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LITERAL TRANSFORMATION FOR LITERACY

iKhaya Lencwadi (Home of the Books), our Community Library, was opened by Jabulani in October 2011. With over 1000 books on the shelves, our expectations were high, but it turns out that changing people's minds about reading and literacy was not as easy as it initially looked to be. After the initial enthusiasm wore off, the long slog began.

Literacy levels in our area are not high and although there are a lot of people who tell you that they like reading, they do so because it has become a rote and acceptable answer to the kind of question like "what are your hobbies or interests?" and finding someone with a real passion for reading is quite rare. But, as with all our programmes, Jabulani was in it for the long haul and we continued to work hard to improve our library and engage learners through fun but educational activities. Combined with the work that fellow Zithulele NGO Axiom Education has been doing to raise literacy levels, we have been seeing significant changes in interest in literature of all types and our library is now a hive of activity every day that it is open. We have slowly and continually built up the resources within the library, but we have not had the capacity to improve the actual facility, despite knowing that the facility itself can contribute to the creative influence on the learners engaging within its walls. While we have always been appreciative of what we have, our rather dark building, with its slightly sad looking bookshelves, a very scuffed floor and a leaky roof was not exactly very inspiring.

After what was supposed to happen in early 2020 but had to be put off due to Covid-19, we had, enter centre stage, Kamvalethu Foundation (the facilitators!) and Jeremy Puren from Make Play Work (the creative genius!). Lots of preparatory remote work from Jeremy, plus 45 days on site (learning through a baptism of fire what it is like to work in the rural Eastern Cape, where not much goes according to plan and contingencies are a must!) plus a lot of hard work from Jabulani's Building Services team and some very skilled carpenters who fortuitously happened to be volunteering in Zithulele at the time, led to a complete transformation of our library. The learners are loving being in the new space and everyone who has walked past and stuck their heads in, has marvelled at the complete transformation that it has undergone.



As the physical transformation came to its culmination, the final step was that after a few years of on and off discussions, we have handed the library over to Axiom Education, where it is a natural fit within their circle of educational programmes, all the way from early literacy to their support of the higher grades and onto career guidance. Home of the Books might have found a new home in Axiom, but it will always have a place in our hearts.



MOVING TOWARDS INCLUSION

Quality educational opportunities for children with disabilities are always a challenge. In a rural area such as ours, where the standard of education across the board still leaves a lot to be desired (as a generalisation to which there are exceptions, of course), decent educational opportunities for children with disabilities become even more scarce.

Trying to build relationships with stakeholders within education with the intention to improve inclusive education (“emerging [worldwide] consensus that children and youth with special educational needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children” has led to the rise of the concept of “inclusive education”), has been exceptionally challenging for our Rural Ability Programme (RAP) team. Inclusive education exists in the local schools in theory, but it has proven almost impossible to find out who is responsible for it and there is certainly no additional budget (or at least this is how it seems) and no additional teachers assigned to schools in an attempt to really achieve inclusion. In short, inclusive education is really only something towards which we have heard lip service be paid, over the last 7 years. Individual teachers in certain schools, on the other hand, for whom it is directly relevant because they have children in their classes who require additional support...that is where we are eventually seeing breakthrough.

Building on the success of a workshop we held in November 2020, with teachers from eight schools in the area, and at the request of the teachers with whom we are working, we worked with the Zithulele Hospital speech and occupational therapists to host a teacher-parent collaboration. This was the first time

that teachers and parents of children with disabilities came together and it provided them with a platform for expressing themselves and a forum within which to come up with ideas on how they can work together to include children with disabilities into mainstream education.



On the 17th of May, seven teachers from five different schools attended, along with 32 parents/caregivers. Understandably, it took a while for the parents and caregivers to warm up and feel comfortable to start sharing their stories and about their challenges with their children, but when it became clear that the RAP and hospital staff as well as the teachers, really were there to support and help them, the conversation started to flow. “I am so happy to be given this opportunity to express my views and ideas on how to move forward. This has never happened before in all the school meetings I have attended before”, said one parent. And move forward is exactly what we will be doing. As one of the teachers commented, “it makes me happy to see that parents are now opening up about their children’s disabilities as most of them are usually in denial; this shows that we are all in the right

direction". That direction, will be leading us back towards those higher up in the chain of influence - with the parents and teachers collaborating

effectively, and with our support and the backing of the hospital therapists, we will keep knocking on the doors until lip service turns to real service.



