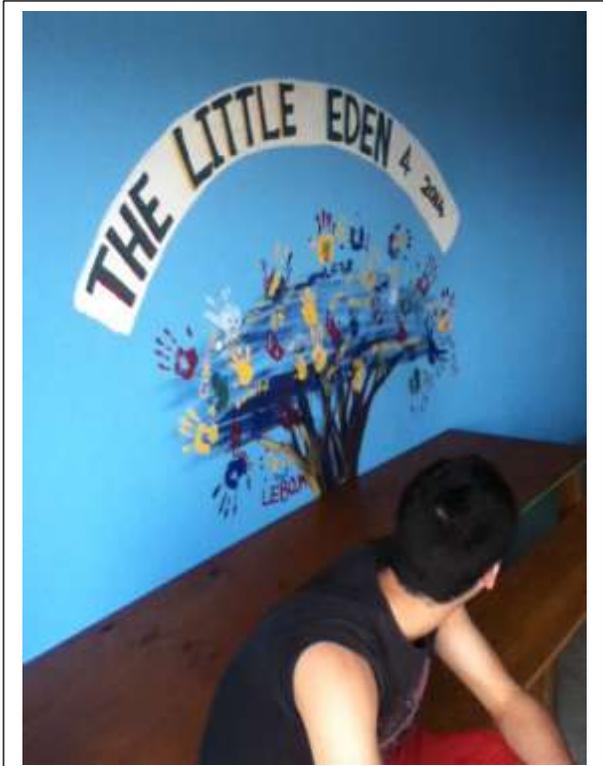


Africa Blogs: South Africa

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The tree we painted at the creche

When we arrived, Mama Mahopo was standing in the doorway, baby on her hip, little wondrous faces peeping out from behind her long skirts staring. The crèche (daycare) was essentially a one car space garage. They had with two tiny side rooms, one for the kids to rest and the other acting as a sort of kitchen to cook meals. As we entered the dwelling, the children were just sitting down to have their midday meal. Huddled on a small thread bare rug on the floor they looked up at us as we entered, eyes wide, pap (maize) covered hands reaching out in a "sharp" greeting.

It wasn't our first time here. We had been here once before but that had been enough. The conditions of the place were so terribly poor, it was obvious to all of us that we had to help. Mrs. Mahopo was smiling with tears in her eyes the first time we told her we were going to invest in her little creche. Four tables, four benches, made from scratch as well as a good coat of paint to brighten up the place. And so, we got to work. We painted the interior that day. As we began to apply our first layer of bright holiday blue on the concrete walls, Mr. Mahopo played saxophone and the children watched in wonder at us.

At one point, I went out and played around with the little ones. I went back to work but it was approaching lunch and Mama Mahopo had promised to teach me to make Chaka Laka, a vegetable type side

dish, that's typically eaten with pap (maize). Making chaka laka was simple with the careful instructions of Mama Mahopo. She showed me to chop carrots thinly to create strips, we talked very little because English wasn't her first language, but it was a good, working silence and I was glad just to spend time with her. At one point, Mr. Mahopo came in with his phone and began filming us as we chopped vegetables, he said something humorous, I laughed and Mama Mahopo smiled. The atmosphere was good, nice, comfortable, safe and easy.



Helping create the "leaves" of the tree.

After I finished preparing the chaka laka, Mr. Mahopo assisted me in painting a tree on one of the walls and we got all the children to place a painted hand on the tree to serve as "leaves" of the tree. We placed our own "leaves" there too and wrote our names by each "leaf". Mama Mahopo came out with a meal of baked fish, pap, my chaka laka and cold drink. We all ate heartily with our hands, chatting about art and life stories. Soon after we had to leave to work on furniture at another location. We went back multiple times to work but I will never forget that day, the day that Africa stole a piece of my heart. Nothing in that day had been extremely out of the ordinary. It had simply been Africa, South Africa at it rawest.

Anja H.