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UPDATE

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ETHEKWINI
Living Legends

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April 2023

Change of Guard in our Accounts Department
Hopes for some genuine change in Dalton
Marking World Book Day - on line and in person
A new service at the DHC



The Dalton mess begins to seep in



Gcina Mhlope works with our booksellers



Art as a form of therapy with staff

CHANGE IN OUR FINANCE DEPARTMENT

April was a moment to say hail and farewell in our very small finance department. We welcomed our new Finance Manager, Thembeke Mchunu, and said farewell to our original Finance Manager, Errold Victor.

Thembeke schooled in different parts of KZN including a period with the Oakford Dominicans. She studied accounting at the University of Natal and later completed a Bachelors in Accounting Sciences with UNISA; she is currently undertaking the Advanced Diploma with the UK-based Chartered Institute of Management Accountants. And in the middle of this she has also, with her agronomist husband, brought up three children, now aged 19, 17 and 13.

Thembeke has spent most of her career working for small firms and NGOs (such as Howick Hospice) and so is familiar with an environment like the DHC. What had most struck her when she first arrived?: "I first smelled the beautiful food being prepared in the kitchen and noticed the order and discipline that people show when they are getting food. This is not a tense environment at all."

Digging beneath the surface, as she needs to do as a Finance Manager, she has got to know about the full range of services that we offer and been impressed and surprised.

She was drawn to the DHC as a faith-based organisation: "Faith matters to me - I have committed my life to the Lord and I intend serving him. It is very encouraging for me to be part of an organisation that treats people in such a beautiful manner. Since this is a society of different people we need to work together to serve even when we have different beliefs."

"My role in finance is clear. Accurate reports are vital and donors need to see that funds are used in the right way. But essentially, I am here to make sure that managers can do their jobs efficiently: my role is to make sure that budgets are managed and finances are planned strategically."

Thembeke has spent six weeks overlapping with Errold Victor who is retiring, having served the DHC for over eight years. He was already known to Paddy Kearney (with whom he had worked at Diakonia for nine years) and also to Costas Criticos (the man who built the DHC and for whom Errold had worked at K-RITH). Errold was brought in at a time when the fund management for the DHC was getting too large for volunteers (like Paddy and our Treasurer Siphon Phakathi) to handle. There was especially a need to report to big overseas funders and also to manage the complexity of our VAT reclaim (which saved us over R2 million in the construction programme).

Errold has set a very high standard which Thembeke looks forward to matching: they are both people who believe fervently that 'things must be done properly'.

He sees this as providing a basis for us to grow further: "Why shouldn't the DHC be operating 24 hours a day, or providing accommodation and storage facilities, or getting bigger, or offering more development and employment opportunities?" He points out that the funds are out there as can be seen from the way that the Government pumps a lot of money into programmes: "But so much of that seems to be wasted."

When asked what he would miss he said: "I will miss seeing people who have nothing and yet are still smiling and laughing. They often come to me thinking I am the priest or the doctor! What I will not miss," he adds, "is getting up early to come to work!"

Errold is planning to use his retirement for some 'me time'. A particular project he wants to pursue is genealogical research and tracing back his family who originated from France. He is hoping to make a trip to Mauritius to find out more about ancestors who moved there in the 1800s.

We wish Errold many blessings on his retirement and wish Thembeke grace and patience as she starts to fill some very big shoes!

Thembeke and Errold share some thought on our financial systems as they prepare for the hand over.



ON-GOING FRUSTRATION AS THE MUNICIPALITY PROMISES BUT FAILS TO DELIVER

We keep hoping that we can share some good news with you about our Dalton project. But, despite support from some areas, the Municipality remains resolutely blind to a major disaster that they could easily solve.

Dalton is about 2km from the DHC near the harbour. Its Beer Hall – opposite the men’s hostel – was once a place famous for jazz. Now, it is home to about 1000 families living in wooden sheds under the decaying roof. Outside, between the busy taxi rank and the thriving cow hide trade, there are another 400 or so homeless people living in makeshift shacks.

We have been operating on that site for six years, using two containers to provide a clinic (focused on TB and HIV) and a crèche to help children who live amidst this squalor to prepare for school. A Dutch funder, Izingane Happy Foundation, and some local Durban individuals have been key supporters of this project. And specialists from the Botanic Gardens have helped create a lovely vegetable garden.

That is the good news; but the rest is a pattern of disappointment. Our containers were equipped – thanks to Container World – with sinks and a flushing toilet. But six years on the Municipality has still not connected them to the water mains so they remain unused. Instead, we have to spend R1,100 per month unnecessarily for a temporary toilet.

For the wider community, the Municipality installed two ablution blocks of the sort. This after refurbishing but never opening a brick ablution block already on the site. One of these new ‘blue blocks’ almost from the start has been spewing raw sewage out of the pipes. Yet despite multiple attempts to engage many departments of eThekweni – and visits by two Deputy Mayors – the problem has never been fixed. To the sewage has been added years of dirty water from the showers (which does not drain away); once mixed with rain, mud and litter the result is the health hazard that you see in the photo.

