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A SIGHT TO BEHOLD

“I am the guy in the background watching as sight is restored after years of blindness. One older man’s bandage is removed the day after surgery but everything is still a blur. No happiness. It has been four years since he has last seen anything and he is disappointed. He sits in silence, head bowed, waiting for the optometrist to examine his eyes. As his eyes slowly start to focus, he realises that he has vision. It is not perfect but it is much better than before. Now he’s not sure how to react. After sitting with his son, he wants to go to the bathroom and his new reality sets in...his face lights up at the same time as his son stands up, not knowing what is going on. He wants to lead his father like he has been doing for the last four years but now there is no need. Playfully tapping his son with his stick, he motions for him to get out of the way. He starts walking, showing his son that he can go by himself, and everyone in the room is able to share in his joy!”

The above is an account from someone working on the Mercy Vision team, and it is just this kind of experience that makes the Mercy Vision programme so unique and so encouraging. As we have said before, this programme is different to some of our other initiatives where many of the real benefits may only be seen in the long term, because immediately upon receipt of glasses or eye surgery, there is often an evident improvement in people’s circumstances and the joy felt on these occasions is contagious.

Post op celebration

Building on the success of the last few years, the Mercy Vision programme has continued to expand their services. They recently started working in partnership with Vision Care in Mthatha and in celebration of Women’s Day, they teamed up to provide glasses to all who needed at an event in Kwazighamo. They have also just launched a Schools Outreach team, whose function is to visit junior schools in the area, testing the vision of the children and providing corrective measures where possible to improve these children’s participation in school. With the priority being Grades 1, 3 and 6, they try to assess each entire school so that by the time they are through, every child can see the blackboard, read their textbooks and in other words, engage in their education.



JUMPING AT THE OPPORTUNITY

On a recent visit back to Zithulele during the holidays, a previous participant encouraged this year’s intake not to waste any session, to learn as much as they can, because it will stand them in good stead every day thereafter! Perhaps he was preaching to the choir, as the group of guys he was speaking to have embraced every session, task and opportunity. They have applied themselves to a variety of different topics and subjects in the “classroom”. They outshone all others at the recent White Clay half marathon where all five came in the top 15, despite never having run a half marathon before and many wearing borrowed or donated second-hand running shoes. They have turned their hands to baking (certainly not the cultural norm out here) and proudly sold their products to those with a sweet tooth. They have been involved in community events where they have provided a service to others. They continue to amaze everyone in Zithulele who has led a session, which is many people, as it is hard not to want to be involved with

such an enthusiastic, knowledge-thirsty group.

But who is this group? They are the participants on Jump Start, a gap-year programme with a broad skills development focus that we are running in partnership with Axiom Education following a successful pilot last year. Axiom works with high school students and are therefore able to recommend prospective participants who have great potential but limited opportunities after school if they don’t move immediately on to tertiary studies. Despite it being a beautiful part of South Africa and a tourist hot spot, growing up in the rural Eastern Cape has numerous limitations, one of which is access to skills training for young people or opportunities through which they can develop some of the life skills that many of their urban or upper income counterparts take for granted.

Jumping at the Opportunity continued...

Providing exposure to and development of a wide range of skills for five post-matric students who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity, the course is a thorough mentorship programme roughly broken up into four areas: Business/Academic; Social; Skills/Trade; and Physical. A number of modules are covered under each of these areas, ranging from computer skills, finance and budgeting, Black Consciousness, ethics, leadership skills, public speaking, teamwork, carpentry, basic vehicle maintenance, cooking, swimming, life-saving, orienteering and many more. There is a good mixture of "classroom-based" learning and practical or physical activities.

During the course we endeavour to instil in the participants a professional work ethic that they get the opportunity to put into practice four afternoons a week, when they work for either the hospital or one of the NGO's in Zithulele. In these afternoon jobs they are responsible for various tasks, and as a result gain experience being held accountable while learning how to conduct themselves in the workplace, as well as it carrying the added bonus of being an opportunity to earn some money.

Many of the modules also cover the development of social skills that are often taken for granted; assumed to have been cultivated at home or in the school environment. Lack of assertiveness, general worldly knowledge or wisdom about societal trends could make a young person vulnerable to being taken advantage of, particularly those who have grown up in deeply rural areas and then suddenly find themselves in a completely different "world" if they progress on to college or university. The intention of developing these skills in our Jump Start participants is to help them have a considered view of things, as well as be able to speak confidently to all manner of people in a variety of settings. We believe that these "soft" skills are important to help develop character, maturity, and identity.

Developing confidence and self-worth are also fundamental objectives of the programme, as is assisting the participants to access further education. We currently have past students studying at Rhodes University, University of The Free State and Tsiba and are optimistic that with support, this year's intake will progress on to further education too.



