

April/May 2009

South Africa

# evoke

movement created • change inspired

**making a  
difference:**  
*Giving the deaf  
a voice*

**Healing our  
rainbow nation**

**NGO of  
the month**

**Green Living:**  
*background into  
being green*

Evolve Apr/May Edition 2009  
RSA R19.95 (Vat incl.)  
Other R17.50 (Vat incl.)



# itshepeng

trust yourselves

## *Warmth this winter*

As winter approaches and the cold sets in, the fight to survive changes. The need for foods that help keep the body warm grows and the feeding lines get longer. Many of the people that we feed do not have a home to go to and must find a place to sleep that offers some protection from the cold. The need for warm clothing and blankets increases and we never have enough to go around. At this time we ask anyone reading this magazine to open their

heart to those that do not have enough food or warmth this winter. If we all do a little for those that have little, that little added together makes a huge difference to the lives that it touches. Please consider those around you and donate to your nearest organization that is trying to make a difference in these difficult circumstances. May you be blessed for taking the time to give. Itshepeng welcomes all donations. **e**

*Author: Deborah Atkin*



2009 has arrived with interesting challenges for all of us.

Recently we got a new President, America got a new President things are changing in Zimbabwe and in the Middle East, The Rand is fighting for survival, schools have opened and all of us at Itshepeng are very positive for the new year!

You hear very good plans from various people about what the year holds out for them. People are saying "The year of the womb" "Two thousand and shine" "Two thousand

and mine" "Two thousand and fine" I also believe this year will be a GOOD one!

I want to thank every board member, all the volunteers, the companies, funders, donors, partners and every one that has supported us during the year.

Thank you for believing in vision and change. **e**

*Author: Iris*

# what's **your**

# social responsibility?



We might not all belong to a volunteer group but there are many ways in which we as South Africans can assist those who are in need. Caxton, Itshepeng and African Divas work together to feed many in the community. They are sending out an appeal for food, blankets, clothing or toys to assist them in supporting those who are unable to do it by themselves.

**Drop off depots:**

West Rand  
Itshepeng  
Coronationville  
Community Centre  
159 Caledon Street,  
Coronationville  
Iris Adams  
011 477-0851

South Rand  
African Divas  
41 Marlborough Road  
Springfield  
(off Rosettenville Road)  
Felicity Billings  
011 683-7743

Contact us on 011 683 7743/49  
[www.africandivasza.com](http://www.africandivasza.com)  
[info@africandivas.co.za](mailto:info@africandivas.co.za)



# a day in the life...

community living

## *The uphill struggle of community workers in South Africa's informal settlements*

**This article contains information that may upset sensitive readers.**

Martha A and B is how Martha Dichake and Martha Sephesu introduce themselves. After walking into Joe Slovo informal settlement in search of the subjects of my original assignment I became hopelessly lost and asked the two women for directions. What would follow would be a story that is worlds apart from the one I had set out to do that morning. After speaking to the women for a few minutes and realising that my only option is to abandon my original plan, I start speaking to them about their lives in Slovo Park.

The women, it turns out are community workers and respected leaders in their community. Their individual stories are not uncommon but their dedication to the improvement of the lives of their fellow residents certainly is. They start by telling me that they have just returned from a meeting with social workers to discuss the problem of a mentally ill young man named Michael. The meeting is their fourth attempt to get help for him and they aren't very optimistic about receiving it. What sets the two Marthas apart is not that they work tirelessly for their community but that the circumstances of their own home life would put them squarely in the "in need of assistance" pile in most people's estimation.

As we make our way to Michael's shack the women, take turns showing me their homes. Dichake lives with her children in a three room shack. One of the children is not hers but was abandoned by his parents and taken in by her. According to both women its not uncommon for men and women to come to Slovo and have children and then leave, abandoning the children with no birth certificates or identification. Creating problems with child welfare and the social grant agencies.