The new director of ICON – the Centre for Non-Violence at DUT – Professor Alain Tschudin visited recently and was so shocked by what he saw that he immediately wrote a detailed report about the Child Protection implications of the area. As a registered psychologist and a consultant for Save the Children and UNICEF he commented: “I am completely taken aback by the horrific circumstances surrounding these children.” Two senior city officials have promised Alain that there will be some improvements to the site – but sadly we have heard similar promises before over the last six years.

The Municipality has not been idle, however. They regularly organise a ‘clean up’: but this does not mean actually tidying the area but rather sending in bulldozers to destroy people’s shacks and their few precious belongings (including medicines and IDs). And they committed to upgrade the facilities for the skin traders. But the project was never completed and produced merely two brick buildings with corrugated iron roofs – a poor return on R25 million of rate-payers’ money.

We were briefly excited recently to hear that the Municipality has received more millions from international funders to address, among other issues, the sanitation problems of displaced people. But it turns out that this will not be used to solve the problems in Dalton, or any of the other unsolved problems that the Municipality ignores. Instead they plan to create a brand new building. And then presumably, once the politicians have had their photo opportunity, it will be left to decay like so many other smart buildings around Durban that eThekweni have built (using money extricated from optimistic donors) and then not been able to manage. Meantime, we will continue with your help to provide life-saving services.

Photos like this one still do not capture the shocking state (and smell!) of the Dalton site and the build up of sewage, waste water and litter.



STREET LIT CELEBRATES WORLD BOOK DAY

Sunday 23 April was World Book Day, a date created by UNESCO in 1995 as a worldwide celebration of books and reading and celebrated in over 100 countries. The date is inspired by Shakespeare's date of birth and death - which are both commemorated on April 23. 459 years on he is still remembered!

We were delighted that the DHC Street Lit project was high on everybody's agenda when they thought of World Book Day. We are very gratified that the public and media equate important literary days such as these, with us and our project.

Renowned literary ambassador, Gcina Mhlophe (pictured above), held a World Book Day event. Typically, she holds these in her hometown under the Bluff Baobab Tree. With the weather not looking great, the outdoor venue was changed to an indoor one; and the chosen spot was with our partners Broll, at Bluff Towers - where Vusi Meyiwa trades. He was involved in the celebrations and was even invited on to the stage to talk about the DHC. He was delighted, and the envy of all the other vendors, in having met Ma Mhlophe and appearing in a photo with her.

The media was very keen to promote the day - in fact, we secured extraordinary media coverage. Thank you to *SABC TV* news; *SABC radio* news and *Lotus FM* for all spending time with us in our bookstore.

The *Sunday Tribune* also endorsed World Book Day and carried a news pic of Street Lit book vendor, David Sithole, who trades by the Workshop pop-up library. A seller of pre-read books and an avid reader himself, Sithole encouraged us to honour World Book Day and purchase, read and enjoy the magical world of books.

The DHC Street Lit programme is an award-winning entrepreneurship project providing purpose, income opportunities, skills and hope to a team of 15 or so homeless and formerly homeless men and women, working out of the Order of St John in Durban, and supported by the Hollywood Foundation.

Photo: Mxolisy Mavimbela appeared as Harry Potter extensively across various social media platforms, including 1000 Hills Tourism when the photos were taken.



ART AS A FORM OF THERAPY

We like to be able to offer great new services to our clients – just because someone is poor does not mean they do not deserve the best. And we are also keen to work with people with specialist skills who are looking for challenging opportunities for practical work experience.

So we were delighted to be approached by Durban-born Saxon Kinnear. She is at the University of Johannesburg where she is in her second year of an Art Therapy Masters degree. This programme is in fact unique in South Africa so we are especially honoured that she is bringing her skills to us a part of the 600 hours of community work that she is required to do.

In essence, art therapy uses a combination of art-making processes alongside the principles of psychotherapy. It is utilised in many different contexts, such as hospitals and schools, and across diverse client groups. The idea is that art therapy can help individuals of all ages create meaning and achieve insight, find relief from overwhelming emotions or trauma, resolve conflicts and problems, enrich daily life, and achieve an increased sense of well-being.

Saxon explains: “Despite misconceptions, art therapy is not about how well you can draw. Rather the process is valued more than the output. The inherently therapeutic process of art-making and the artworks produced are both essential ways in which the art therapist interacts with clients. Importantly, art therapy is not about interpreting what the client has made, nor can it be used to diagnose mental health disorders. It provides a space and an environment in which someone can stop and reflect and then an opportunity to speak about what you are creating.”

UJ is the first South African university offering formalised training. To become a qualified art therapist in South Africa you are required to have a relevant first degree (usually psychology) and then a Master’s degree and be registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

Although you do not need to be an artist to benefit, some people who are already involved in the art skills group (that Stuart Talbot has been running with our UKZN OT students) have been among the first to take up this opportunity. As a form of psychotherapy it is best delivered one-on-one but to enable people to get a sense of how it can help them, Saxon started by offering some small group sessions. She ran one with all our staff members (photo above) and is now providing regular taster sessions outside in Paddy Lane for anyone (homeless people or passers-by) who want to stop and try.

People see the art materials and art-making that is happening and want to stop and ask questions and find out more. Saxon is then able to offer one-to-one sessions with someone who requests it and thus help the person to use art more deeply as a way of addressing psychological issues.

Saxon Kinnear (second from left) offers a taster of Art Therapy. For more information, please contact her by email.



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