

Our First Year of Impact

Hello friends, sponsors, and followers!

On 12th September, we marked one year since leaving the UK to begin our Opening Doors journey. We registered as a South African NPO in April 2024 to prepare for the move, and this milestone has been both a personal and organisational adventure. You can read more of our story at www.openingdoors.co.za/our-story.

Our first 3 weeks were spent in an Airbnb while we searched for a rental (and ambitiously, our forever home). Despite the wet summer, which, as Brits, we were completely used to! It felt incredible to finally be here.

We quickly reconnected with community contacts and, most importantly, with our boy Elihle (more on him later). From day one it was boots on the ground: meeting people, hearing their stories, and helping one family at a time. "You can't change the world, but you can change the world for one person at a time."

So, what does one year of Opening Doors look like?

Here's a glimpse into the impact, challenges, and heartfelt moments we'd love to share with you...

104

Children with school supplies

28

Baby Boxes given to Young Mums

6

Birth Certificates Obtained

8

Grants Successfully Issued

58

Food Parcels Distributed



BACK TO SCHOOL PROGRAM

Many children miss out on education because they don't have the basic uniform. Some wear ripped clothing, and others walk long distances in shoes with holes.

November and December were busy months of referrals, home visits, and pulling together a database of children who needed uniforms for the new school year in January. We made trip after trip to NuShop and Gem Schoolwear, buying uniform, shoes, bags and stationery. So far, 104 children are proudly wearing the uniforms we distributed: shoes polished, bags packed, and big smiles on their faces! Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, children who were once at risk of missing out on education now walk to school with dignity and confidence.



Would you consider sponsoring a child's school uniform, with a donation of R650 (approx. £30)?



YOUNG MUMS PROGRAM

South Africa faces high rates of unplanned pregnancies, and many young mums need urgent support. That's why we began creating Baby Boxes as part of our Young Mums Program. We shipped hundreds of donated baby clothes from the UK, and after re-washing everything that got soaked during travel, we packed bags filled with clothes, nappies, sleepsuit or blanket, hygiene items & formula if needed. These are small packages with a big impact. It's a reminder that someone cares about them and their baby.



MORE THAN JUST A MEAL

Hunger is one of the biggest challenges families face. Our food parcels, which cost between R400 (approx. £18) and R800 (approx. £35) depending on the size of the household, include essentials like maize meal, rice, flour, veg, cooking oil, potatoes, beans, bread, chicken stock, soap and washing powder. Each parcel can sustain a household for 2–3 weeks.

Could you help sponsor a food parcel, while we help find employment?



JOB READINESS

Despite what some people may think, the families we meet don't want to rely on us for help. They don't want to rely on the government either. People want to work and provide for their families. This is where we have started to support them on that journey. We assist by creating CVs, or simply making copies of an existing one if they don't have access to a copier, then connecting them with local businesses to find opportunities or helping with online applications.



BIRTH CERTIFICATES & GRANTS

Without a birth certificate, a child can't finish school, and parents can't apply for the government's child grant. It is often a child's first step toward security and the grant, just R560 (approx. £25) per month, isn't much, but it's a lifeline for some.

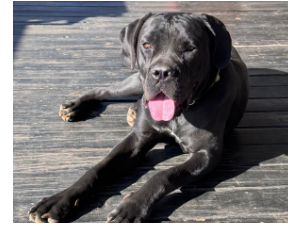
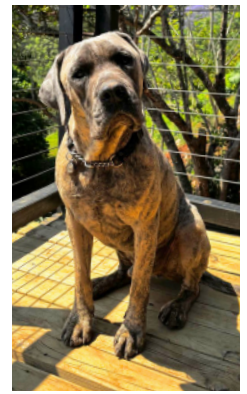
We step in to assist with paperwork, transport to Home Affairs & SASSA, and guidance through the process. Claire battles the online portal weekly (glitches galore!), and when that fails, an in-person visit takes a full day. Patience is key!

