

Ukanyo Lwabantu Community Care Centre, De Doorns

Opening Ceremony

The Ukanyo Lwabantu Community Care Centre in De Doorns was officially opened on the 15th of May 2007 by the Western Cape Minister of Health, Minister Pierre Uys. The establishment of this community project has been the culmination of efforts of the local community to provide sorely needed services within the impoverished community of De Doorns East, as well as those of NorSa, a section 21 company that focuses on changing the destiny of families and children infected with and affected by HIV/AIDS and TB. The ceremony was also attended by the Western Cape Minister of Agriculture, Cobus Dowry, and the Executive Mayor of the Breede River the Honourable Linda Sibeko and the Speaker of the Breede Valley District Municipality, Alice Titus.

The opening ceremony was held in the open air in front of the newly erected buildings and before proceedings started, the autumn skies were threatening rain. As the name of the project, chosen by the community means "**Light to the People**", it was quite symbolic that during the ceremony, the sun emerged and shone brightly on the gathering of the local community, community workers, project developers, local producers and donors.

The two buildings that have been erected in De Doorns East are situated on land donated by the Breede Valley Municipality and provide the infrastructure for Norsa's projects in De Doorns. The Executive Mayor the Honourable Linda Sibeko spoke at the opening ceremony and thanked all those involved in establishing the care centre. She stressed that the stigma of AIDS needed to be banished to prevent people from suffering in silence and encouraged people affected by the disease to come forward and make use of the counseling and medication that was available to improve the quality of their lives. She also shared with the gathering that she had family members affected by the disease that had benefited from similar services and encouraged the community to be proactive in finding out about their HIV status.

Marietjie Bezuidenhout of NorSa took the opportunity to sketch the background to the establishment of these projects and to thank all the organizations and individuals who had assisted to make this possible. She also thanked the dedicated staff members of the Ukanyo Lwabantu Community Care Centre. The children attending the Daycare centre performed a few songs for the audience and members of the community were invited to share with the audience how the new community centre had made a difference to their own lives.

In his address at the ceremony, the Minister of Health stressed the importance of community support and commitment for projects such as this one. The Department of Health has provided considerable financial assistance towards the establishment of this resource as it will provide vital services to children and the broader community. He added that as approximately 5% of children in the Western Cape were HIV positive, the recourses offered by this and similar projects would become progressively more important to communities in the region.

As a gesture of thanks, NorSa provided Ministers Pierre Uys and Cobus Dowry with a sample of the monthly food parcels that NorSa distributes to families in their cluster Care programme.

A community initiative

De Doorns is situated in the Hex River Valley, a region of the Western Cape where the economy is heavily reliant on the production of table grapes. Many of the residents of De Doorns East work on table grape farms. "The establishment of this project has been truly a godsend to the people of this community," says Elza Jordaan, CEO of the Hex River Valley Producers' Organization, who is a driving force in community development in the De Doorns area. "At the end of 2006, Pamela Nelani, a Breede River Valley Municipality community development worker who works closely with the community in De Doorns East approached us and explained that there was a dire need for support of women in our community who were coping with the affects of HIV/AIDS. In order to set up a support structure, we contacted the Deciduous Fruit Producers' Trust, and Procure. The collaborative efforts of these two

organizations had presented the highly effective Nyanisa "Let's Talk Status" programme in the area and we believed that their clear commitment to fighting the AIDS pandemic could assist us with establishing this initiative. The group was established in 2006 and Pamela Nelani was elected as chairperson of the Doorns Aids Support group. She is still currently the chairperson of the group and is a proactive worker in this cause."

"We are very grateful to NorSa and the other donors involved for establishing this care centre, as well as to the Breede River Municipality for donating this property to us, as it is well located in the community we serve," says Elza. "It is my dream to see the counseling services offered by the centre to extended to cover counseling for Cancer and Tuberculosis as well," she concluded.

NorSa answers a need

"When the community in De Doorns contacted us in 2006 to ask for our assistance in supporting people affected by HIV/AIDS in their community, this was just the kind of project development opportunity we had been liking for," says Marietjie Bezuidenhout of NorSA and Procure. "Norsa is an organisation founded as a co-operative initiative of the organisation Children of the World-Norway, SA Cares for Life, Procure and the ATKV, and in co-operation with NorSa, we have been able to establish these community development projects in De Doorns, as well as similar projects in Wellington," she added. "Once we had identified this need, we (NorSA, together with assistance from the Deciduous Fruit Producer's Trust) took this development project and ran with it. Where we knocked on doors for help, it was generously forthcoming to the point where it was possible to establish the infrastructure and services that now exist in De Doorns. What has been achieved has happened as a result of the input of various government departments, local and international aid organisations and individuals. I believe we instruments in God's hands carrying doing his work as somehow the recourses we need continue to fall into place," Marietjie explained.

The level of commitment to the project by the community is clearly illustrated by the dedication of the staff members. "All the staff members are local and most of them started working for the project as volunteers before we had the funds to pay them. We are optimistic about the future of the Norsa projects because the local community has been involved in tailoring the projects to serve the specific needs of the community," she added.

NorSa projects

The NorSa projects in De Doorns consist of three components: the Cluster Care programme, the Counselling and Education Centre and the Daycare Centre.

The Cluster care programme identifies 15 families that are in need or who are HIV infected of affected and registers them as a cluster. In order to serve the needs of these clusters, a "Mom" is appointed from the community and trained as a child care worker on an ongoing basis. These community workers then visit the families weekly to provide support and guidance. NorSa also provides a monthly balanced food parcel to each of these families to ensure that family members receive at least one healthy meal per day. There are 3 such clusters registered and operating in De Doorns at present and NorSa is currently in the process of registering three more and a total of 90 families will benefit from this programme through the care of 6 care workers.

At the counselling and Education Care centre, the focus is to provide counselling and education about HIV/Aids, Tuberculosis and general health information to the whole community. The centre is financially supported by the Department of Health: Overberg region and is manned by a trained HIV counsellor.

The Day care centre accommodates all the children that are involved in the cluster care programme, ensuring that these orphans and vulnerable children receive adequate share, nutritious meals and stimulation. The daycare centre currently provides care for 47 orphans and vulnerable children. The establishment of the building for the daycare centre was made possible by an organisation from the USA, U&SA. An individual family, the Christensen Family made this contribution to U&SA.

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Written by: Louise Brodie
Contact Person: Retha Louw
Tel: 082 302 7507 / 021 – 870 2900
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Photo Captions:

- 1 Children from the Cluster Care programme attending the Ukanyo Lwabantu Community Daycare Centre.
- 2 Ministers Dowry (*left*) and Uys with the food parcels they received from NorSA. Behind them are (*fltr*) Marietjie Bezuidenhout of NorSA and Riekie Van Den Berg of SA Cares For Life.
- 3 Marietjie Bezuidenhout (*far right*) commends the employees of the Community Centre on their commitment and dedication.