Dichake takes me through her home and shows me how modestly she lives. She uncaps the tub containing the maize meal that is her family's staple food, it is nearly empty. She receives a child support grant for only one of the children and a pension for herself. All but one of the children still attends school. Sephusu lives diagonally across from Dichake and shares her shack with her three children. The roof is nearly rotted away and with the recent rains she had to take shelter with Dichake as the waters poured in. There is not a hint of self pity from either women and soon their attention returns



to Michael's plight. Neither of them knows his surname but they have known him since he was a boy. "He was a clever boy. He lived with his mother and brother and everything was fine until his mother died," says Dichake. That, according to both women, is when his life took a strange turn.

His brother left and has never returned and Michael seemed to unravel in the years since then. No one knows what it was that set him off. "He was clever, he attended school. He even got his matric but after his mother died he just got stranger and stranger," said Sephesu. The women recount how he began wandering around Slovo Park late at night. "He doesn't sleep, you hear him walking around in the middle of the night with the dogs barking," says Sephesu. He's not dangerous but his behaviour worries them. He refuses to wash and has taken to rummaging through garbage. When he began eating what he found in the rubbish including the contents of used nappies the women knew something was wrong. "It got worse and worse. When he started eating the faeces out of kimbies we thought he was hungry and we would give him food but all he would do is throw the food you give him onto the ground, mix it with sand and then eat it," said Dichake.

As we make our way through the narrow alleys and side streets that make up the settlement we pass the homes of other residents some better than these women and I wonder at the strength it takes

to work for a common good when you don't know where your next meal is coming from. Eventually we enter a clearing and they tell me that Michael's shack is just ahead. When we get there they call to him but are not surprised that he isn't there, he's known for his wandering. Right next to his shack is another one that is so well looked after that it wouldn't be out of place in the township that borders Slovo Park. Michael's shack resembles a storage room. The women open the door to look inside and instantly take a step back as the full impact of it hits them.

There is barely room for a person to move through let alone sleep. It is filled with discarded rubbish ranging from packaging to garden implements. On the shelves near the door are bottles filled with different coloured liquids. The liquids on closer inspection turn out to be urine; Michael pees in the bottles and then drinks the fluid at night. While I'm taking pictures he comes up behind us and instead of the explosion you would expect he throws a tantrum and storms off. He ignores all attempts to calm him and disappears into the maze of tunnels between the homes.

The two Martha's insist that I get a picture of him and so begins what could easily be described as the weirdest few hours of my life

so far. Together with the two women we proceed to play an adult version of tag with Michael. Chasing him down alley ways, through homes and around bushes, Slovo Park is our playground, spurred on by fellow residents.

Eventually tired and out witted we return to his shack intent on waiting him out. "He wont stay away long" I am assured and he doesn't. After yet another failed attempt to photograph him we give chase again only to end up right back at his shack. This time when he gets back, Dichake tries to calm him with the offer of money held in her outstretched hand. He eyes her and only asks why before refusing the money. I get the pictures but this lost and motherless boy's face stays with me long after I leave Slovo Park. Because once the adrenalin has worn off and you look at him, I mean really look at him. Not the dismissive blind stare we normally reserve for beggars at traffic lights and people like Michael, but the look of one human being connecting with another, it hits you, up close that is exactly what he is, a boy.

Martha Dichake can be reached on 071-521-6673 and Martha Sephesu can be contacted on 073-735-0547. e

Author: Mark Scheepers



Martha's very humble abode



Michael



Michaels shack where he lives in his collected garbage



Michael walking down his alley

# life as it happens

in my eyes and words

## *Yellow Roses defy stereotypes and prove that old age smells sweet.*

For those of us nursing images of the “winter years” of our lives as a time spent languishing in nursing homes waiting for visitors, the Yellow Roses are a very rude awakening. Not content to while away countless hours reliving the highlights of their youth this group of enterprising seniors decided to do something about the grinding poverty they saw in the community.