The Mamas pictured here had tried since their children were born to get the Birth Certificate. Now all six children have certificates, and three of four Mums have secured grants. One Mama hopes to return to school in January, while we're helping the others search for work.



OUR HOUSE HIPPOS!

We did a lot of research into the best breed of dogs to have around children, and although much comes down to training, we chose the Cane Corso. Apollo and Bella joined the family in November at 14 weeks old and have been amazing. They're very cheeky at times, but that's the puppy in them! They've completed their puppy training and are growing fast. Weighing 40kg each at just a year old, they sometimes forget their size, but they're loyal, affectionate, and love a cuddle. Don't be fooled though, they know their job!



ON THE ROAD

Navigating the terrain of 1000 Hills requires a reliable 4x4. A 7-seater was also a necessity for Opening Doors activities. Unfortunately, buying a car is more complex than buying a house, for those who aren't residents! After a 3-month search, and Claire wrestling with paperwork, red tape and licensing, we finally purchased a Toyota Fortuner in December, the perfect fit for our needs. We added a second vehicle in April, which Aaron mainly drives for collections and deliveries.

If you see either of us, give us a wave!

A HUGE THANK YOU!!

Some of the amazing Intellek team, one of Opening Doors' charitable sponsors, took to the skies with a skydive to raise funds for the children and families we serve. A massive thank you for their courage and to everyone who cheered them on and donated! Together, they raised over £1,000 (approx. R24K).

THANK YOU!!



FOOTBALL, FUN, AND LIFE SKILLS

Our football training sessions now attract 35+ children every week, many of them incredibly talented and love the game. We thought the language barrier might be more of an issue, but football seems an international language that everyone can understand!

Football is more than just a game: it teaches teamwork, respect, and discipline, creates potential role models, while offering a safe alternative to bars and drugs. Thanks to donations, we've handed out kits, boots, and balls and seen first-hand how sport builds community.

It's not just football they love here.... This is South Africa!! Cricket and Rugby are very popular, and although we haven't got a huge amount of knowledge on these, we're going to try and hope volunteers will one day bring their skills to expand these programs.



OUR FIRST EMERGENCY CASE

In December, we received an early evening call about three children left alone all day while their mother went out. The oldest was just six. We arrived before 6pm; the door was locked but we managed to get inside. The children were sitting on a rug, with only the TV for company. There was no easy exit if an emergency had occurred. Thankfully, neighbours had reported the neglect. We took the children for food and then went to the police station. It was after 6pm, and the officers explained the lack of local support and asked if we could care for the children overnight. We weren't fully registered yet, but in this emergency, they completed paperwork allowing us to help. Of course, we agreed. Back at our rental, the children had baths, pizza, story time, and cuddles. Travel cots we had brought were set up for a proper night's sleep, and these were a huge upgrade from the floors and under-table sleeping they were used to.

The next morning, we had breakfast together and then met social workers, who found relatives for the children. With new clothes, a cuddly toy, and some books, the children headed to a safer home.

We are grateful to have been a bridge in their time of need. Stories like this remind us why a registered 24/7 facility near the community is so vital.



ELIHLE

Many of you have already heard about Elihle... the little boy who stole our hearts. It was an emotional reunion after months of staying in touch from afar.

We met Elihle in Jan 2024 whilst delivering school uniforms to his family home. He was turning two in March and weighed only 9kg. He was very under-weight and had a serious chest infection. Before we headed back to the UK, we took him to the clinic at 1000 Hills Community Centre, and the amazing nurse got him on the mend. We also arranged and paid for him to attend creche there in the week so he could get the nutritional meals needed to get healthy.



After staying in touch from the UK, thanks to 1000 Hills and Elihle's wonderful Auntie Thenjiwe, we arranged a visit as soon as we arrived in September. We would take him for food and to the park and after two weeks, he came to stay for the weekend. The weekends turned into 3...4...5 days. In November 2024, it was agreed with the family that he would live with us full time. We're still very much in touch with his family and he visits them on a weekly basis. It's important for him, us and the family too. Everyone realises what a special little boy he is, with the most amazing character.

