

DUST IN OUR HAIR  
STORIES FROM THREE2SIX CHILDREN

CELESTE.....9

CHLOÉ .....15

EXAUCÉ ..... 19

PATIANCE..... 22

LUCKY ..... 27

Project Coordinators: Justine Kimbala and Charlotte Margerit Byrne

Writer: Maren Bodenstein

Design and layout: m+m Studios

Photographs: Debbie Yazbek, David Edwards

Foreword: Prof Jonathan Jansen

Thank you to the parents and guardians and young people who participated in this project.

Published by Sacred Heart College, Johannesburg, South Africa

© Text: Sacred Heart College.



If you would like to support our activities, you can donate to Three2Six by visiting our website here:

<https://three2six.co.za/donate/>

Each donation counts and helps us make a valuable change in the lives of our learners.



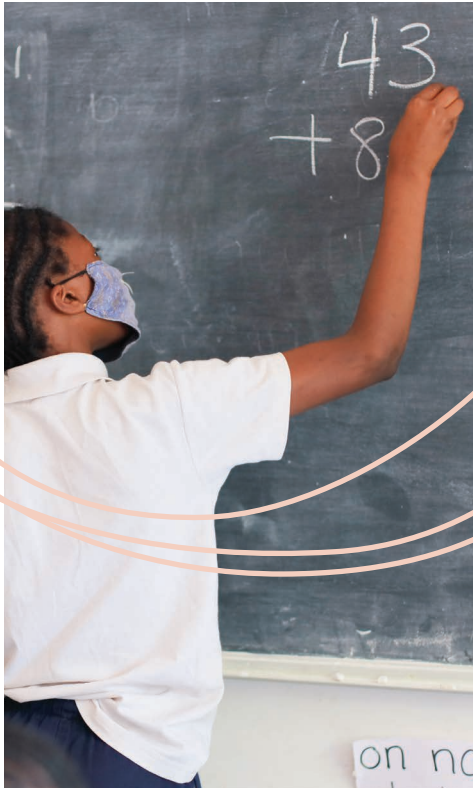
**THREE2SIX**  
Refugee Children's Education Project

## REFUGEE CHILDREN'S STORIES

“

Lucky feels safest when he is with his parents. He loves the colour blue because “*it is shiny like the sky*”, but most of all, he loves his mother. Elizabeth too feels very lucky to have Lucky in her life.

# THREE2SIX IMPACT 2008–2022



**240**

**DIRECT  
BENEFICIARIES  
PER YEAR**

**1200**

**INDIRECT  
BENEFICIARIES  
PER YEAR**

**2597**

**children offered a safe  
learning space, who would  
have otherwise been left  
out of the educational system**



**683 463**

**meals to our beneficiaries**

**12 036**

**food parcels to our  
community**





To Eileen and Jim Hornor

Park Row Charitable Trust

Thank you for supporting the Three2Six project!

## FOREWORD

# LIVING AND LEARNING BETWEEN FEAR AND HOPE



There is something deeply moving that emerges from this collection of stories of refugee children trying to live, learn and love in post-apartheid South Africa. To the rational mind, theirs is an improbable story. How could children fleeing danger end up in a country that exposes them to new dangers? How can a country like South Africa, whose people know first-hand the pain of being declared foreigners in their own land, express the same behaviour to those from the same continent? And what happened to notions of pan-African solidarity when it comes to refugees from war-torn countries? These are questions, I confess, that are hard to grapple with since it goes to our very humanity.

The fear and hope in these children's voices are palpable even though I have not met any of them.

They write with an innocence and a force that makes it difficult to look away. How will I find a new school “without papers”? The fear of violence, even death, stalks them at every turn. Sometimes there is a reflection after an episode of violence that perhaps it is better to return to their home country, whatever the risks. I cannot imagine what it is like to be caught between two states of emotional distress where neither country is hospitable to these children.

And then there is hope.

The children write with great joy and appreciation for those South Africans that offer an alternative, a school of hope where teachers love and embrace the refugee learner as if s/he were their own. This is the country I love and that keeps me from descending into utter despair. The moral underground, a borrowed title, is one I often use to describe institutions like Sacred Heart College and other education sites where the refugee learner finds acceptance and a way out of poverty and danger. It occurred to me as I read the stories that here schools become a safe place, a refuge from the danger outside. This is a function of schools that does not find much space in the research literature where the focus is narrowly on teaching and learning, rather than also on these powerful social roles of schools in conflict and post-conflict societies.



