It was a much quieter, but in many ways, no less busy end to 2020 than any other year. There were no big preschool graduations (although of course, the kids themselves still got made a fuss over and recognised for their progress during the year, especially those moving on to Grade R), no big World Aids Day events, no Jabulani staff end of year celebrations and I’m sure there is no need to even mention why. It was of course a slightly melancholic but fitting end to a year that had tried and tested us all in a myriad of ways.

One of the biggest conclusions that the end of 2020 marked, was us calling a completion to our ‘ECD in the Home’ programme. It is not often that we stop a programme, but we have always maintained that we will only start and/or continue a programme for as long as there is a need. Once that need is no longer or there is someone better placed to continue the work, we will withdraw. Our ‘ECD in the Home’ programme has been running since 2012, engaging parents in early childhood development (ECD), assisting them to better understand when children start to learn and how they learn, and equipping them with the skills to support their child’s early learning. Since the start of our programme, Philani’s ECD Mentor Mother programme has worked alongside us in the community ECD space, implementing playgroups for children who live too far away from preschools and for many years we even trained together regularly as we all sought to best meet the needs of this community and improve our skills and knowledge in order to do so.

When Axium Education started working in Zithulele, their focus was on Grades 10-12, as there was a desperate need to improve the level of education of those nearing the end of school in a bid to improve their chances of gaining entry to tertiary education. The longer Axium Education has been in Zithulele and its surrounds and the more successful the incredible work they are doing in education has become, the more they have been able to expand the scope of educational support they provide, providing more coverage of the ‘cradle to career’ concept; and while there are still some grades that are not getting direct support, Axium now offers educational interventions from early literacy and numeracy, through to grade 12. Their Community Readers (called Nobalisas) work with schools as well as running reading clubs in the community, and their intention is to instill in children a love of numbers, stories and reading as a foundation for all future learning.

Between Axium Education and Philani Mentor Mothers, community-based ECD in Zithulele is now well covered. There are still arguments that could be made for and against us continuing our ‘ECD in the Home’ programme and ending it was a hard decision, but ultimately we believe the end of 2020 was the right time for us to draw back from this. We will still be working hard to engage parents and caregivers of our preschool children, as we still believe it is important to get parents on board with their children’s education, but ultimately we have peace that we have made the right decision and it is time for us to leave this vital work in the hands of others. A very big thank you to everyone who has supported this amazing programme over the years.
At a hospital down the road from where Nelson Mandela grew up, the rural community still lived without the standard of health care their compatriots took for granted. More than a decade into the country’s democratic era, the hope and promise of freedom hadn’t yet changed the chance babies had of being born alive, or children making it to their fifth birthday. Making life “better for all” takes more than rhetoric and policy. It requires real people, doing real jobs, often under difficult circumstances. At Zithulele, a “sticky core” of four doctor friends responded to the call to make a difference. Their story is one of hard work and humanity. There’s heartache; at times, hilarity. But mostly, it’s a story of hope; a story of ordinary people doing their bit to make South Africa better.

That is the official ‘blurb’ from Dr Ben Gaunt’s book; Hope, a Goat, and a Hospital, that he published last year to celebrate 15 years of working at Zithulele Hospital. Ben, along with his wife Taryn, and Drs Karl and Sally Le Roux, founded Jabulani in 2007 while working at Zithulele Hospital, and they continue as active members of the Board and/or as Directors. We obviously can’t separate ourselves from our bias, but even trying to think as objectively as possible, we consider this a great read. As one reader has commented in an online review, “It is readable, funny, heart-breaking and incredibly inspiring”. Certainly, if you’d like to get a taste for what it is like to work and live in a place like Zithulele, you should read this book. You don’t need a medical background to understand the more medical stories and the array of stories means there is something for everyone. Click here to buy a print or electronic version and if you’re on Kindle Unlimited, you can read it for free!

When Ben and Taryn came to Zithulele and when they founded Jabulani along with Karl and Sally, they did so with the phrase “If you don’t have a dream, how can you have a dream come true?”, as part of their inspiration. Since then, “Living the Dream” has become adopted by many as a Zithulele slogan of sorts, the real beauty of which lies in the fact that the actual dreams can be different for everyone but the power of a group of people working towards achieving dreams can be immense.

In 2019, we did a ‘dreaming exercise’ with the full Jabulani staff team. Whether they thought it realistic or not, teams were encouraged to share what their dreams for Zithulele were. Contributions ranged from having a harbour at Lubanzi beach and a shopping mall in the village, to a museum and a coffee shop. Something that almost every group mentioned, was to have a college or skills development centre of some kind as this is a much needed step along the path towards better livelihoods. It was such an interesting exercise and so thought-provoking.
micro-finance projects, through our Rural Ability Programme we have worked with apprentices and community based savings and credit groups, and since last year, we have made our first forays into small scale agriculture. We believe that the time is now right for us to be pursuing this and with an enthusiastic architect on board waiting to draw up plans, we are working hard to raise funds to build what we believe will now be a Livelihoods Access Centre – somewhere for people to gain access to opportunities to learn new skills/grow their business/gain knowledge; somewhere for our clients with disabilities to engage meaningfully with able bodied members of society; a place where people from different backgrounds can gather socially, providing opportunities for stigma and prejudices to be challenged; workshop spaces for entrepreneurs who need intensive mentoring; and training spaces for courses to be delivered.

Clockwise from top: sewing group project; business entrepreneur - leather making goods; apprenticeship programme for people with disabilities

AT A GLANCE

YOUR TALENT...OUR REWARD

We might have made in-roads into small scale agriculture, and the land around Zithulele might be fertile and arable, but unfortunately we all know that money doesn't grow on trees. We are in a slightly unusual position this year, in that for the first time in many years, our funding position is a bit fragile. Some of this is due to Covid-19 and the economic impact that this has had on grant funders, some to do with two of our large grant funders making strategic changes in the direction and focus of who and what they are funding making us now ineligible for their support, and some of it is purely down to our own growth and therefore increase in costs and the ongoing challenge that it is to keep up with this. We ask that you have faith with us for provision for our needs, and we urge you to support us where you can – perhaps you have a birthday coming up where you feel you could suggest donations to Jabulani in lieu of gifts; maybe you have out of the ordinary cooking or baking skills and would like to host a meal or coffee afternoon and donate the proceeds from tickets to Jabulani; a sponsored hike or bike ride in Jabulani’s name? We all have different skills and talents...are you able to turn yours towards assisting us to alleviate some of the funding strain this year?

OUR VILLAGE...YOUR VILLAGE

Become part of our village through the MySchool MyVillage MyPlanet initiative. You can now download the app for free on the Apple App or Google Play Store. Then all you need to do is sign in, search for Jabulani Foundation and choose us as your beneficiary (if you already have a card, you can still link yourselves to us as you can have up to three beneficiaries) then scan your virtual card at till points to donate to Jabulani every time you shop. It is not just Woolworths where you can scan your card; there are a number of stores that are part of this initiative - Loot, Waltons, Builders, Engen and more. It also has a handy search function so that you can put in your location and find out what stores near you accept their card. Real support, the virtual way. Every cent counts!