Despite being called the Yellow Roses the group counts two thorns amongst their loyal members. The men, also seniors, don't mind their lone status amongst a group of women as one of them Mr. Goliath quips, “I'm used to being told what to do by women, I'm married.” The group started a few years ago when the seniors, who come from the townships of Riverlea, Riverlea Extension and Horseshoe started noticing a disturbing trend in their community. “We started seeing that despite living in the new South Africa with new opportunities that the people living here seemed to be struggling more and more,” says Yellow Roses Chairlady Leonora Starkey. The group started by word of mouth and soon more and more women and men started to join.

They avoided the lure of other organised groups in the area because they had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve. “Many of us belonged to other groups but weren't impressed with them. Because there was too much fighting about money and personal issues instead of focusing on helping people,” she says. Spurred on by the need they saw in the community this group of over twenty seniors hit the ground running and funded their first projects out of their pockets.

Eventually they started getting assistance from other organisations and people in the community who saw the work they were doing and wanted to help. The group still relies heavily on fundraising efforts to do the majority of their work. They have done everything from bake sales to dances and trips to the casinos around Gauteng to fund their activities.

The main focus of their charitable work are seniors and children. It was decided as a group that they would concentrate their efforts on helping those who didn't have a voice. “We spend a lot of our time visiting the old people in the different old-age homes in the area. We help the children but a lot of orphanages and children's homes don't struggle to get attention the way old people do,” says Starkey.

They find that for most of the seniors in the homes they visit just the fact that someone has taken the time to visit them means more than gifts and treats. “Many of the people in these homes feel abandoned by their children and some actually are. Their children can't cope with them and find it easier to put them there,” she says. One memory that still haunts her is of a man living in one of the homes the Yellow Roses visited, who cried every time he saw them. “We knew him and it was terrible to see him cry for his wife and family every time we visited,” says Starkey. She eventually intervened and spoke to his family. Together they arranged for someone to help him and his wife at home and he was reunited with his family. This is just one of the many stories the group comes across in their work and it's what keeps them going.

The realisation that not everyone is in their position spurs them on to work harder and do more. While most people in their community spend their days waiting for the next grant collection days, these seniors are putting people half their age to shame.

When they aren't collecting donations, they're out canvassing people and companies for sponsorship. Summer, winter, rain or sleet they are out in their communities or the nearby informal settlements handing out food hampers, blankets and toys. They make it a point to give out everything they receive to anyone who needs it. So much so that when seniors who were due to be recipients of blankets from the Yellow Roses last winter didn't pitch because the weather made venturing out impossible, the Roses loaded up the blankets and trekked from house to house ensuring that the blankets got to the people they were intended for.

The cost of this kind of philanthropy is staggering. Even when they receive donations or help from sponsors a large part of the administration of those donations falls on the group. Their visits to seniors' homes in the area requires transport to pick up the members from their different locations. Often Starkey will rope in her husband for the many day to day errands that are entailed in running the club. Despite this none of them has ever even considered not doing this work; in fact it seems to invigorate them.

Spending a day or even a morning with them leaves you feeling as though you're not doing enough with your life. The energy and enthusiasm with which they do their work is intoxicating. A visit to the Red Cross



Ethembeni children's home with them showed that this wasn't a hobby for this group of people. After the party and gift giving on the first floor the ladies hiked up two flights of stairs to visit with the babies. The stairs were an effort for me but not a single Yellow Rose complained.

In the nursery the women visited with the babies, many of whom were only a few weeks old. More than half of them had been found abandoned in drains and rubbish bins. At every location that I've tagged along on, they do more than hand out toys or blankets, they do something completely unique; they talk to the recipients of their goodwill like equals. For them this isn't a public relations exercise, its one mother reaching out to another mother, one woman extending the hand of kindness to another woman.

The men are not admonished for drinking or not working. The women are not chastised for having lots of children. They treat the people who receive help from them with the dignity most of us only reserve for bosses and family. They work with dance clubs in the community to regularly host fundraising dances and the Yellow Roses are no wall flowers when its comes to these events.

