

Looking Forward: Zara's Second Decade

a progress report on
Zara's Center



October 2019

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CAPTIONS: THIS PAGE: (from top): 1. Front of Zara's Center, 2. and 3. The recreation field adjacent to the building. OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left): 1. Joy during group games, 2. Sewing class, 3. Computer instruction, 4. Playing the marimbas takes intense focus.



Our mission is to help orphaned, vulnerable, and at-risk children become confident, self-sufficient members of their community. By providing a supportive environment where children feel safe and cared for, the Center ensures that all of Zara's students can focus on their academics, personal health, and on simply being kids.



Executive Summary

Zara's Center is an after-school safe haven for AIDS orphans and vulnerable youth in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The Center was founded in 2007 to respond to an increase in children being orphaned due to AIDS and the deteriorating economic and political situation in Zimbabwe.

Since then, the situation in Zimbabwe continues to make life difficult for low-income, at-risk, children. Zimbabwe has experienced a sharp decline in the last decade: access to education, economic stability, employment, healthcare, and overall life expectancy. The country is ranked 109th out of 117 developing countries on the Global Hunger Index [GHI]. 13% of adults have HIV/AIDS, making Zimbabwe one of the most impacted countries in the world [AVERT]. As a result, the country has one of the world's largest orphan populations [BBC].

As of 2012, 74% of Zimbabweans lived on less than \$5.50 USD per day.[BBC] Many Zimbabwean children do not consistently attend school, as their guardians cannot afford mandatory public school fees [Reuters]. A period of inflation that began in early 2019 has made life even more difficult, as the value of the Zimbabwean currency decreases almost daily [Reuters]. it is not an exaggeration to say that the situation is dire.

Over the past dozen years, Zara's has grown from a small organization operating out of a church to a stand-alone Center for over 125 children aged 5-18. 65% of Zara's children have lost at least one parent, most to HIV/AIDS-related complications, and over half of Zara's children live with extended family. Zara's staff visits every child's home periodically to assess the family's circumstances and discuss the child's well-being. At home, many children sleep on the floor and lack electricity or running water. Caregivers are mostly unemployed due to job scarcity and cannot afford food.

Zara's Center provides twice-daily meals, academic enrichment, medical care, work training, recreation, and artistic development. Children come to Zara's Center for a good meal, help with homework, intervention for health & wellness, and structured activities in a safe place. Zara's gives children the tools and confidence to become their own advocates. The Center's guiding goal is that Zara's kids will grow up to be agents for positive change in their country.

Zara's outcome studies reveal that our children are thriving in measurable ways, yet we know there is still more to be done. To that end, we have recently broken ground on a new agriculture program which will teach our children to grow their own food and to raise chickens. The program will help Zara's become more sustainable - both in terms of the welfare of the children and by creating an earned income stream for the Center. This project will propel us forward into another exciting program year. With a balanced budget and a growing number of donors around the world that believe in what we do, our small but mighty international team is enthusiastic and determined to make this coming year Zara's very best ever.

Thank you for reading our Annual Report and for spreading the word about Zara's Center.

Programs & Services

The focus of Zara's programs is broad and varied with a mission driven 'one child at a time model'. Zara's Center offers a wide range of programs and services to help vulnerable children thrive. Programs are implemented by an 11-person team led by Mr. Gibson J. Connick, a veteran educational professional who joined Zara's team in 2014.

Nutritionally Balanced Meals

- Breakfast before school
- A hot meal after school
- A hot meal each weekend day

Recreation

- Supervised play
- Monthly birthday celebrations
- Sports instruction
- Periodic field days

Academic Enrichment

- Tutoring
- Computer instruction
- Internet access
- Library access (1500+ titles)
- School Fees Payment
- Payment of fees or facilitation of third party payment
- College guidance



CAPTIONS: THIS PAGE: (from left): 1. Washing up before lunch time, 2. Learning to make beaded bracelets .
OPPOSITE (from top): 1. Masterpieces made in art class, 2. Traditional dance

Arts Programs

- Music (Marimbas, Piano, Choir)
- Dance (Modern & Traditional)
- Beading Instruction
- Visual Arts (painting & drawing)
- Drama

Mental & Physical Healthcare

- Annual Medical Check-ups by Certified Nurses
- Psycho-Social Support
- Spiritual enrichment activities
- Case Management
- Quarterly home visits
- Oral hygiene (Instruction & Supplies)
- Feminine care products

Life Skills

- Gardening
- Sewing
- Post-graduation Employment Assistance



Meet Zara's Director



Mr. Gibson Connick, Executive Director, joined the Zara's Center team in 2014. He came to Zara after a successful career as an educational leader in traditional academic settings. Most recently, he served as Principal at one of the most respected private schools in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe - Petra Primary School.