I am not sure what our public schools teach in Life Orientation or just common human decency but this is an issue we should elevate to curriculum consciousness in education, the treatment of children from other African country (or any continent, for that matter).

Teachers have a responsibility to make a point about our intertwined histories, such as the simple fact that many African countries whose citizens we now mistreat, offered refuge to thousands of South Africans in exile during the anti-apartheid struggle; there is history lesson here and not only one for LO.

For the geography teacher with a critical conscience this is an opportunity to point to the colonial constructions of borders that separate African countries and why being xenophobic plays right into the hands of the colonialists. I often wonder whether the decolonization activists think about this question

of colonially constructed borders when fighting for rights and recognition within them. The economics teacher also has a role in education, if not re-educating young South Africans, by putting data on the table that shows the economic contribution of refugees and immigrants more broadly vastly outweighs whatever costs there might be to the native taxpayer.

My point simply is that the only effective counter to this creeping xenophobia in South African schools and society is the education of our citizens. This requires a broad curricular approach rather than one focused narrowly on subjects and performance on tests and examinations.

While we wait for such enlightenment, this precious book offers a sensitive and powerful set of insights into the lives of refugee children mostly in their own voices. You would have to have a heart of stone not to be moved to empathy and action. And with just a little reflection it might occur to you that under different circumstances, that fearful and hopeful child could have been your own.

**Jonathan D Jansen**

Distinguished Professor of Education  
Stellenbosch University





## CELESTE

13 YEARS OLD | GRADE 6 | SACRED HEART COLLEGE  
THREE2SIX

**E**ven though I was born in South Africa, I see myself as a Zimbabwean because that is where my mum is from. She left Zimbabwe in 2006 and I was born three years later. She worked in a hair salon in Yeoville and that is where she met my father who came from Nigeria. He left my mom in 2015 or 2016 because things were difficult for him here. But he is back now and I try to keep contact.

My brother Prince was born in Zimbabwe in 2005. My mom had to leave him there when she came to South Africa because she first wanted to find a proper place and then fetch him. I was four when he came to join us. We are close. My cousin and my aunt also stayed with us but last year my auntie passed away. That was the worst day of my life.

In 2013 my mom had to go to hospital because the chemicals in the salon made her sick. She has asthma. Now she can't work there anymore and braids hair for people. We are now four. My little brother is one and a half and my sister is still at Holy Family [College] Three2Six.

*I was only ever in Zimbabwe once when my grandma died. I was very small. My mother said it was difficult because we had no papers. We had to go under the bridge over the Limpopo. There were people who help you cross, my mother carried me on her back. It was dangerous.*

*What makes me very angry is getting chased from where we live. We were chased from our home twice. It made me feel bad and sad. It was when there was xenophobia. They were going through the houses to check that there were only South Africans living there. Where we lived, the person who owned the house was a Zimbabwean. They chased us out and burnt down the house so that only South Africans can renovate that house. They told us to pack our things and go. We went to this blue flat where there were Zimbabweans. It was very bad. There was no water or electricity. We had to buy water and there were bad people there.*

*Another time I was going to drop my young sister at school, we saw people burning cars and chasing people. When we got to our house some people chased us away. They told us to take our things because they were going to find better people who are South Africans. Now we have not moved for a while. Our landlady understands our situation. She is a South African. I have South African friends but, in our area, there are mainly people from the Congo. Most of my Zimbabwean friends have left because of the situation.*



*When I was seven my mom applied for me to go to Holy Family Three2Six. My brother was already there. We had to wait three months and then one day Mam Justine [the Three2Six campus co-ordinator at this College] interviewed me and I was accepted. Then when it came to Grade 4, I could not get in to Three2Six at Sacred Heart [College]. I went to this school in Yeoville but my mom couldn't afford the school fees so I had to stop. It was hard not to be at school. I felt like I am missing a lot. In the morning I watched everyone going to school and I wished it was me. After school the others were walking together, taking each other home, speaking about what happened at school. I was so depressed because even if my mom had a small job, I still had no papers. So how would I ever get to school?*



*In that time, I tried to have a timetable for myself. I went to my cousins to ask for their old books. I watched TV and waited for my mom to send me to the shops. I cooked because when my mom is out looking for work, she comes back tired. I also clean, tidy up, change my little brother, make my sister neat, help her with homework, and that type of stuff.*

