



Phoenix launches education fund for burn survivors

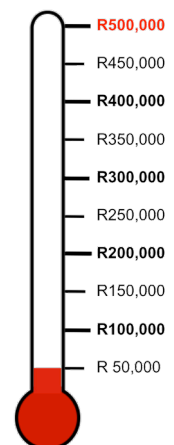
Education provides a child with skills and knowledge to become a productive and fulfilled member of society. This is especially true in the case of persons with disabilities, who may be excluded from a range of jobs that would be accessible to uneducated persons. Many burn survivors fall into this category; see the article on education and rehabilitation in this issue. Moreover, burn survivors often need long-term follow-up after being discharged from hospital. Such follow-up treatment includes counselling, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and surgical procedures.

The sad reality is that paediatric burn injuries in South Africa are very strongly correlated with poor socioeconomic circumstances and the associated use of open flames in confined spaces for cooking, heating and lighting. In such poor households, there are simply no resources to support special educational needs, beyond what is covered by State-funded public schools, many of which are desperately under-resourced.

Phoenix, and the burns team in the Red Cross Burns Unit have identified two particularly promising five-year-old children with exceptional capabilities and resilience for whom a sound education will be the only hope to realise their potential.

Phoenix has established a fund to support both education and access to follow-up treatment for burn survivors with severe, extensive injuries. The fund is meant to cover the costs of tuition, board and lodging and also transportation to hospital for follow-up treatment from primary school up to Grade 12. Phoenix plans to cooperate with St Josephs Home for Children, which was founded by the Pallottine Sisters in 1935 in Cape Town.

The fund has been seeded with R50,000 and we appeal for donations to reach our target of R500,000. Donations to this fund are tax deductible. For more information, or to donate, see the Phoenix website www.pbp.org.za.



Education and rehab go hand in hand

Although the majority of burnt children recover well and can conceal most of their scars under clothing, there are those whose injuries are too extensive to hide – typically those with 40% and higher body surface area burns, and particularly those who have suffered burns of the face and/or hands. These individuals are very rarely seen in public places and find gainful employment almost impossible. Sadly, in South Africa such persons do not qualify for disability grants, even though they are effectively unemployable.

Once the bandages are removed, the dire needs of survival in the face of extreme poverty take precedence over rehabilitation and many patients default on their follow-up and rehabilitation visits to hospital. The Phoenix *Bear With Your Rehab* programme is designed to encourage patients to return to hospital for follow-up treatment.

Paediatric surgical units in South Africa abound with former patients returning year after year well into adulthood to show their gratitude to the medical teams that treated them and gave them a second chance at life. By contrast it is almost unheard of for survivors of severe burns to return to what they experienced to be hell on Earth. For this reason, long-term follow-up is dismally poor and very little is known of the long-term fate of burn survivors after they are discharged from hospital. However, the anecdotal evidence is extremely disturbing.

Schooling is a huge challenge to the disfigured burn survivor due to a general lack of public awareness of the adversities encountered by such persons on a daily basis. In school situations, staring and relentless teasing result in many children dropping out of school soon after attempted reintegration. These young people effectively drop out of society or find themselves exploited by criminal gangs or drug and prostitution syndicates. Often, suicide is the only release from such a hopeless existence.

Ironically, modern technology, and particularly information technology, allows for people with major disabilities to lead somewhat normal lives and to be economically productive. However, proficiency in the use of such technologies requires a solid education. Such schooling should be complemented by ongoing access to rehabilitation in hospital.

For these reasons, Phoenix has decided to start an education fund. The objectives of the fund are twofold: Firstly, to ensure that children receive a sound education in a supportive environment that provides for their basic needs for food and shelter; Secondly, to ensure that these children continue to have access to follow-up medical care in hospital.

If you would like to make a difference, go to www.pbp.org.za and pledge your support for this Important cause.

Burns and poverty

Poverty and burns is a controversial issue. The much-publicized, tragic burn injury of Pippi Kruger captivated the minds and hearts of South Africans in early 2012. Over R1 million was raised rapidly to pay for imported cloned skin, a treatment modality that is still considered investigational internationally, with very limited data on the long-term outcomes. This case raised public awareness of burn injury and its associated challenges. As a result, the number of skin donors also increased dramatically.

During this time, at least three children, all with more severe burn injuries than Kruger's were fighting for their lives in a Cape Town public hospital, and no doubt many others like them

were elsewhere in other South African state hospitals. Standard tried and tested cost-effective therapies were used and the outcomes were excellent. However, for those children, no large funds were raised, no private rehabilitation facilities are available and no special equipment will be fitted in the shacks that they will be returning to. There is a good chance that they may not return to school, and should the parents be working, many will be without proper day care. These children must not be overlooked.

Phoenix pays tribute to Pippi and to our many poverty-stricken burnt children being treated in our state hospitals. They are all brave little heroes!

The need for a national skin bank

We are all aware of the importance of donating blood to our national blood banks before holiday periods, which are fraught with road accidents and emergency surgeries. Have you ever thought about what would happen should there be a massive fire resulting in a large number of severely burnt people? Consider, for example, a fire in a busy nightclub, or in a factory, or even a bomb blast in a building or train. Such incidents could result in many casualties, with burns so large that there would be insufficient unburnt skin to graft onto the burnt areas. Donor skin is life-saving in these instances.

Donor skin can be harvested from live donors, but is preferably taken from deceased donors, within 12 hours of death. The skin acts as a temporary biological dressing for about 7 days, before rejection starts and replacement or re-grafting with own skin is required.

Donor skin stabilizes the physiological mayhem created by the lack of skin. Temperature regulation, fluid losses, infection risk and pain are all factors that immediately stabilize once donor skin is applied to open burns. Only about 5% of donor skin is not rejected in the long term. A donor needs to be free from cancer and infections, but no tissue matching is required and all racial skin types can be grafted onto anyone. Tattoos are not a problem, either.