Community Outreach

Zara's Center has become an important institution in Emganwini and wider Bulawayo communities. In addition to serving children, the Center regularly shares resources and invites community members to visit for periodic events.

Resource Sharing

- **Water:** The Center has one of the only boreholes in the area and provides water to community members during shortages. In 2019, we added two more boreholes on our newly leased land adjacent to our existing facility.*
- **Electricity:** Zara has the only generator in the area, providing electricity during almost daily blackouts. In 2020, the Center will convert to 100% solar power, eliminating the need for generator fuel and ensuring consistent electricity.
- **Tree Planting:** Zara's Center is committed to making the community more beautiful and plants trees on the grounds and around the neighborhood each quarter.
- **Agriculture:** when our forthcoming agriculture program (see page 15) is fully operational, we plan to share surplus fruits and vegetables with the surrounding community.



Enrichment

- **Library:** Community members have access to Zara's extensive library with over 1,500 titles (including current public school textbooks) and a copier so children can make copies for reference at home.
- **Internet Access:** The Center offers the only free internet and computer access in the area. A technology overhaul in late 2019 will replace outdated computers for staff and children.
- **Sharing Space:** Zara's Center shares its space with local community members as needed. Recently, a teacher used the space to prepare students for O level exams when the school where he taught suddenly closed.



Outreach

- Zara's staff members regularly meet with caregivers to discuss ways to improve the children's lives. The meetings provide guidance in wide-ranging topics, including school registration, birth certificate acquisition, and basic hygiene.



CAPTIONS: OPPOSITE (from top): 1. and 2. Community members line up for water from Zara's borehole during routine municipal water shortages. 3. Trees ready for planting. THIS PAGE: (from top): 1. Zara's library is available for children and community members to use. 2. Exec. Director Gibson Connick leads a caregivers' meeting. 3. Staff member, Gayle Mhlope, meets with a caregiver during a home visit.

Annual Update: 2018 Milestones and Impact

➤ **Provided 28,000 meals.**

- Impact: We've saved lives, improved the school performance of our kids, and lessened the personal and fiscal burdens of the adults (and extended community) that care for them.

➤ **Continued to measure our children's real time educational performance.**

- Impact: Ensured that Zara's children perform, and provide intervention for improvement. We're proud that Zara's students consistently perform better on national pre-secondary school exams than the national average (see section five). Assisting with college tuition and fees allows Zara's Alumni to lift themselves out of poverty, and provides role models for younger children.

➤ **Provided school fees for 100% of children in need, and university support for three graduates**

- Impact: Covering school fees guarantees that our children can attend school. We're happy to report that for the first time in Zara's history, 100% of our kids are enrolled in school, in a country where 25% of the poorest (lower secondary school age) children are out of school due to personal or financial hardship. Historically, a handful of our children had been refused enrollment due to a lack of birth certificate. Through the efforts of our staff, we have been able to work with families and schools to ensure every child is enrolled.

➤ **Expanded our partnership with Lalela, based in South Africa, to provide art instruction to all of our children**

- Impact: Created new outlets for self expression for our children; provided instruction and training for our staff in a program that is deeply impactful, for participants and the entire community.

➤ **Made significant progress on the development of our new land; and the progress is visible to the children**

- In 2017, Zara's Center leased a five acre plot of land from the City of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe adjacent to the current facility owned by the center. Since January 2018, we have successfully drilled two additional boreholes (wells), installed pumps and solar panels to allow us to pump water without electricity, and fenced the property. We have also planted over 70 trees that beautify not only our discreet area, but the entire community.