*I do everything with my big brother's help. Prince keeps me in check. When my mother didn't have money to send me to school, we were sitting together and he said: "How would you feel if I get a job and put you through school?" I said, "I don't think I will ever go back to school because I am far behind with my studies."*

*He said: "Don't ever say that again because maybe one day mom will make a plan that you go back to school or get our papers."*

*Prince and I do judo together. When we were at Holy Family, Sensei came to school and asked Mam Justine if he could train us. I was eight. Judo teaches me to protect myself. My brother hasn't been able to go to school since he finished Grade 6 here at Three2Six, because my mom doesn't have money. So he spends most of his days doing judo [...]. He is really good. Sensei is very kind. We even went to Durban with the judo team.*

*I was at home for one year and six months and then one day I was playing on the street when the Three2Six bus drove past me. Mam Justine saw me and asked why I am not at school and I said I was chased out because my mom can't afford school fees. She told me that my mom should apply to see if there is space. That Monday I was in school again, this time at Sacred Heart Three2Six. I went straight into Grade 6 without doing Grade 5. I felt so happy to get education again. Education can take me anywhere. I can be a doctor, an accountant, a psychologist. If I hadn't come here, I would have been in trouble.*



*I am quite impressed with myself because I caught up fast. My teacher always says she is impressed with me. The best thing is that I get to learn many things and I don't feel judged for being a refugee. At first I was shy, then I made friends. My friends make my world safe. It feels like my second home. The teachers are wonderful. They stop us from fighting or bullying and teach us not to be judgemental because we are all equal. As seniors, we treat the young ones as our siblings. If one of their teachers is not around and they fight, we tell them not to. We also play with the little ones. This school has taught me how to love, be kind and respect each other. Mam Justine is my favourite teacher. She has been my teacher since Grade 1.*

“

“My dream is, if my mom is still

alive, to build her a house. I want to

look after her like she did for me.”

*School meals are nice. I love food. When there is no food at home then I am lucky because I eat at school. When I am hungry, I feel weak and sad. My friends will be running around joyful but I don't have the strength.*

*Being at school makes me feel so happy. What I love most is my friends and teachers and the volunteers. Now my favourite subject is English, and Life Skills. I love playing netball and reading. My mother also loves reading. We get books from her friend.*

*What has made me strong is my mom. She makes me feel safe. Even though sometimes life is hard and we go to bed without food she will make sure that the next day we go to bed with food. Even though she doesn't have work she makes sure that we sleep, we clean, we bath, everything. She also makes sure we have shelter.*

*Home is where I feel loved, happy and joyful. If I get chased from here, I can go to the other home in Zimbabwe. I am happy to have two homes. A family does not always have to be happy, but home is a place that is warm and where I feel loved.*

*If I could change something in this world it would be that people should not be judgemental. I would like to change their minds so that they know that there is no one better or worse. Some people think they are high and we are low. When you have no money, no food, no papers, no place, you can feel like you are not one of them. My mother taught me not to listen to bad words from other people. I should always remember that we are all equal.*

*My dream is, if my mom is still alive, to build her a house. I want to look after her like she did for me. I would like to go to Zimbabwe again to visit my grandmother, my cousins I have never met them. My mom is trying to organise money to go to Zimbabwe but we won't have enough money to get back. I would like to take her back to Zimbabwe one day.*

*I am really scared of next year because I am not sure if I will be accepted at any other school without papers. I am also going to have to find new friends and be with people who are judgemental.”*





# CHLOÉ

11 YEARS OLD | GRADE 6 | SACRED HEART COLLEGE  
THREE2SIX

In 2011 Chloé's father, a medical doctor, was killed in Kinshasa and his family was evicted from their home. Her mother Solange decided things were not safe and fled to South Africa. She left behind her six children, vowing to fetch them as soon as she had found her feet. At the time Chloé was only three years old.

When she got to South Africa, Solange sold tomatoes and vegetables on the street. Like many other refugees, her goods were often confiscated by the police. In 2012 she met a truck driver from Burundi. He was a kind man who helped her send money to her children in the Congo. When their son was three months old, her husband was killed in a xenophobic attack. He was a Tutsi which means she will not be able to take their son to the Congo until the conflict there is resolved.

When Chloé was nine, Solange came back to fetch her and her older brother Prince. She soon realised that her children had been maltreated by their uncle. They were often not given breakfast with the other family members and they did not receive the money she had sent them.

Every night Chloé's brother had to massage his uncle's back and was threatened with a beating if he stopped. Chloé's older sister lost two teeth after falling off a bunk bed.