Removal of the donor skin is done within 12 hours after death and only a very superficial layer of a few microns thickness (much like grass burns) is removed from the back and the back of the legs and arms. Unused donor skin, when not specially frozen, is only viable for one day. However, with deep freezing, the skin can remain viable for up to five years.

In some countries, such as Spain, all citizens are considered organ and skin donors, unless they document their refusal to donate. In South Africa, one must be a registered organ donor, and even then one's family may override this by refusing to consent to organ donation.

Due to our complex transplant legislation and also due to a huge lack of awareness about skin donation, it is very hard to find donor skin for large burns. Countries such as Israel have started national skin banks, where enough donor skin is stored to cover up to 30 adults completely at any time. The skin is frozen and

can last for 5 years. Dr Alan Rodgers, a plastic surgery registrar from Groote Schuur Hospital, visited Israel earlier this year to investigate the possibility of establishing a similar capability in South Africa. The start-up cost for the necessary equipment is around R1 million. Phoenix is ready to support this very worthy cause by working with like-minded partners to establish a national skin bank in South Africa.

PHOENIX FIRE MONITOR

Fires reported during the past three months in local news media in Cape Town.

- 13 Oct 2012, Eye Witness News
Man killed in Robinvale (Atlantis) fire;
200 shacks gutted in Valhalla Park and Uitsig
- 17 Sept 2012, Cape Argus
1 killed in weekend fire in Taiwan settlement (Khayelitsha)
- 4 Sept 2012, Cape Argus
2 parents killed in Malawi Camp fire (Elsiesriver), child survives
- 27 Aug 2012, SAPA (News24)
1 man dies in Khayelitsha shack fire
- 26 Aug 2012, Eye Witness News
1 killed, six homes destroyed in Heideveld fire
- 20 Aug 2012, Eye Witness News
2 houses destroyed in Matroosfontein, 17 homeless; man killed in Ravensmead fire; man and boy die in Overcome Heights due to stove fire, 4 shacks destroyed.
- 6 Aug 2012, Eye Witness News
5 people died in separate blazes across a few days in Lavender Hill, Nyanga and Atlantis
- 15 Aug 2012, IOL News
1 man killed and 2 firefighters injured at Masiphumelele fire. Approximately 1500 shacks and some formal houses destroyed. Estimated 5000 displaced.
- 7 Aug 2012, SAPA
Masiphumelele fire leaves 140 homeless
- 6 Aug 2012, Cape Argus
2 Sisters die in Haines Park shack fire (Phillipi East); Nyanga woman dies in blaze that destroys 6 shacks, 24 displaced; 13 Adults & 11 children displaced after house fire in Lentegeur, Mitchells Plain; Gugulethu fire destroys shack displacing 2.
- 7 Aug 2012, Cape Times
Man dies in shack fire in Lavender Hill
- 6 Aug 2012, SAPA
Woman dies in Witsand (Atlantis) shack fire
- 6 Aug 2012, Cape Times
2 children killed in Phillipi shack fire
- 5 Aug 2012, Bush Radio News blog
Woman killed in Nyanga fire
- 30 July 2012, Bush Radio News blog
Imizamo Yethu (Hout Bay) fire kills 1
- 21 July 2012, Eye Witness News
2 men die in Ottery shack fire, 1 shack destroyed
- 15 July 2012, SABC News, 7pm
Shack fire in Hout Bay informal settlement destroys approximately 50 homes, over 200 displaced

TOTAL: 25 persons killed, 6251 displaced

We extend our heartfelt condolences to all who lost loved ones, homes or possessions in these tragic events.

VOLUNTEERS' PAGE

Supermum is also a Supervolunteer

Leigh Whitaker is mother to two toddlers and has volunteered for Phoenix since May 2011. In between working and studying accounting part-time, she still finds time to organise kids' parties, bake cakes, and clean bushels of previously-owned teddy bears for the *Bear with Your Rehab* project. Leigh is also a regular donor to the *Care Package Project*.

Leigh's mother, Sandra, previously collected toys for Phoenix. And now Leigh's grandmother, Esme, has also sprung in to assist! Esme and ladies from a knitting circle are creating toys for a wonderful initiative of Leigh's - The Teddybears Picnic.

Leigh is organising the Teddybears Picnic at the Miniature Blue Train in Seapoint to top up toy reserves. Bring new or used Teddies to gain entry and once inside there is plenty of fun to be had with rides on the Blue Train, a jumping

castle, face painting and various kiddies games.

Why does she volunteer for Phoenix? Leigh says, "probably because I feel directly involved in making a difference to the children and it is wonderful to know that just by cleaning and fixing a few toys that there are children going through really hard times that benefit. I want my girls to grow up helping other people and Phoenix has offered me a way to instil this in them from an early age." **Diarise the Teddybears Picnic - Blue Train, Seapoint: Saturday 9th February 2013, 10h30 - 12h30.** If you would like to help with implementing or sponsoring this event, call May Bleeker-Phelan on 082 932 9504.



Patricia Waight (centre), a Phoenix Council member and organiser of the Care Packs project, with two other regular volunteers, Rene Esson (left) and Blanca Vazquez (right) from the Constantia Catholic Church's Ladies Group, providing Care Packs, snacks and hand-knitted jerseys and beanies to children and their mothers in the Burns Unit.

Thank YOU! We gratefully thank all our individual donors and the following organisations: Action for Burns and Children, Bishops Preparatory School, Catalyst Communications, Catholic Women's League, Catholic Church of Constantia, Cripps Sears and Partners, Paterson Cooke, Danielle Twigg and the ROSE Foundation.