

The Ubuntu Centre has become a popular gathering spot for children who live in Zwile.

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY IN THE EASTERN CAPE

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Standing tall in the Proudly South African stakes is the Port Elizabeth Ubuntu Education Fund and its Centre in Zwile township. Born 13 years ago out of the vision of a New Brighton teacher who wanted to help his community but passionately believed that handouts were the wrong way to go, the many-faceted grassroots organisation is a living monument to South African ingenuity, commitment and a readiness to adopt global best practices to local needs.

Today Malizole "Banks" Gwaxula's dream of giving township children the same opportunities to succeed as

someone who is born into privilege comes true every day as Ubuntu educates and keeps some 2 000 children healthy. Each enjoys the right to a roof over his or her head, someone to talk to, books and pens and school uniforms, nutritious food, and the time to play, imagine, and enjoy being a kid.

As for the Centre, Stan Field, an internationally renowned Port Elizabeth-born architect, created a beautiful space in the unlikely setting of a struggling township and the community has taken it to heart. A child can walk in, talk with a counsellor or receive any medicines

It began with a chance meeting in a township tavern when a teacher shared his dream with a young university student. Today Ubuntu is setting global benchmarks with its womb-to-career approach.

needed. There are fresh vegetables from the garden to enjoy and a range of classes that include grammar, yoga and geometry. The aim is for every child who enters to leave feeling a worthwhile person who deserves attention and respect. The building was created as a statement that access to world-class education and health services should be every child's right.

It is not one story, but many.

Indeed, this applies as much to the architectural awards that salute the impressive building as it does to the boy who was able to study at night when given a lamp and the fourth year medical student at KwaZulu-Natal University who has emerged from her disadvantaged background as a top student. Notably, there are presently another 131 sponsored students at universities around the country.

Small wonder that Banks was acclaimed Nelson Mandela Bay's 2010 Citizen of the Year in the annual *Herald* GM awards.

Yet another story is about depth. Rather than expand geographically, Ubuntu has drawn a seven-kilometre perimeter around the community of 400 000 people that it serves. Over the years the fund has developed an integrated system of medical, health, educational and social interventions to help orphaned or vulnerable children succeed in the worlds of higher education and employment. A network of community members and supporters has built the foundation into a blueprint for culturally appropriate, community-based development. It is not about how many children are reached, but how deeply each child is reached.

It all began in 1999 in a township tavern, when the New Brighton teacher shared his dream with Jacob Lief, a young American university student visiting South Africa. For the next six months the pair, who became firm

friends, walked around the townships, talking, listening and learning. "They saw a community ravaged by AIDS, unemployment, poverty, violence, instability and apartheid's legacy. They also saw bright-eyed children so eager to learn that they used hot stones to press their school uniforms. They saw grace and ambition despite daunting obstacles," says managing director Jordan Levy.

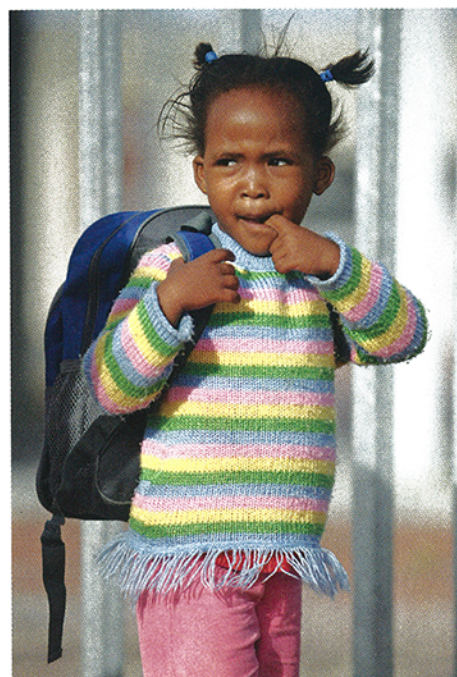
Their first office was a broom cupboard at Banks's school and start-up capital came via a raffle on the University of Pennsylvania campus, where Jacob had studied. Ubuntu has since surpassed all expectations. Having started with a few thousand rands spent on school supplies, its annual operating budget is now about R52 million.

The Centre is an extension of Ubuntu's belief that those who have the least deserve the best. Pencils were not enough when children had no school uniforms. School uniforms were useless when children with HIV were too sick to go to school. HIV medication was not enough when there was no food to help digest it. Health and nutrition were not enough when families were poor and unstable.

Families were limited in what they could do to augment the work of an overworked, under-resourced education system. The Ubuntu model is to concentrate deeply on each child to provide every possible support on the pathway out of poverty. It is a womb-to-career commitment because the journey begins before birth by preventing the transmission of HIV from mother to child. It continues with a groundbreaking early childhood development programme for two to five year olds.

"If the foundation of a house is not strong, there will be some cracks," says staff member Veliswa Jontana. The model continues until many are able to access higher education and employment.

In essence, it's a success story to make all South Africans proud. 🐘



A child from Ubuntu's pediatric clinic looks forward to a great day after seeing a doctor.

HELP AT HAND

Thousands of township children have been Ubuntu clients: children like Bonga, who had to study in a tavern because he had no light at home and Mandiswa, who couldn't concentrate at school because of abuse at home. Bonga was given a lamp, and is now at university. Mandiswa received counselling, and is excelling in her studies. Others are at university or working.



Over 100 children from various community schools attend maths, science and English classes at the Ubuntu Centre.