

Active involvement brings real change at Stoneridge

True vision: Working hand in hand enables transformation of school and learners

REAL change only comes from being actively involved in communities and the environment.

This belief lies at the heart of Nedbank's involvement with Stoneridge Primary in Eden Park as part of the Symphonia Partners for Possibility (PfP) Programme.

Stoneridge Primary has 1 280 learners ranging from six to 15 years in age and an average of 45 to 50 learners per class. These learners come from various and diverse communities with different socio-economic backgrounds. Like many other schools they face challenges like language barriers, below average reading skills compared, high levels of illiteracy, unmanageable classes, bullying and substance abuse, lack of discipline, shortage of support services, non-payment of school

fees, difficulty in maintaining sport facilities and minimal parental involvement.

Mr Richard Carelse, the principal of the school, is a born teacher - somebody who is passionate to play the leading role in his school of both the educators and learners driving them to high levels of success.

When approached by partner Nina Wellsted, he jumped at the opportunity and the past 18 months both of them spent time learning valuable lessons from one another, and in the process, realising Carelse's vision for the school he so loves.

"I was appointed as principal in 2009 with no real knowledge of what is expected of me. This partnership has built my confidence. Before Partners with Possibility, I used to come to school every day and just work by default.

My partnership with Nina has changed this completely, and I now have a passion for what I do, a sense of responsibility and accountability for my school and all the people involved in it, and a massive feeling of pride in what we have all been able to accomplish - and will continue to accomplish in the future," Mr Carelse said.

About the partnership:

The aim of the project is to mobilise the community to reclaim the responsibility for educating South Africa's children rather than leaving it solely in the hands of the government. Key to the initiative is to get experienced businesses and community leaders to partner with school principals to help them strengthen their leadership abilities and that of their teaching staff, and then finally, enrol the entire community to engage with

the school.

Stoneridge Primary is a prime example of positive results. Through the partnership they build a strong leadership and management at the school and empowered an effective teaching body. The school now has a highly motivated parent body and inspired learners.

"We have integrated a programme 'How to understand maths' and this is already introduced to our grade R learners. Our learners have only benefited from this partnership and apart from the math initiative, we have established a reading lab, with the help of Nedbank and Karabo. If children can't read, then they can't solve math problems or for that matter, do any other subject at school without the ability to read. These programmes have boosted the ability to read and the confidence of our children tremendously," said Carelse.

Sustainability in action

In her role as Nedbank Retail's Sustainability Manager, Nina shared her extensive experiences and leveraged the staff to deliver a rainwater harvesting tank, vegetable garden and solar cookers to Stoneridge. To ensure that the school and the communities could extract maximum value from these, Nedbank volunteers spent a morning with the grade 6 and 7 learners, teaching them the practicalities of sustainability to enable them to maintain the new food-generating garden at the school.

This garden has, like everything else at Stoneridge, just kept on growing and today even the community in Eden Park benefits from the garden.

Valuable relationship

The school has showed a massive turn-around and the transformation of the leader-

ship of the school is something one can only stand in awe of. Both Carelse and Nina agree that the partnership did not only benefit the school, teachers and community, but on a personal level they both see it as a live-changing experience.

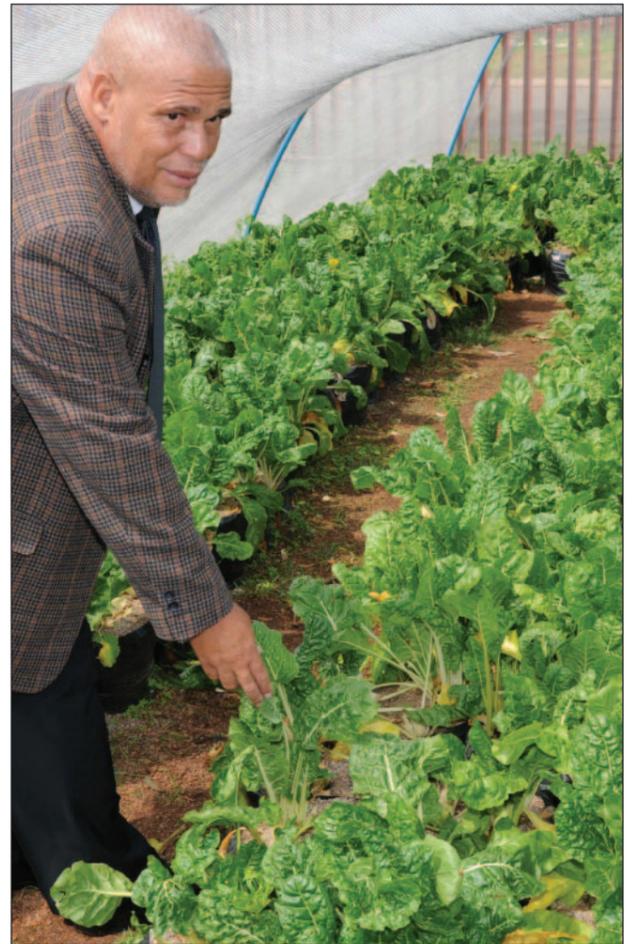
Mr Carelse said that the programme has delivered many benefits to learners that are not directly education-based, but have an undeniable impact on their ability to learn and develop. "In addition to learning to read and understand better,

