

Sizanani (Help me to help myself)

I am Glenys Van Halter and I lost my eyesight slowly over a few years and was told in Hong Kong that there was a slim chance of regaining my sight but it would be expensive and no guarantees. I came home to Africa and a Specialist here gave me most of my sight back. I promised myself and God that if I got my sight back I would Teach others the crafts and talents I have been blessed with and put my bit back into Africa. I chose Witkoppen School as I live nearby and I cannot drive because of my eyes and I know they were in tremendous need. And this project is my 'Vision'.

Witkoppen School is 50 Years old and used to be classified as a farm school and as a result they received very little in funds. A large number of the students are from Zevenfontein and other squatter camps and are desperately poor. They have no food to bring to school for lunch so their is little chance they can afford crayons and rulers and even pencils. They have little if no self esteem and the future seems quite bleak from their side of the fence.

Our aim is to teach the children that there is a way to survive out there by showing them their own potential to use their talents to make money, thereby not having to rely on someone else to give them a job and salary.

This is how we propose to do it:

- 1) Equip the children for the future with money making skills.
- 2) Give them the confidence in their own ability to deal with the world.
- 3) Teach them productivity is the cog that turns the economic wheel.
- 4) Create a sense of achievement by making and selling their own goods and learning entrepreneurial skills and bring in funds at the same time and helping us to keep the ball rolling.
- 5) Make them independent by learning how to control money in business no matter how small your business is.
- 6) Teach them to pass on their knowledge to others, so we can all grow.
- 7) Teach them to hold on to skills but to share this knowledge without feeling threatened by the loss. We can only grow if we help each other.
- 8) Show them in a practical way that with teamwork we can make festive things happen for all of us
- 9) Channel them into paths where their talents lie and how to use them so they have a direction before they leave school
- 10) Teach them to love each other even if it's only little by little

Our needs

- 1) Paint - to paint the outside of the dreary school. It will be an art project for the high school students and we will do it in an ethnic design. We need a school the children can be proud of. Right now it's in need of a drastic facelift
- 2) Basic things like crayons, rulers, paintbrushes, felt pens, paints, glue, paper and board
- 3) Computers, as there is none for the children to become computer literate which is a necessity in the modern world
- 4) Basic garden tools to start a vegetable garden for each standard (grade). They can learn to sell what they have left after

they have food for the day. There is space for this project but no tools, seeds or hoses. Fertiliser would be a bonus

5) Sewing machines and an overlocker for the students to make and sell garments to wear as well as sell. Scissors are almost non-existent here

6) Tools for basic woodwork such as toys and dolls furniture which will be easy to sell as long as we keep the quality good.

7) Sports equipment as there is almost none at all. This could include some gym equipment.

8) Stoves (ranges) repaired or replaced, and the basics to teach them to bake for profit. There is not even a spoon in the kitchen. It is very easy to teach them to make and sell cookies, chocolates, health bread and many other things but we need all the basic ingredients and kitchen equipment.

9) Rolls of cotton or calico, wax and dyes to make batik fabric either to sell or to make clothes of good quality for selling at the school or on the markets. And the cotton to sew the garments.

10) Silk-screen inks and silk-screens. Tee shirts to screen our wonderful designs we are going to create. Cotton fabric to print our ethnic print tablecloths and place mats.

11) Cash to send some of the older students to a first aid course, a fire fighting course and a civil defence course if that is possible.

12) Funds to enable us to get a decent sports ground. At present it is a piece of veld (ground) with two goal posts on very uneven piece of ground and nowhere for spectators to watch from. These facilities are pathetic to say the least and not at all adequate for 700 children. We need help in coaching them too.

13) Classrooms are in desperate need. There are as many as 65 in some of the classes and some pleasant smelling new toilets would be a dream come true.

14) A small building or market type stall for them to sell and learn about business is essential. We need a lockable market shop and a basic till (cash register)

15) The school has the most broken down fences and a rusted old gate so for security and safety we need fences and gates, and lockable classrooms to prevent our books being stolen at night when the adult classes are on.