*"When my children came to South Africa, they just wanted to touch me all the time. As if they had lost something. They must have missed me."*

One day Solange's friend who was also selling in the streets, found her crying bitterly. She had just returned from Home Affairs in Pretoria and had been refused papers for her children. This meant that they would not be accepted at a government school. Her friend told her about Three2Six and Solange immediately walked all the way to Holy Family in Rosebank. She applied for her children to attend and after that came to the coordinator's office every day until she was told that her children were accepted.

*"The first time I walked into the school I saw how neat the kids were and their bags were put down carefully. I was so happy. My one son did not get in here and he goes to government school. When I see the difference in the education he gets, I cry. The teachers here love our kids. They do things nicely. The other school doesn't like 'makwerekwere'. On the day they teach Zulu my children always come home crying: "The teacher insults me. She says I don't know Zulu." Here the teachers are good and love our kids."*



After school other children from Three2Six like to come to play at Mama Solange's house. She thinks that this might be because she herself loves playing so much. She also loves singing, she even recorded a song in a studio in Kinshasa. She writes songs about the Congo and about her feelings. She has also written a song about Three2Six which she is eager to perform one day.

Solange's biggest struggle is to find accommodation for her and her children. Because she has seven children, landlords raise the rent. Currently they all live in one large room in an apartment in Bellevue.

*"The place is not nice. We are not safe there, but I do not have a choice. I am selling food outside. The tsotsis came and stole my chair and the phone. The other day they cut someone's finger. Nowadays I am doing braaiing and sometimes I ask Chloé to help me. I need to show her because who knows what happens tomorrow. She must know everything. I keep telling my children that one day everything is going to be fine. My children keep me strong. One day when I die, I will know they will be okay because they have a good education."*

Mama Solange's eyes shine when she speaks about her daughter, Chloé.

*"Chloé sometimes surprises me. She does all the schoolwork herself. I never have to remind her. She likes to give me small surprises. Even if there is no money on my birthday she will come into the kitchen and sing for me. She has a very good heart. If you see a cockroach in the house and you want to kill it, she will say: "No leave him!"*

*She can do everything well. She could be a lawyer or a doctor. I would like her to be the Minister of Education or the President. She can do anything."*





Chloé comes across as playful, witty and very wise. She also is one of the top three achievers at the Three2Six project.

*“When I was born the first thing I did was cry. Everyone cries when they are born. Life is full of tears and full of happiness. When it is dark, I can sit alone and think about life. When I wake up, I thank God for waking me up.*

*I was born in Kinshasa in 2008. When I was six my father died and my mother came here. I stayed behind with my big sister. It was so sad when my father died. Everyone was crying. My aunt, my mom, everybody. And then they kicked us out of the house and my sister had to start working.*



*And then my mom went to South Africa. She was away for years, we were all alone and did not go to school. The happiest moment in my life was when I saw her again (and when we went to Gold Reef City with Three2Six.)*

*We got here on 15 August 2018. I was 10. We left my big sister at home and I miss her so much. We took a plane to Lubumbashi, then we changed cars and drove in trucks and a bus to get to Johannesburg. It took three to four days. We had dust in our hair and eyebrows. The trip was terrifying and hot, but also fun! We saw lots of animals like monkeys and giraffes and drove through different countries.*

66

“I like history. It helps you

understand the world. The world

is cruel.”

*Coming to South Africa was very scary because I could not speak English. I spoke French and Lingala. I learnt English from my friends. People were laughing at me in the park. The first English word I learnt was ‘chicken’. The first few months here I was so sad and I cried a lot. I was shy and I never talked to anybody. I was lonely and isolated.*

*In 2019 I started Grade 3 at Three2Six. My brother Prince is also at Three2Six. The first day at this school was scary but soon I was happy and relaxed and could be like everybody else. Now what makes me the happiest in my life is coming to school every day. I like the way they teach here. They give you more freedom. I love that we get free books, uniforms, the holiday programmes, camps and trips. Getting food here helps us a lot because sometimes my mom does not have money to buy us food. I wish my day here was longer. I would also love it if we had a nice blazer.*

*If I was not at school now, I could be one of those kids who smoke and drink. School gives me hope. When I arrive at*

*school, I feel safe and happy to see my friends. I think the school has made me more confident. It has taught me that even if life is hard, you can still make it in the end. They have also showed me here that there is good in the world. I can see that some South Africans are good while others don’t want foreigners in the country.*

