

Our green grass became brown as the flood waters subsided from the roads and houses, leaving three feet of brown sand as the new normal baseline. Tons of rocks and sand were removed by digger loaders and trucks every day for over two weeks. The river was crossed by boat, and at this point the causeway across the river remains inaccessible, as the river is still too high. The bridge higher up washed away again, and the other bridge is still mostly under water.



Thankfully, most of our groups and guests still arrived, while some pushed back their stay to a later date, and some did cancel. However, the inaccessibility of our valley for almost two months has definitely affected us. We are hopeful the now warm summer weather and mostly full weeks and weekends will help us recover, but the remaining challenges are enormous.



A number of groups continued to seek out the beauty and peace at Volmoed in the past months, some of which were silent retreats. The Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) came for the first time, gathering a group of young people together to talk about the challenges of living as LGBTQ+ people in South Africa. This was a creative and innovative retreat that did important work. The silent retreat groups were focused on the theme of Compassion, and several individuals came on retreat for a couple of days or longer.

Our series of story sharing and oral histories continues at the weekly gathering of staff and residents. One person each week shares their story of where they were before Volmoed, how they came to Volmoed, and what Volmoed has meant to them. Our hope is that by 2026 when Volmoed celebrates its 40th anniversary, we will have gathered the oral histories into a format that is accessible and readable and tells the stories of Volmoed.



In early December, we held our annual Christmas carol picnic & sing-along – just not at Volmoed this year. It was not an easy decision, but the state of some of our roads, and the usual field where we hold the event, were not going to work. Instead we moved to the beautiful gardens of the local Anglican church. As usual, we had the band from Manenberg, and our own youth drummers and choir, and many splendid raffle prizes from generous donors in the local community. There was a wonderful spirit and once again it was a memorable event.



Financially, Volmoed Retreat Centre is still challenged. The damage caused by the flood has further challenged our infrastructure needs. The river water is currently the color of brown Coca-cola. This makes our filtration process more difficult and it is difficult to get enough filtered, colorless water for all our guests and residents. The staff is doing sterling work to fix this, but so far we have not solved the problem. None of the fixes are cheap but they have to be done. Thus, cash flow at Volmoed continues to be a challenge. Thank you so much for your generous, ongoing support. Without you we could not do the work we do.

We wish you glimmers and shimmers of hope and joy this Christmas.

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS ARE ALWAYS APPRECIATED!
THANK YOU!**