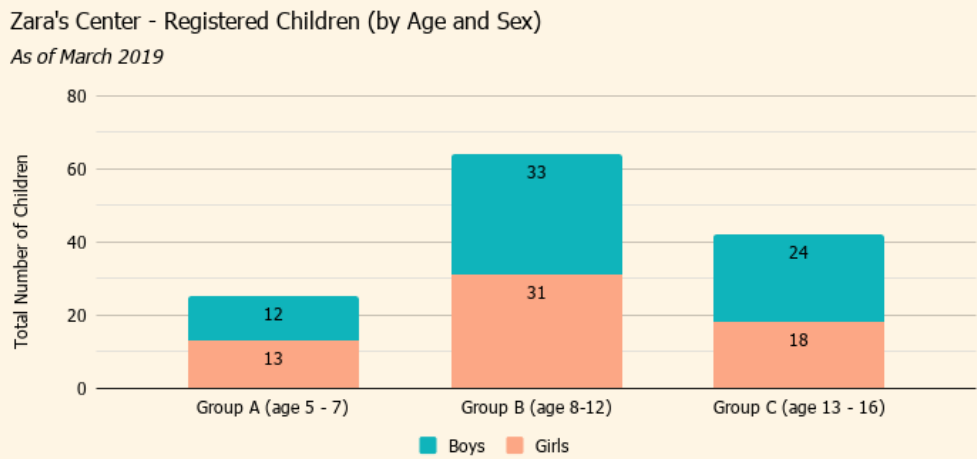


CAPTIONS (clockwise from top): 1. Youngest kids enjoying sewing class, 2. Working on art, 3. Older girls modeling the uniforms they made for themselves in sewing class, 4. Watering the newly planted vegetables.

Statistics and Impact

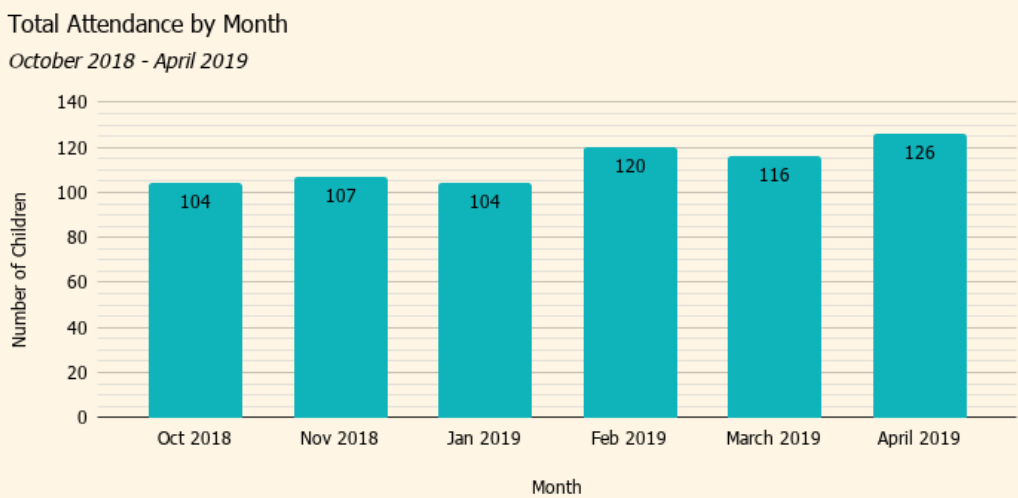
Age Groups

Children at Zara's Center are broken into age groups in order to optimize programs and ensure all activities are age appropriate. Most children are in "Group B", which includes children from 8-12 years old. The staff has found that the youngest children (ages 5-7) thrive best in a smaller group separate from the older kids and Zara's has a dedicated staff member for Group A children. Zara's Center tries to keep the female to male ratio as close to 1:1 as possible, while still allowing siblings from the same family to attend together.



Monthly Attendance

The Center is open seven days a week to all registered children - all who are able to attend are welcomed and encouraged to do so. Some children are unable to come everyday - usually due to school demands or family obligations. The Center offers breakfast before school on weekdays, a hot supper (and programs) on weekday afternoons, and a hot meal on both weekend days. Below is the total number of children served each month from October 2018 - April 2019. The totals increase in 2019 due to the fact that the Center holds an annual "Graduation" of older kids in December. A new group of children are registered and start attending in January. December was omitted due to the two week closure for the holidays.