*It makes me scared. I would like South Africans to know that we are all Africans and that South Africa is for everyone. Xenophobia makes me so angry because they kill a lot of refugees, like Congolese. My mom’s friend in Durban was killed. My mom is stressed a lot. My biggest wish in the world is to buy my mom a house where we can live with my brothers and sisters. And to end the war in Congo.*

*I like history. It helps you understand this world. The world is cruel. I read my sister’s history books. She is in Grade 9. Sometimes we debate things. Some people forget where they come from, how their ancestors lived. I have read about the history of the Congo. It is still my home and I would like to go back. I love the songs, the dances and the clothes. My mother keeps the traditions. We cook Congolese food Thomson, Tillapia, Dindon, pondu, kwanga and she sings. I miss the food and my friends. When it was dark, we used to sing.”*



# EXAUCÉ

20 YEARS OLD | FIRST YEAR STUDENT | UNIVERSITY OF JOHANNESBURG

*“When I was born, I was not awake, I was dead. The doctors had to perform some miracles. That is how I got my name. It means God has answered my prayers. And God is still with me. Sometimes I think to myself: what if I had not made it? I wouldn’t be able to tell a story about myself. Telling my story means a lot to me.”*

Exaucé has just finished his first year exams in sports management and marketing at the University of Johannesburg. He is a volunteer at Sacred Heart Three2Six and runs art classes. He also coaches netball and soccer to the Three2Six pupils. It is important for him to give back to the place that took him in ten years ago when he was an undocumented eleven-year-old from the Congo.

*“This place means a lot to me. This is where I started. I didn’t know English or anything about the country before I came here. This is also where I found out that I am an artist.*



*I had my first lessons at a holiday festival at Three2Six and enjoyed it. I didn’t have materials to continue but in Grade 6 I started drawing again. One day I drew a bird and everyone realised that I was really good at it. Now I use art to express myself. I look at what has happened in my home country and what I see around me. Soon I am going to have an exhibition in a restaurant in Braamfontein.*

*Whenever I walk through the gates of Sacred Heart I feel excited, like I have come home. The drivers of the Three2Six bus recognise me. Even the security recognises me after 8 years. We are family.”*

Exaucé came to South Africa in February 2012 with his mom Nene and his two younger siblings. Two years earlier his father had left the Congo because of the war. He had been working as an engineer for the military and then later for the Red Cross.

Exaucé remembers his early childhood in the Congo as carefree and fun. The family owned a compound in a semi-rural area outside Kinshasa and his father provided for them. Even as a boy he was deeply religious and longed to be a server in church.

He attended a local school but did not like the military style discipline, he was too sensitive. His father used to take lots of pictures of him, all the pictures of his first day at school show him crying terribly. Later his parents moved Exaucé to a Spanish school which he loved.

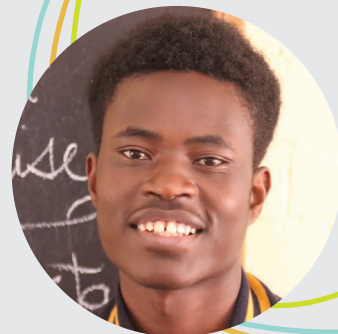
After Exaucé's father fled to South Africa the house he had built was taken away by government officials and the family had to move to their grandmother's house in Kinshasa. Exaucé remembers the soldiers moving about, sometimes shooting. Once the family had to stay indoors for a week. As the oldest child, Exaucé made sure that when their mother came back from work the house was clean, and everything was in its place.

Exaucé does not remember much about leaving Kinshasa. His mother sold farming equipment to finance the trip to South Africa. He remembers that they couldn't say goodbye to their family properly because his mother believed it might jinx the journey and that his cousin took them to the airport in the middle of the night, hours before they were due to leave. It was the boy's first time in an aeroplane and the pilot invited him to sit in the cockpit. Instead of a few days, they were stuck in Lubumbashi for four months waiting for papers. In the end, they never got them.

On the way to South Africa the bus broke down in Zambia. They had to sleep in a tent next to the road.

When the children had to hide under the seat at the South African border post, Exaucé realised that they were in a foreign country and it felt frightening. In Musina they were reunited with their father who they had not seen for two years. Home Affairs kept them for four days and they had to sleep outside. On the way to Johannesburg the bus was stopped and the family were told to return to Musina. Luckily, the other passengers persuaded the police to let them go and gave them a bribe.

