

THE PASSION BEHIND KHULANI

*As individuals and communities, we are capable of both compassion and indifference, but it is those who choose to act on the former, who really change the lives of others. **Cara Reilly** looks at the people and a project that is bringing change in rural Hluhluwe*

The beginnings of Khulani Special School (KSS) were less than humble and started in 1998 as a gathering of special needs children under a tree, watched over by Elsie Nsukwini and Crazentia Ngobesie – two mothers who incited change across the community.

Located in the Mduku community, between the north-western edge of False Bay in the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park and Phinda Private Game Reserve, KSS now has over 250 special needs children – a number believed to be grossly underestimated.

“Moving to rural Hluhluwe in 2001, I felt a certain sense of responsibility to people in the area, so went to a few crèches which the Africa Foundation were involved in to see how we could help,” said Paula Louw, manager of the Zuka Private Game Reserve. It was while on one of these visits in 2002 that Paula met Crazentia and Elsie, and immediately committed to helping them.

AN INTERIM SOLUTION

After five years of negotiations with the chief of the Makhasa community, support was obtained from the Africa Foundation – a non-profit organisation working in the surrounding communities. Then in 2008 the Department of Education (DoE) registered the school and together with staff from Mseleni Hospital, began assessing the children – 15 children with physical and cognitive disabilities formed the



PROJECT KHULANI has received the endorsement of Rachel Elnaugh (*Dragons' Den*) who we brought out to South Africa in May 2013 to show her the school so she could understand their needs and how best to structure Project Khulani. Rachel has included the school as a beneficiary of her Source TV initiative www.source.tv/ with 10% of the proceeds going to the school.

SUPPORT

Rachel Elnaugh, Keith Upton and Paula Louw outside the old Khulani school building

core of the school's learners.

With official support in place, a committee of Mduku community members approached the local Traditional Council who allocated a one-hectare site for the development of a school building. The new “interim” school was built, but very quickly the number of children grew to 50, and the need for a bigger school became urgent.

In 2010, Mrs Thokosile Nxumalo was appointed principal of the school. “Despite very challenging circumstances, Mrs Nxumalo she has never given up on the kids, or the goal of creating a place of refuge and learning for them,” said Paula.



Picture: Aiserv

THE NEW SCHOOL

In May 2014 the R54-million school was opened, complete with 15 classrooms and boarding facilities

REALISING THE DREAM

Thanks to Mrs Nxumalo, Paula and support from Mrs Gwala at the DoE, plans for a new, bigger school were drawn up, and in July 2012, construction of a R54-million school began.

The new school was completed in May this year, and boasts 15 classrooms, four multi-purpose rooms, a workshop, an activity room, a media centre, and an admin block. Boarding facilities for 200 boys and 200 girls have been built, as well as a dining hall and state-of-the-art kitchen and laundry.

“The people on this project were never afraid to take charge and battle through the many obstacles they faced over the 12 years it took us to get here. We now have 250 special needs children being educated, finding their place in society and most importantly learning self-respect,” said Paula. »

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MAINTAINING THE IDEAL

While the new school is the most incredible gift to the children, the running costs are well over R50 000 a month. "Ironically, because we have such a wonderful facility, it is difficult to motivate our needs to traditional funding structures. However, they are very real and our shortfall unfortunately always affects the school and those who run it," said Paula.

It is for this reason that Keith Upton, CEO of Durban-based company Nyati Textiles and an owner of Mziki Share Block, who had watched KSS grow from nothing, began looking at ways to sustain the school.

With his resources, Keith pulled a team together, and Project Khulani was born. The project involves the creation of the Khulani range of items which carry a design based on drawings done by the KSS children depicting African animals. "By creating useful products such as high-end bags and picnic blankets (which are not only attractive but have a social need at the heart of their production), we hope to ensure sustained funding for the school," said Keith.

Branding and packaging on Khulani products will clearly communicate the Khulani story adding credibility to the product and project, with the KSS website allowing people to see how the school is benefitting from their purchase," said Keith.

In order to produce a quality bag, Keith partnered with Carla Ashton and her Thandana luggage brand. For Carla, the opportunity to be part of Project Khulani was ideal. "Thandana has been looking at linkages with projects which better the lives of communities and the needs of KSS really resonated with us," she said.

The Khulani range of bags will include a combination of full leather and leather/laminate products such as iPad covers and wine coolers. "We have taken the most popular items from our existing range and will be manufacturing the stand-alone Khulani range," said Carla.

The full range is due to be released in time for the spring/summer season, and the bags will be available through Thandana's national stockists as well as online through the Nyati Textiles and Thandana websites. *

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QUALITY BAGS

Above: The original Khulani design made up of drawings of African animals done by children from Khulani Special School
Below: A Thandana double wine cooler and Thandana weekend bag

