from their various projects.

Impact of Covid

With support from L'Arche International and donors, the community was able to prepare for Covid including the sourcing of thermometers, hand sanitisers, gloves, liquid soap and rapid screening tests.

Throughout this period the community has been reaching out to people with intellectual disabilities and their families, parishes, neighbours and other organizations working in the same field. They have been giving Facebook live talks about their experience and expanding their outreach program to support families.

Tadiwa has intellectual disabilities and lives at home. His mother says *"The visits of the L'Arche outreach team during the Covid period made us feel that we are part of a caring community which reminded us that we are not alone."*

Back at the community, to keep spirits up, creativity was encouraged with new musical instruments and games; the Internet was installed to enable and promote communication between the houses and with other communities around the world. Happily, as a result of all their precautions, in 2020, L'Arche Zimbabwe did not experience a case of COVID-19.