This is all possible, we just need the right people and tools and large doses of enthusiasm and a great deal of love and patience. As you see we have great need of so much and would be happy to have any help at all even if you have old, rusty or shop-soiled tools and garden implements we would be happy to repair or restore them for our project.

We were delighted to hear about your project to help us here in the far south. The huge problems facing the education of children from very poor and underprivileged homes. Most of our children are from squatter camps and are not able to pay school fees and bus fare. They have far to go to school and some WALK up to 15 kilometres (10 miles) to the bus stop and need to leave home at 4.30 in the morning on an empty stomach, but they are at school most days. A large percentage of the parents are illiterate and are unemployed and have no prospects for employment. We also have no dole (social security) in South Africa so the only hope for these families is to get money coming in for food as soon as possible by teaching them to make crafts to sell. The difficulty is to get the equipment to make these things. We have orphans who are taken in by strangers and given a bed

and little if any food so they cannot even afford a pencil so asking them to bring wool or needles or crayons is crazy. One eight year old is an orphan from the violence and is living with a woman with a drinking problem. So he gets very irregular meals and is very under fed and small. He has one school shirt and he washes it himself and as there is no iron that has to surface, but he is at school every day. He has no winter clothes so we are trying to get some second hand ones to get them through the winter. They are in dire need of drug education and aids education but the cash is in short supply for these luxuries.

Who would have thought that these are luxuries but to these children they are. Space is a major problem and some of the classes are as large as 70. The hall has a class in it and so does the chapel. The kitchen is also a class room. We would love to use the kitchen to teach baking for profit but where does the other class go.? The two stoves do not work and we need funds to get them repaired.

There are three other schools in our area that are as badly off as us and they are:

Riversands - Vanzylsand - Golang

There are so many priorities it is difficult to know where to begin but wherever we do begin it is a matter of urgency as there are thousands of people pouring in from the neighbouring states and countries and the ones at school already have to get a move on if they are to make a living in the next few years. If I can get a few of them on the road to being able to make a living without relying on someone to give them a job by the time they leave school we can solve a small portion of the unemployment. But we cannot afford to waste any time as some of them have one or two years left at school and do not have any idea where they are going. There is a young man of 16 who is an orphan and lives with a friend of his late Mother who is a widow and has 5 children of her own. She receives a disability pension as she was involved in an accident and is almost blind. She has no hope for herself or these children as her pension is the grand sum of 310 Rand per month (US\$45 - £30). How can she even feed them on that? The young man is so talented and I would like to send him to do a course in dress designing as I can see by his artwork that he is very gifted and so keen but we need a sponsor for him to help him financially then he says his sister of 13 can also go to school. She is trying to do odd jobs when she can get them to help her Mom. These are just a few, I can give you so many as badly off.

How do we find sponsors for the most needy ones?

One of our major problems is the school bus. It is an old rattle trap and is still in "miles per hour" so it dates back to the early sixties. This bus does 110 miles (180 km) to pick up children from all the farm areas and country districts as there are not enough schools. The bus then takes them back again, when it is going. Being so old and worn out it seems to be in need of repairs more often than it goes, so at least 50% of the time it is not going. We could do with at least two busses to get the children to school in time each day (700 pupils). Teachers are in short supply due to lack of funds. I as an example can only work there two days a week as I get no remuneration from the school as they just cannot afford me at the moment. There are two other teachers who do one day a week as a

donation. I need to work at least three days a week to keep my family going or I would be there every day. We need teachers as some of the classes have up to six periods (lessons) a week without a teacher and there are teachers who have no jobs sitting at home. I can go on and on and tell you dozens of stories about these children so let me know how much information you need. Do you need photographs of the children?. I can hardly wait to hear from you and get something going.

Yours sincerely,
Glenys Van Halter
And all the children at Witkoppen School