Finally, in March 2014, the family arrived in Johannesburg. When Exaucé left the Congo he had had a brochure called "A Portfolio of Places" with luxurious places to stay in South Africa. He has kept it to remind him of how his illusions of South Africa were shattered. Initially the family shared a room with a friend of their father. He found employment in a wealthy white household as a gardener and also did some maintenance work. A strong bond developed between the families which has lasted till today.



Exaucé's mother was given asylum seeker status, but he and his siblings did not get any papers. This meant that they could not enrol at a public school. Luckily, Nene managed to get her children into the Three2Six programme. Exaucé was put into Grade 5 and his classmates from the Congo helped him to integrate.

Three2Six has showed Exaucé the good things about South Africa. Outside the school he experienced xenophobia and racism but the school taught him to stay positive about life. It also offered him a peaceful space in a turbulent life.

In 2016, just as Exaucé was finishing Grade 6, tragedy struck. Exaucé's father died of lung cancer, leaving the family almost destitute.

*"The night my father died I was studying for exams. I was so angry that he died. He shaped me, taught me how to behave, and how to choose friends wisely. Because we lived apart, I didn't know him that well and now I have so many questions I want to ask him. He used to take us to different places and made sure we had fun. He even took me to his work and showed me how to use a forklift and those big machines. He gave us an experience of life. I don't want to leave the arts – my dad did love art – but my dream of starting a company keeps me going. I love business. When my father died, I was very demotivated, but now I feel I want to build a company in honour of him."*

“I often dream about being together  
with my whole family again.”

With the help of his school and human rights lawyers, Exaucé and his siblings finally got their papers in 2017. After he finished at Three2Six he went to Yeoville Boys and Barnato Park, and in Grade 11 and 12 he received a scholarship to attend the National School for the Arts.

During COVID Exaucé managed to get a volunteering position to fumigate the courts and other spaces at the Department of Home Affairs. Last year he worked in shopping malls, saving enough money to pay for his studies.

Even though most of his friends have left the country and there is still civil war, Exaucé dreams of returning to the Congo and building a business with his uncle.

*"If I go back to Kinshasa I would like to go to where I was born. I often dream about being together with my whole family again. I want to visit the house and tell the person who is living there that this is my home. If I could change the world, I would provide houses in the rural areas. There is nothing better than home. You can starve and if you don't have a home, it can be deadly. You are not safe. It creates dangers and tensions."*

## PATIENCE

9 YEARS OLD | GRADE 3 | OBSERVATORY GIRLS' PRIMARY SCHOOL THREE2SIX

Patience is the only child of Alice and Peter from Zimbabwe. Peter is a bead artist and entrepreneur who came to South Africa in 2004. At the time there was a wave of funding for the arts and crafts and he was given many commissions, including for the World Cup in 2010. He began selling at markets, some was even displayed at the interior design show called Decorex. However, after a bad business partnership, Peter decided to leave the art world and move to Johannesburg. Since 2013 he has only worked sporadically.

*"I feel as if everything was fighting against me. Nothing, nothing went my way. Being a Zimbabwean citizen creates barriers. I have been blocked from many activities. I have many projects in my mind but I am tied. I do proposals and people are happy, but now there is this operation Dudula which has come like a whirlwind, changing people's minds about working with me." (Operation Dudula is a xenophobic organisation known for intimidation and street violence.)*



To survive Peter has done maintenance work in exchange for a room for his family. He has joined an agency that gives him intermittent gardening jobs. His wife Alice works once a week as a domestic worker. He explains that he does have a passport and papers but does not have enough money to take his family to Zimbabwe to renew them. He refuses to give up. Always keen to upskill himself, he is currently doing a course in digital marketing. Something else he refuses to give up on is his sense of dignity.

*"My main aim is to make sure that our family have food and live in a place that is clean and quiet, and where people are respectful."*



Peter and Alice have known each other since they were young, they met at church and were married in 2012. Patiance was born at Baragwanath hospital in 2013. After the birth, Alice fell ill and went with Patiance to live with her parents in Zimbabwe. Four years later they joined Peter in South Africa again.

*"I was born here. But when I was small, I lived in my country. What I can remember is that I always followed my mother around. It was beautiful. I have two grannies and family in Zimbabwe. I want to visit them again in December. My daddy came twice to visit us in Zimbabwe and then I came here with my daddy and my mommy. I was only four. I was happy because it was a fresh start. I'm a Zimbabwean and there is no other place I can go to. I like South Africa but I don't like that there are thieves here."*

Since she was four the couple has had, at times, to leave Patiance alone in the house when her parents went to work.