learners are gaining massive amounts of confidence in themselves and their own abilities, and this has had a knock-on effect in terms of benefiting their performance in all their school subjects."

And today - two years later - Stoneridge Primary boasts a teachers' corps and learners who are eager to learn, to better themselves and the school as a whole and is looking forward towards a brighter future where everything is possible.



CONFIDENT: Learners of Stoneridge Primary benefit from the programme by improving their reading skills, enabling them to better understand their other subjects in school.



EVER GROWING: The food garden established at the school through this partnership, now also provides for the community.

Abraham Kriel Childcare needs your assistance

Dire need: The 112-year-old establishment has R3.6m shortfall

LESS than two months before Christmas the normal excitement and joy of the festive season is replaced by a gloomy atmosphere as the dire financial situation at Abraham Kriel Childcare looms over staff and children.

Six months into its current financial year Abraham Kriel Childcare faces a shortfall on budgeted income of R3.6 million. The 112-year-old organisation will have to make serious decisions to reduce services if the current financial crisis is not addressed very soon.

The organisation reduced expenses and saved about R76 000, but had to dip into its emergency fund reserves over the past few months. Monthly cash outflow will consume the balance of the emergency reserves within the next two to three months unless urgent help is received.

The cause of the current struggle is threefold. State funding was cut by R1.2 million. Despite numerous fundraising events and the continued loyalty of donors,

donations are below budget with R1.14 million. The usual income from childcare training on behalf of local government has also not yet materialised. The organisation is pursuing all possible income sources vigorously, including an appeal to government for emergency relief.

According to Paul Momsen, Chief Executive of Abraham Kriel Childcare, the current financial situation is ironic as it comes at a time when outcomes from their services are exceptionally positive. One Abraham Kriel alumni recently won an international award as best emerging African filmmaker. For the first time an overwhelming number of 14 youngsters, representing more than 50 per cent of all school leavers from their community services programmes in Soweto and Westbury, have approached the organisation for assistance to enrol into tertiary studies next year. This, from a community where it was rare to see children completing their schooling, is

phenomenal. While they are delighted about their successes Mr Momsen warns that this is an added concern, "Abraham Kriel Childcare is now battling to fund the basic necessities such as food, transport, utilities, education and clothing."

When asked about the future viability of the organisation, Mr Momsen said: "We believe we have to restructure to be more sustainable in the long term, while operating in the best interest of the children in our care and in line with the most urgent needs of society. These restructuring processes will be approached with caution. Abraham Kriel Childcare will honour partnership agreements and respect the investment of funders in programmes which, with their help, are currently running sustainably."

Mr Momsen expressed his concern for the cash flow situation over the next six to 12 months. "Without the help and support of donors in the very near future, we are unlikely to be able to maintain

services at current levels. We are appealing to all existing donors to consider donations to the core costs, rather than the 'nice to have' gifts. Sensible and responsible financial contributions could prevent a Crisis in the Christmas stocking."

Abraham Kriel Childcare has been in operation in Greater Johannesburg and the East Rand since 1902. It currently cares for more than 1 000 children and youth in two children's homes, seven group homes, four HIV/AIDS community programmes, a skills development centre and an early childhood development centre. Abraham Kriel Childcare has a reputation as an accountable and transparent organisation with excellent governance systems. Donors contributing to the organisation can count on both a tax benefit and points earned for the SED element of their B-BBEE scorecards. For additional information about the Abraham Kriel Childcare, go to www.abrahamkriel.org

