

The Maunatlala Times

July 20- July 26, 2025



Photo op at the *kgotla* for our goodbye ceremony,
Musupe Special Education program students dancing at the blanket drive assembly

New Partners & New Blankets

Last Friday we went to Musupe Primary School's Special Education Program Blanket Drive. Bonshetse, who continues the work previous students have done with disability awareness and education, worked hard to collect community donations to benefit students in the Special Education Program. There were musical performances, dancing, and a lot of joy from these students and their peers.

We were joined this week by professor Dr. Diana Rohlman, who is looking at bringing an environmental research component to the BGHI program. She was able to see the community waste disposal site, and the Lotsane Dam and the water treatment plant.



Emma, Ben, Kylie, Diana, and Dorkas with our dumplings!

Our Last Week

This week marks the end of our time here in Maunatlala. Purva left us a few days early, and we are all feeling her absence – especially in our games of Bananagrams (which are a lot less animated without her and her dubious tactics).

Master's students Kylie and Emma thought we couldn't get any closer to our data after performing focus groups/interviews then painstakingly listening to them over and over to transcribe them – and we were *wrong!* To analyze the data we had collected and make something meaningful of it, we had to go through our transcripts phrase by phrase to identify common themes and ideas. We'll be dreaming of color-coded data for weeks to come.

We worked with OT and Bonshetse to develop presentations of our preliminary findings for a community sharing session in the library on our final day in the village. The community was excited to hear Purva's findings on peer-to-peer SRH education, and Emma's overall positive findings on MHH, but Kylie and Ben's presentations were harder messages to hear. Ben outlined some of the major changes the country is facing for HIV service delivery with loss of US funding programs and a governmental restructuring that has been anything but seamless. Kylie also noted the gaps left in GBV response in the village by an ineffective social worker. This led to some tense conversations at the meeting, but ultimately the community acknowledged the importance of this issue – our roles as researcher is to share our findings and allow the community to respond.

Attendance at the meeting was mixed, with some community members dismayed that village leadership officials did not participate – pointing out that change cannot happen without them. We had significant youth participation with 9 of our 11 survey volunteers attending the entire session and receiving certificates and thanks for their work this month – we ultimately collected 405 surveys, on-target for our goal counts. We are grateful to them for their hard work!

One final picture with Purva before her long journey back to the US. (from left to right: Sunil, Emma, Kylie, Purva, Bointse, D'impo, Tiny, Ben, and Thulani)



The team with our completed puzzles – 2,499 pieces in total (when he can't find the piece he's looking for, Sunil always says a piece must be missing – this time he was right!

For our final outing, we met with Dorkas, the head CEC Chef, and were taught how to make *Pap* and dumplings. Laughter (and slight judgement) filled the room on our questionable dough ball rolling techniques that were quickly fixed with a single grab by the chef. But boy were they yummy! Even OT and Bonshetse were impressed with our "cooking" skills".

The remainder of the team headed back to Gaborone on Thursday morning, with all but Ben heading back to the States soon – Ben will be staying behind for another two weeks of data collection in the capital.

The youth volunteers were awarded with certificates for all their hard work - signed by Sunil himself!



Kwa Nokeng Lodge (at the river)

As our last weekend here in Botswana, we spent our Saturday at Kwa Nokeng Lodge along the Limpopo river with the whole team. There we had a wonderful lunch and gave our thanks to Bonshetse, OT, Mokopo, and Thulani for all their hard work at making our projects possible and for turning their home into our home. We've learned a lot from our team beyond just our research and will forever be grateful to them. After lunch, we went on a safari drive near the Stevensford Game Reserve. What started as a peaceful ride turned into the ride of our lives ducking past branches and bushes as we drove quickly in an open air safari truck! As the adrenaline wore off we were left with scratches and bruises and a new found appreciation for the fragility of life!



The group at our very windy table – even with the space heater, OT was freezing!

The BGHI 2025 team made a significant impact in Maunatlala through collaborative, community-involved public health research and services. We fostered local dialogue on sensitive yet vital topics such as menstrual health, GBV, peer sexual and reproductive health education, and HIV service transition. Our efforts increased youth participation and awareness and empowered local voices to address these public health challenges. BGHI combines thorough research, cultural exchange, and community-based service to create a lasting impact on both the community and its students.

All smiles before the ride of our lives!



Thulani repping Kylie's nurse union handkerchief! Represent!

Bonshetse, Purva, OT, and Ben in the aftermath of the safari drive, Bonshetse with her Indian cuisine (she was unsure initially, but ultimately loved it), and a meerkat!



Fun/Funny Pictures

Cleopatra on the run



This is sooo a zebra



Tiny is the star



Emma getting all the zzz's



Ben and Sunil's relationship in one photo

Candid or Plan-did by OT



Bointsi carrying her baby

How do I look? - Kylie



As a group, we have worked hard, but also had so much silly fun. We've laughed with our community partners, made lifelong friends and connections, and banded together to cope with all of the challenges of the program – homesickness, exhausting days of data collection, funny tummies, and lots more. We have loved our time here in Maunatlala, and are incredibly grateful to the community and the program for allowing us to learn and grow in the challenging realm of global public health.

Kylie and OT enjoying water treatment!



Bonshetse rethinking meal choices (aka anything with flavor)

Ben's luscious eyebrows



Thank you for following along with our adventures, and we all hope to see Botswana again soon!

Signing off,
BGHI Team 2025



One final picture with everyone before heading back to Gabs