*"Sometimes my mom is not there then I make my own breakfast. In the morning I clean around the house. I am a little scared when she is not there. I always lock the door. I am scared of elephants and sharks."*

Patiance's life changed when she got into the Three2Six programme at Observatory Girls' Primary School.

“

“This school took our children

when we did not know what to do

and where to go.”



*“Being in my class makes me feel safe. My friend Alisha is a sister to me. She likes writing and we like reading together. I love learning, reading and writing. I feel less lonely here. I’m not that shy. The teachers are good, sometimes they are strict. My favourite teacher is Mrs Moyo. I like the way she teaches, the way she explains. She is so caring. This is the only school I have ever been at.*

*Before I went to school life was so boring.”*

Peter adds: *“I don’t know where to start explaining how important the school is to me. Right now there are children who didn’t make it into this school who are at home. This school took our children when we did not know what to do and where to go. When you come here, everyone is seated. It teaches the children to be disciplined and smart.”*

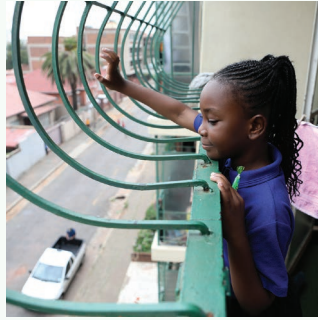
Peter feels it is important to protect Patiance from the difficulties of their lives and their struggles. He also prefers her to stay indoors, and when she goes out, he keeps a keen eye on her.

*“Outside it is not safe so I don’t let her go out in the street. She is always in the house and doesn’t play with the other children.”*

But there is another reason for staying indoors. Peter:

*“When we have no money, we stay in the house. We don’t go out, talking to people about our problems. This is our life. Patiance understands. I tell her that when we have money, I will buy her everything. Before we go to school and also when she comes back, we pray with her that God opens the door and gives her parents work.*





*One day when we did not have any food, I found R2 and I bought a tomato. We cut it up and ate it with pap. The bag of vegetables we used to get from school has meant a lot to us. During lockdown we also got food parcels and vouchers from the school."*

It is probably not surprising then that Patiance's favourite place in the world is the park, all parks. She loves the swings and playing with other children. She also wishes that she had a sister or brother.

*"It's not fun to be the only one, you are sitting alone. Having friends isn't the same. I see others with their sisters and I just cry. It makes me very sad. My favourite person in the world is my mom. We like going shopping together. She likes cooking and I like helping her. Wherever I go she goes with me."*



Patiance is now in Grade 3.

*"I am going to another school next year, but I don't know where. My friends here at school are Lerato, Alicia and Thabiso. We like to do surprises for our teachers. Today we brought food, cake, drinks and balloons to stay thank you to her for teaching us."*



# LUCKY

10 YEARS OLD | GRADE 3 | HOLY FAMILY COLLEGE  
THREE2SIX

Lucky's mother, Elizabeth, grew up in a rural district near Bulawayo. Her father was a subsistence farmer and her mother was one of three wives. When Elizabeth was 13 years old she had to leave school to look after her grandmother. From there she was shunted around from one family member to another and never managed to return to school. She met Lucky's father when she was very young. The couple have three children, Lucky is the middle child.

Elizabeth left Lucky's father as he became increasingly abusive. She went to work as a domestic worker in Bulawayo but her earnings were not enough to support her children so she decided to join her sister in South Africa. Her first job was in Alberton, she was paid R1000 a month to look after a baby for five days of the week.

A year later Elizabeth went back to Zimbabwe to attend her father's funeral. She was shocked to find five-year-old Lucky emaciated and neglected.

He had been moved from his paternal grandmother to his maternal grandfather, and then to a step-grandmother. None of them had the resources to look after him.

Lucky remembers.

*"When I was in Zim there was no food. Sometimes my grandfather and my grandmother went somewhere and they did not leave me any food. I just drank water and slept. My brother was away at school so I never saw him. It was bad there. I stayed in different places."*

Elizabeth decided to take the boy back with her to South Africa. Lucky found life in Johannesburg very different to rural Zimbabwe. His mother and aunt had moved into a flat in Hillbrow. He found the people strange. As was the language they spoke. He learnt English playing in the streets with some boys from Malawi.

Elizabeth and her sister sold tomatoes and amagwinya in Hillbrow. *"Selling is my talent, even though I don't have an education"*, she says proudly.