From weekend visits to becoming a permanent part of our family, he has brought immense joy to our lives. Elihle's room was the first to be completed in our new home, and he loves it! He continues to thrive, excited to start a new school in January, while staying connected to his biological family.

OUR FOREVER HOME

After accepting an offer on our UK house in December, we began the search for a permanent home in South Africa, a base for our family and the perfect spot for what we had planned for Opening Doors. We had a long list of needs and a few wants: a family home with space for friends, relatives and volunteers, a personal space for Aaron, a space for the baby home and temporary emergency care facility, and room for all the projects we dreamed of.



Deborah, our fantastic estate agent at Remax, helped us find the perfect property. After seeing beautiful houses that didn't tick all the boxes, we discovered a "wild card" in Drummond, just 10 minutes from the communities we serve. It needed work, but with our builder Derrick onboard, we knew it was possible and renovations are underway. Aaron's cottage is finished, the property has been equipped with new security fencing and CCTV, and the gardens are now safe and level, with a shallow pool perfect for little ones. The main house is being updated, and the three-bedroom cottage will house volunteers and temporarily accommodate emergency cases.

MOST EXCITING OF ALL...



The property we recently purchased includes large stables, which we're now converting into a DSD-registered baby home, a specialised CYCC and Temporary Safe Care facility.

This much-needed space will provide day and night care for infants of young mothers in our Young Mums Program, as well as for emergency placements referred by local authorities.

Many of the young mums we support have no family to help with childcare. Too often, this leaves them facing impossible choices: dropping out of school, giving their baby up for adoption, or, heartbreakingly, feeling they have no option but to abandon their child.

In our baby home, mums can visit anytime, and their children can go home on weekends and holidays if they wish. This ensures that young mothers, aged 20 and under, can stay in school or vocational training while knowing their babies are safe, loved, and cared for. They no longer have to choose between their education and their child.

Our model tackles high school dropout rates, reduces long-term grant dependency, and builds sustainable futures through education, skills training, and preventative outreach to reduce teenage pregnancies. It's early days, but we believe Opening Doors truly can, and will, open doors to brighter futures.

Would you like to be part of this transformation? Help us bring the baby home to life... sponsor a room, lend a hand, or support the renovation in any way, near or far. Your contribution makes this dream possible for young mums and their babies.

Contact us to get involved and make a real difference today.

WE WELCOMED SONTA TO THE TEAM

We were thrilled to welcome Sonta to the team earlier this year, as our Community Liaison. She's a teacher at a local High School and brings energy and innovation to every lesson... even to the sleepiest students on a Monday morning!!

With her wealth of experience, passion, and energy, she's a perfect addition to our team.



YOU HELPED MAKE IT HAPPEN



A heartfelt thank you for all the incredible donations over the past year, from online contributions to the many heart-warming gifts we've received.

We've been so grateful for the clothes, nappies, a cot, and changing table dropped off for our little ones. A local neighbour even donated a well-loved jungle gym! Our amazing team repaired and restored it, turning it into a safe, beautiful space for children to enjoy for years to come.



A special shout-out to our wonderful supporters in the UK too. A mum and daughter who sent over 100 toys via Takealot, and to friends and family who sent two suitcases filled with football gear.

Your kindness and generosity continue to make an incredible difference. Thank you!

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL @OPENINGDOORSAFRICA
WE'LL KEEP YOU UPDATED WITH REGULAR SOCIAL POSTS AND QUARTERLY NEWSLETTERS

LOOKING AHEAD INTO 2026

As we look to our second year, our priorities include:

- Converting our stables into a fully functional DSD-registered baby home
- Expanding our young mums support program
- Welcoming local and international volunteers

TO ALL OF YOU...THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT AND MAKING THIS FIRST YEAR POSSIBLE.
LOVE JAY, CLAIRE, AARON, ELIHLE AND THE OPENING DOORS TEAM XX