Microbiology with Taryn



Gardening for the elderly



Life-saving with Katy

PROFILING OUR PRE-SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

We recently caught up with Thandeka, our Pre-school Principal, who told us a bit about her experience as Zithulele's pre-school teacher and more recently, her position as Pre-school Principal which entails her managing the Zithulele Pre-school and its team, while also providing oversight and support to Khanyisa Pre-school.

JRHF: Can you tell us a bit about your circumstances before you joined Jabulani?

Thandeka: I was just staying at home. In my family, only my father knew how to read and write. I went to school in Putuma for primary school and high school at a school on the way to Coffee Bay but I did not manage to finish matric. Before, an organisation called Lima that did agriculture and opened pre-schools, wanted to open a pre-school in Zithulele. I joined them in 1989, when they started the school. It was the first time I worked as a pre-school teacher. I was the first teacher in this area and the first time this community had a pre-school. I trained in East London and it took two years, with one week of training every month. In 1994, the couple running Lima decided to leave here and the community didn't continue the school. I tried to organise a meeting with the parents and suggested they could pay R10 each for my salary but they decided not to. Then in September 1994, visitors from Coffee Bay came and asked me to run the school there. I started up a pre-school for them and worked with them until 1996 and then the community sat down with me and asked for Grade 1, then Grade 2 the next year and now the school goes up to



Thandeka

Grade 9. Then there was a conflict and the school was closed and I came back to Zithulele. I received a call in 2007 from Zithulele Hospital, saying that a pre-school was going to be re-opened here. I applied and started in 2009.

PROFILING OUR PRE-SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONTINUED...

JRHF: So, you've been working for Jabulani since 2009, and you've done some additional training, is that right?

Thandeka: I did training in Mdumbi with the teachers there. I learnt a lot from there. Then I started the school and I kept going there and sometimes they came here. I got a lot of experience from them. In 2010, a proposal was made to SETA for training. They offered ECD training and I got the level 4 certificate, then in 2011 I did the level 5 (it took me two years). I got a lot of books and modules from them, and using these books and the training from Mdumbi, I gained a lot. My experience kept going up. Maybe I get stuck with a child in the class, maybe the child is hyperactive, then I take my time in the afternoon to look in my books for help. This year I will be doing the Level 6 training.

JRHF: What has been the highlight for you working in this pre-school?

Thandeka: I'm so happy, I'm happy really, I'm telling you. I'm happy with Jabulani management because every time I say "I need this", they try to help me. The staff I'm working with are great.

JRHF: You recently started a new position, can you tell us about that?

Thandeka: I am now the Pre-schools Principal and I am happy with the new responsibilities but it is so hard – I am scared a little bit, asking my team to do things. I am starting to be a bit more assertive with the small things. Like when we have a team meeting, I am always starting with telling them that if they are not going to be at school, they must give you advance warning so that arrangements can be made.

JRHF: Just to finish off, can you tell us what makes you want to be a pre-school teacher?

Thandeka: When I first got the job, it was my first time looking after children, but it's my talent. I love the children. The way they talk, the way they play. It is my dream. A child is like an angel to me.

A few years ago, we had an ECD specialist spend 18 months in Zithulele, conducting her PhD research and volunteering with Thandeka in the pre-school. She observed that Thandeka had a very interactive teaching style that is quite unusual in this part of the world, and this style, coupled with her experience and her passion for children, makes us grateful to have Thandeka at the helm.

AT A GLANCE

ECD WORKSHOP

Most of the parents of the pre-schoolers attending the Jabulani supported pre-schools did not have the privilege of benefitting from Early Childhood Development and many received limited education in general. So, on regular occasions throughout the year, we engage them in ECD workshops, building their own skills and helping them understand the important role they play in their children's education. At the end of May, our pre-school teachers and ECD in the Home Advocate gave parents ideas on how to play with their children and how they can teach them using recycled materials – scraps of wood that could be used as building blocks; different bottle caps to teach colours, counting and sorting; and how adding into the mix a yoghurt container with holes cut out of the lid for the bottle caps can help develop a child's fine motor skills. The workshop was well attended and the parents and teachers learned from each other while having lots of fun.



Building blocks

KHANYISA JUNGLE GYM

A work team consisting of four Khanyisa community members, the group doing Jump Start, and a visiting group from Common Ground Church in Cape Town, spent a few days constructing a jungle gym at Khanyisa Pre-school. Under the supervision of Roger, our resident carpentry, entrepreneurial and environmental guru, the jungle gym has been designed to be expanded in the future, and consists of two towers, a bridge and a slide. Thanks to Richelle, a Canadian volunteer who was with us last year and who donated the slide, as well as to all the others who have made this possible.

Under construction



LIKE US?

If you haven't already "Liked" the Jabulani Rural Health Foundation Facebook page, do so now to receive regular updates on the work and daily goings-on of what we do in Zithulele. You can also specifically follow the Jump Start programme by liking the 'Jump Start, Wild Coast' page too.