She could not afford a creche or private schooling, so for the next three years Lucky stayed at home. Elizabeth taught Lucky basic writing skills, but most of the time he watched TV or played with other children in the street.



*"When I was not at school, I was feeling scared. When I went outside the other boys would make me scared and I ran back home. I had to stay inside the house to play. When I saw the other children go to school, I was sad. Some of my friends are naughty and others are good. Some bully and play games for fighting. When you sleep, they will hit you hard. I get angry when someone hits me. Another boy taught me fighting, but my mother stopped me from fighting."*

In 2020 Lucky's mother found out about Three2Six so he was able to go to school when he was eight years old.

Lucky explains:

*"Sometimes I am lucky and sometimes I have bad luck. I was very unlucky when I had a car accident.*

*It was before I came to school. My mother, my aunt and I came from church on Sunday. We wanted to cross the road. I was looking up at the buildings and the car came very fast. I didn't see. I fell on the car. I was lucky that I didn't die.*

*I was so lucky to find this school that is so beautiful. The first day I was scared to make new friends. At school I get joy and love from my teachers and friends. My favourite person at school is my friend Lifa. I learnt to draw at school. I like to draw water and fish. I also learnt to swim. On my happy birthday we went to Ellis Park to swim. I like to read and write. My favourite book is the Bible because it talks about Jesus' love. My happiest day is December 25. It's when Jesus was born.*



“At school I get joy and love

from my teachers and friends.”

*I prefer to be at school rather than at home. Lockdown was bad because we did not go to school. Sometimes we saw people striking and then we had to go back home. In the house I watch TV. Sometimes I do my homework and practice reading. I like to watch movies: Fast and Furious, Hulk, and Nzalo.”*

Elizabeth feels that if Lucky was not at school he would be getting into trouble and taking drugs, so Three2Six has taken a lot of pressure off her. She is also happy to have met a man at the beginning of this year. Even though he is unemployed and has no papers, it is helpful having someone around to talk to and share the burden.

Currently Elizabeth has a temporary job as a security guard in a building. She fears that she could lose her job at any time so her situation as a refugee remains precarious. Her passport expired in 2018 and she cannot afford to pay the visas to return to Zimbabwe to have it renewed. Her parents have also died so if she went back there, she would have nowhere to stay.

*“I would be like a street child.”*

Lucky is the only one of Elizabeth’s children who is getting a good education. She wants him to finish studying and find a job so that his future will be brighter than hers.

Perhaps he can look after her one day, but for now, she dreams of buying a stove to sell scones.

Lucky’s teacher describes him as kind and polite, but early on he struggled to control his anger and was easily frustrated. Lucky himself longs for a more peaceful and quieter environment.

*“I love to be in the chapel at school. You can pray there. It is quiet, there isn’t much noise. It is very noisy in Hillbrow. Especially on Saturdays my ears get sore. Also New Year is very noisy. At 12 there are hooters all over. It is exciting but the people who drink get crazy.”*

Lucky feels safest when he is with his parents.

He loves the colour blue because *“it is shiny like the sky”*, but most of all, he loves his mother. Elizabeth too feels very lucky to have Lucky in her life.



# YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Make a long-term difference in the lives of our learners!

## DONATE

Via Snapscan:



Via EFT:

Bank: First National Bank

Branch: Eastgate | Code: 257 705

Account: 62312243405

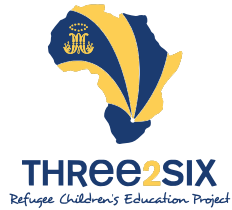
Swift code: FIRNZAJJ



Or contact [partnerships@three2six.co.za](mailto:partnerships@three2six.co.za)

We accept various types of physical donations such as food, hygiene items, clothes and books.

To contribute contact us on [advocacy@three2six.co.za](mailto:advocacy@three2six.co.za)



## SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT US



@Three2SixProject



Three2Six Project



@three2sixproject



@326project



Three2Six

## PARTNER WITH US

Get in touch on [advocacy@three2six.co.za](mailto:advocacy@three2six.co.za)



## CONTACT US

[director@three2six.co.za](mailto:director@three2six.co.za)

[partnerships@three2six.co.za](mailto:partnerships@three2six.co.za)

[advocacy@three2six.co.za](mailto:advocacy@three2six.co.za)

[communication@three2six.co.za](mailto:communication@three2six.co.za)

or visit

[www.three2six.co.za](http://www.three2six.co.za)

for more information

Photographs: Debbie Yazbek © and David Edwards