A DREAM COME TRUE, FAITH STILL NEEDED!

The widely used but unofficial slogan of Zithulele "Living the Dream", is coined from Ben and Taryn Gaunt's (two of Jabulani's founders) own personal motto of "If you don't have a dream, you can't have a dream come true". Dreams are obviously different for everyone. At a Jabulani staff development day in 2019, we did an exercise about what our dreams for Zithulele were, and it was incredibly inspiring and motivating. The main focus of people's dreams was for a centre where skills, training or learning could be gained; quite a few wanted a coffee shop where people could gather and spend time together; and then a few mentioned a museum that tells the story of Zithulele (a particularly inspiring suggestion). What was interesting about this "dreaming together" exercise was that unbeknownst to the wider staff team, it has long been a dream of the Jabulani Board and management to have not only a training centre but a locally run coffee shop where local crafts could be sold and a space created where the Zithulele story could be told.

Well, we are literally getting to live the dream because during October we will be breaking ground to build our Livelihoods Access Centre. The centre will be based on 13 years of experience of what this community has been asking for with regards to livelihoods development, skills/training and what we have identified as being needed – insight that is invaluable so that we know we are not wasting anyone's time or money. Over the past 13 years: we have provided gardening mentoring in a community garden since 2008; we have run a carpentry skills workshop; we have run our skills development programme for young people since 2014; we have provided some microfinance loans to small business entrepreneurs or



community groups trying to set up a business and provided business mentoring to those who needed it; under our Rural Ability Programme (RAP), we have run apprenticeships since 2016; and since last year, we have started training people in small scale agriculture. In addition to our local experience, we will also be using tried and tested tools from around South Africa and the globe so that we aren't reinventing the wheel. Using asset based development strategy and through skills and employability training, the centre will provide opportunities for empowered community members to develop their own livelihoods and in so doing, to offer hope for the future.