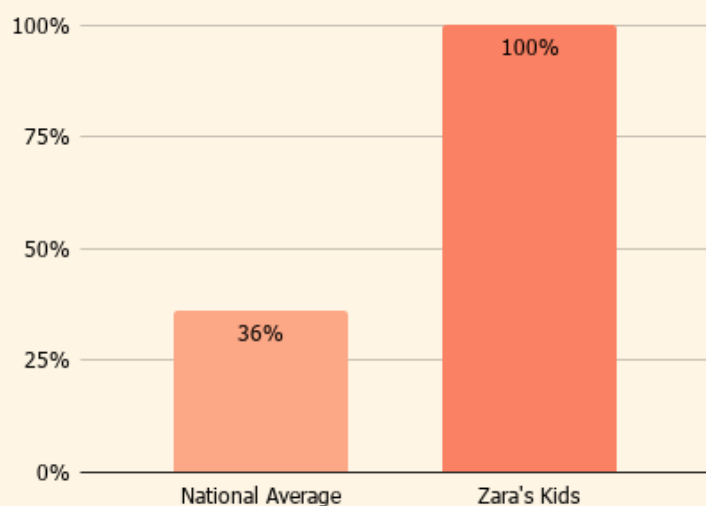


Academic Outcomes

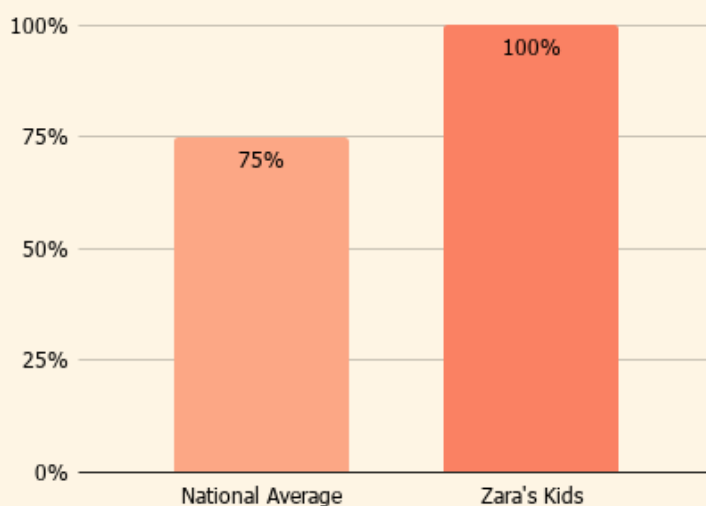
Our children's academic success is only partly due to school fees coverage. Our nutrition program is also a huge factor in our children's academic performance. Indeed, school attendance is directly related to a child's general health and well-being. Attendance increases when children are receiving adequate nutrition at home or school.*

By providing reliable nutrition and academic enrichment, Zara's Center helps children to feel well enough to go to school. Zara's impact is made clear when comparing our outcomes with average trends in Zimbabwe. For example, we are proud to report that 100% of our graduates have completed lower secondary school in a country where only 36% of the poorest children do so.

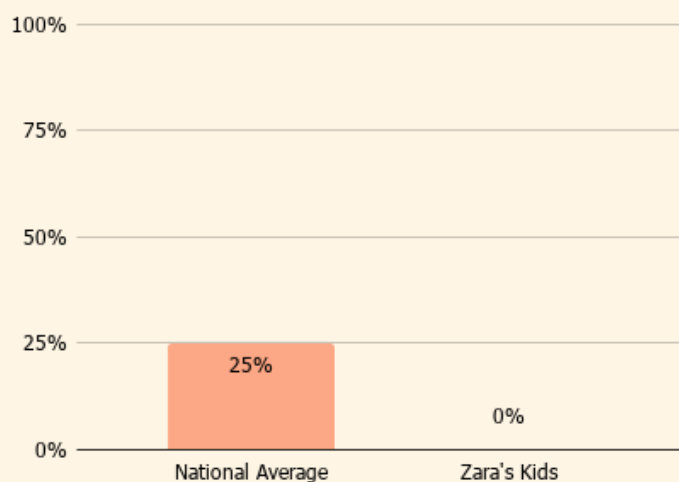
Lower Secondary Completion Rate
(Poorest Children)**



Primary School Completion Rate
(Poorest Children)



Out-of-school Rate
(Poorest Children, Lower Secondary School Age)



* Sandefur, Justin, and Divyanshi Wadhwa. "Schools Are Full of Hungry Kids Who Aren't Learning Anything. Why Don't We Feed Them?" Center For Global Development, 16 Oct. 2017, www.cgdev.org/blog/schools-are-full-hungry-kids-who-arent-learning-anything-why-dont-we-feed-them.