Despite working hard for others with no reward, the Yellow Roses insure that they play

just as hard. The plan throughout the year for a seaside break at the end of the year. Members contribute monthly for the trip and friends, fellow residents and family are welcome to come too. The Yellow Roses run their club like a company; every thing coming in or going out is accounted for. No one member has more say than another, it's a democracy, they vote on everything. They even have a Christmas lunch in December and even that gets voted on, if members are bored with a place they are not afraid to try something new.

The Yellow Roses can be contacted on 011-474-5355e

Author: Mark Scheepers



# making a difference

one at a time

## Food for thought



When SA Cares for Life field-worker Susan first visited Abraham Mathibela in Mabopane township in North-West Gauteng, he was bed-ridden and too weak to stand. Although Abraham found it painful to swallow, she encouraged him to try a spoonful of Sejo porridge every day. After just one week, he was able to stand on his own and started gaining weight.

Sejo porridge is a highly nutritious, sorghum-based porridge used widely in South Africa and exported across the Southern

Africa region. SA Cares for Life, a non-profit organisation, which has been providing services to vulnerable communities since 1993, provides Sejo porridge to HIV-positive people, as part of its Support for Families of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Project. This project has been funded by GreaterGood South Africa's social investment exchange, SASIX. Launched in 2006, SASIX (South African Social Investment Exchange) – [www.sasix.co.za](http://www.sasix.co.za) – is an innovative social 'stock exchange' where carefully-selected projects in ten critical development sectors are listed for individuals and companies to invest in. Each project undergoes a rigorous assessment process to make sure that investors' funds generate measurable social returns. Since its inception in June 2006, over R13.5 million has been invested in 53 social development projects.

SA Cares for Life's project is one of a number of projects listed on SASIX that works towards improving the lives of South Africans infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. According to UNAIDS, there were more than 1 million AIDS orphans living in South Africa in 2007, with 5.6 million South Africans estimated as HIV-positive in 2008. Responding to the growing need for support services in the HIV/AIDS sector, the Support for Families of Orphaned and Vulnerable Children Project empowers caregivers and parents to better care for their children.

The project targets the most vulnerable families in Mabopane. These include child-headed households, single mothers and grandmothers families living in extreme poverty and caring for HIV-positive

children. Situated approximately 50km from Pretoria, Mabopane is an extremely impoverished community. Many residents are unemployed and live in informal settlements. HIV/AIDS is a major problem, with high rates of infection and large numbers of children orphaned by the epidemic. In every family that SA Cares for Life works with, there is at least one person or child infected with HIV.

The project provides food parcels, Sejo porridge, vitamins, anti-retrovirals, school uniforms and stationery and assists with the repair of shacks and the provision of pre-schooling to young children. Trained care-workers visit each family and provide psycho-social support, HIV/AIDS education and life skills training. They also help families to establish their own food gardens and obtain government grants, both interventions making the non-profit's project more sustainable. A total of 31 families, supporting 135 orphans and vulnerable children, benefitted from the project in 2008. Today, Abraham Mathibela has a new lease on life. He is able to help look after his younger siblings and travel into the city to seek employment. A healthy body and a sense of hope are powerful assets in a disadvantaged community like Mabopane. His story is just one example of the significant difference giving can make. A share in a project listed on SASIX costs just R50, and givers can rest assured that their investment will generate a good social return.

### What we also do:

- GreaterGood South Africa brings good causes and committed givers together in meaningful and innovative ways to end poverty in South Africa. Through its groundbreaking website – [greatergoodsa.co.za](http://greatergoodsa.co.za) – and call-to-action campaigns like Gifts4Good, GreaterGood SA makes it easy for individuals and businesses to support registered non-profit organisations with their money, time, skills, loyalty points and goods.
- GreaterGood's SA Social Investment Exchange (SASIX) is a social 'stock exchange' where carefully-selected development projects are listed for people to invest in. SASIX provides independent research, evaluation and monitoring to ensure that listed projects meet a set of criteria, including the ability to deliver measurable returns.

## Contact us:

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