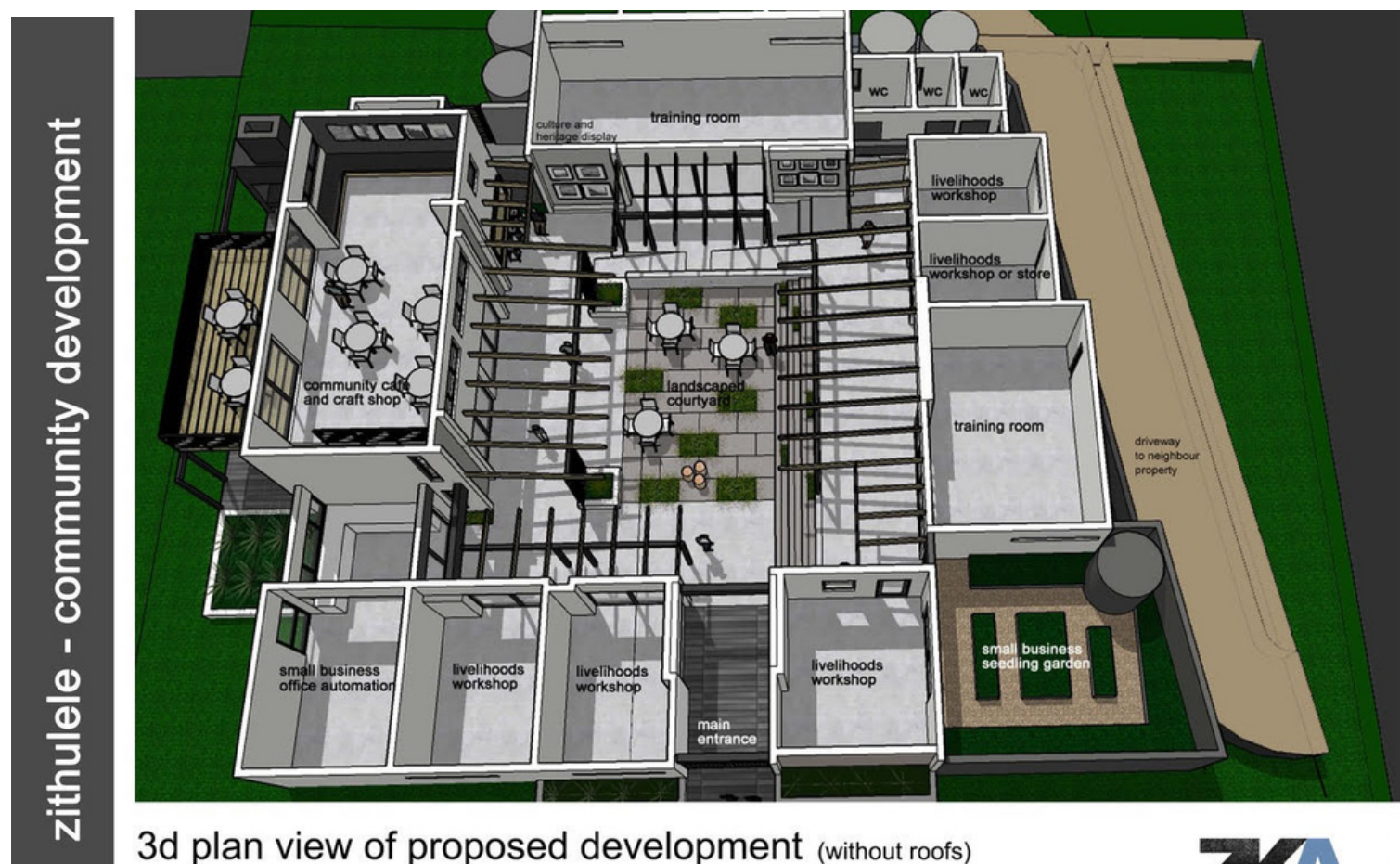
The majority of this amazing building is being funded by the Christian Blind Mission (CBM), who for the past nine years have funded Jabulani's RAP, and as they leave us at the end of the year, the centre will leave a visual and lasting legacy of the role CBM has had on

Jabulani's work and in the lives of many people with disabilities. The centre has been designed to be fully-accessible. The advocacy and awareness raising work that RAP has been doing over the past two years has been so successful in breaking down barriers and eliminating stigma, that the more we can do to bring people with disabilities and able bodied people together, the better. This is the reason behind the name "Livelihoods Access Centre".

The centre will have two large training rooms; four workshop spaces for use by small business entrepreneurs; rentable space; the coffee shop (and coffee shop garden) including crafters market where local crafters can display their creations; an office automation centre with access to internet, printers, photocopiers etc.; a seedling garden where we will cultivate seeds to sell to those doing our agricultural training; and a landscaped courtyard for events.

To start, the coffee shop is likely to simply be a place for people to meet together and have coffee as well as be a place for a few people to gain employment, but in time and with funding for the correct equipment and certification, it could become a site for barista training. Although it will not be done immediately as we would like to secure specific Cultural and Heritage funding in order to do the job properly, the internal walls of the centre have been designed in such a way as to house large display cases where the story of Zithulele's history can be displayed once it has been researched and curated – not a full museum perhaps, but a good start.

We have raised three quarters of the costs required to build and furnish the centre. We hope that you will join us in having faith that we will raise what is required to finish, so that we can expand on this area of our work!



AT A GLANCE

IT'S A WONDEROUS LIFE

The preschool veggie garden has been one of the highlights of this year. Mama Nothandekile oversees the garden, but the children enthusiastically help to water every morning – we have planted carrots, cabbage, butternut, spinach, lima beans and two pineapple plants. The lima beans were first sprouted in the classroom on the nature table, on a bed of wet cotton wool and were dutifully checked on every day and when they had grown a tap route and the main shoot had leaves, we ceremonially transplanted them into the preschool garden with great love and care. The vegetable garden is used to teach the children and they eat the produce as part of their cooked school lunch.