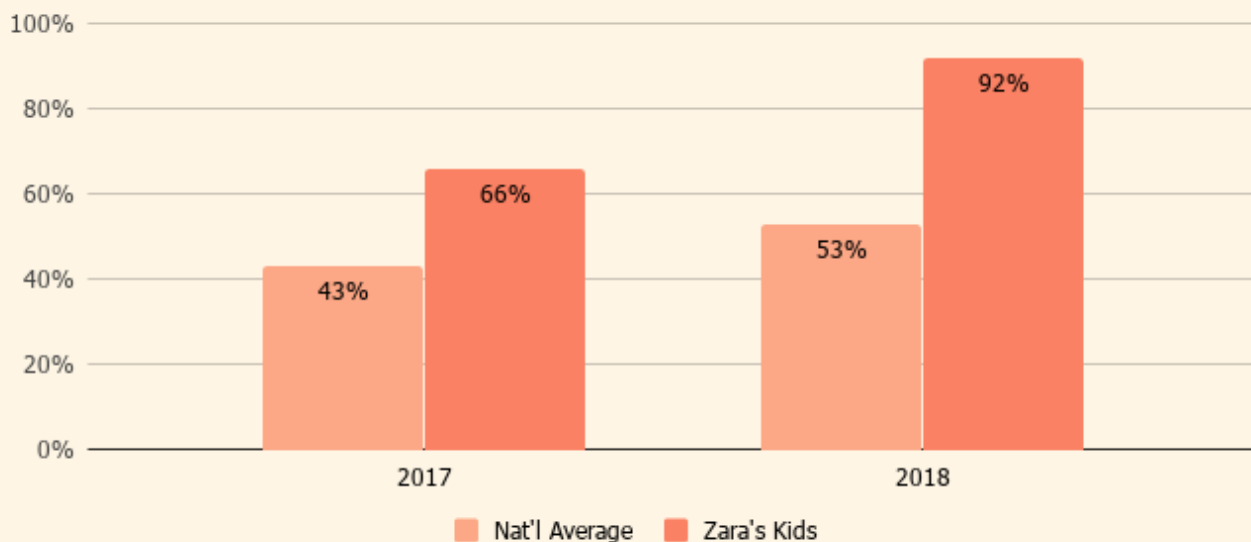
**All statistics taken from the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) (www.education-inequalities.org/countries/zimbabwe)

School Performance: Pre - Secondary School Exams

Children in Zimbabwe take national exams in grade 7, the year before they enter secondary school. Zara's Center began tracking exam performance in 2017*. Zara's students have surpassed the national average** and performed well in both 2017 and 2018.

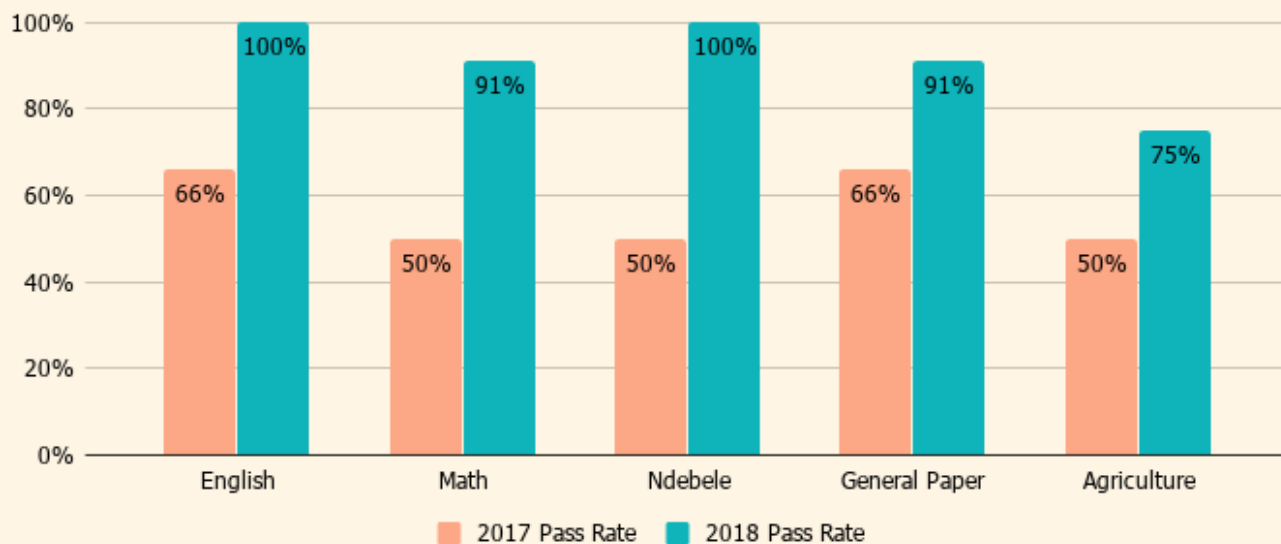
Pre-Secondary School Exam Pass Rate

Zara's Center Kids vs. Nat'l Average (by year)



Pre-Secondary School Exam Performance - Zara's Children

Pass Rate by Subject, 2017 vs. 2018



* In 2017, Zara's received exam results from 50% of the 7th graders (6 of 12 total students). In 2018, Zara's received results from 75% of the 7th graders (12 of 16 total students).

**National exam results - 2017 (www.herald.co.zw/latest-grade-7-results-out/) and 2018 (www.herald.co.zw/2018-grade-seven-results-out/)