



INDAWO YENTSIKELELO
A PLACE OF BLESSING

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Indawo Yentsikelelo
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The Project

THE HISTORY OF THE PROJECT "INDAWO YENTSIKELELO"

After completing my Degree in Social Science at the University of South Africa I founded the German NGO **Positiv Leben e.V. (Living Positive)** in Mannheim in order to raise the necessary funds for setting up the orphan project "**Indawo Yentsikelelo - A Place of Blessing**" in South Africa. Setting up the orphanage, however, proved to be much harder than I had initially envisaged. After returning to South Africa I first couldn't get a real foothold, because the Department of Social Development in Cape Town told me in no uncertain terms that new orphanages were neither welcome nor necessary, seeing that South Africa "doesn't have any orphans or a problem with an HIV/Aids epidemic". I was even told, and I quote: "Mr. Kraemer, take your money back to Germany and help German children!". (This was the general political mood under the administration of then president Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela's successor as President of South Africa. This view has since changed under the current administration of President Jacob Zuma, and the current Department of Health finally recognizes the acute crisis caused by the number of orphans and by the HIV/Aids epidemic.)

After this disheartening experience and the realization that starting my own project from scratch might be impossible, I started looking for existing projects in the townships in April 2004, hoping to find a project I could collaborate with. I eventually found a project called Masizame Educare in Nyanga, a township next to Cape Town International Airport. This project was founded and run by an old, african lady called "Mama Hollow". She had been given a plot (3.500 sqm) by the City Council, which was zoned as "institutional" (for social development), and a South African Fundraising Organization had just complete new building on the plot for the Crèche Mama Hollow was running. The Crèche consisted of only 12 children at the time, and in another metal shack she was running an After School Care with 25 children. There was no electricity, phone or internet connection, and her budget was minimal. No salaries were being paid, and everyone worked on a voluntary basis.

I then offered Mama Hollow a collaboration. Apart from having considerable funds available, I also had knowledge of how to deal with government departments, how to set up a financial accounting structure, how to do basic book-keeping, and how to run a social work project. And, as a qualified Social Worker, I could also bring a certain legitimization to the project by registering it with Social Services. Mama Hollow, on the other hand, had an existing plot and infrastructure, a small but functioning project, a name and reputation in the community, knowledge of the culture and language, and the connection to the greater society within the township. I thus suggested to Mama Hollow that together we could build up, expand and professionalize her existing project and that in return I would be allowed to eventually set up my originally envisioned orphan project on the remainder of her plot. She agreed to this collaboration and we re-named the newly established project "**Indawo Yentsikelelo - A**



Place of Blessing".

Unfortunately the orphanage (or permanent place of safety) was never built. Although after 4 years of hard work we had managed to expand the existing project to include 40 children in the Crèche and 40 children in the After School Care, had managed to get an electricity, phone and internet connection, had built a new building for the After School Care and erected a security fence around a large part of the plot, we also encountered a number of obstacles on the way and had to fight a lot of battles that were too difficult to win and in the end made it impossible to achieve what we had set out to do.

Firstly, Nyanga is the most criminal township in the whole of South Africa (with the highest murder rate as a percentage of the population), and thus we constantly had to deal with a lot of crime. A 5-year old boy from our Crèche was killed by having his head beaten in with bricks because he had become a witness to his mother's cellphone being stolen. And a 16-year old boy from our After School Care was shot by teenage gangsters outside our project at 11 o'clock in the morning, with all our kids, including his 11-year old sister, watching. These are just two of the many sad stories we had to witness over the years.

Secondly there were massive fights between rivaling Clans and families within the community, which made it impossible for the project to become a true "Community Project". Mama Hollow always preferred to employ members of her own Clan, which naturally led to envy and eventually open hostility and violence against our project from members of the other clans, including murder threats against me. The new house we built for the After School Care was completely destroyed after being half finished already. The individual segments of the security fence we were trying to erect was constantly pulled out of the still wet concrete at night and carried away, so that we could eventually only complete the fence under heavy police protection.

And finally there was an old garage building on the plot which had for years been occupied by illegal squatters, and all my attempts to have them evicted led to nothing. Countless meetings over the course of four years with city councillors, police, politicians, street councillors, ward councillors and community elders led to absolutely no results. Even the City Council, which had given Mama Hollow the plot in the first place, and who actually owned the property, was not prepared to help us with this matter. Endless talks eventually led to nothing!!

After 5 years of fighting I was no longer prepared to continue investing both donated funds as well as my entire energy, time and strength into this endless and eventually even fruitless battle. In May 2008 the Board of Directors of **Positiv Leben e.V.** thus decided in a crisis meeting to rather try and re-locate the project to a more suitable plot and to start re-building it there. In July 2008, on my search for a suitable plot, I then came across a beautiful, 5 hectar farm property in the Philippi Horticultural Area (PHA - also known as Philippi Farmland or Schaapkraal), adjacent to the Squattercamp and township Samora Machel. In September I founded **Vulamasango - Open Gates**, a new Non-Profit Organization according to South African law, completely separate from Indawo Yentsikelelo, with a new Board of Directors and a new constitution, in order to start afresh with our plans to build the orphan project I had originally envisaged. In December we were able to raise the necessary funds through Positiv Leben e.V. to purchase the plot. In July 2009 the property was transferred into Vulamasango's name. From August to September 2009 we renovated the existing building, the old farm hall, and in October the new children's project **Vulamasango - Open Gates** was established, first with 40 children in our After School Care and later with 36 children in our Crèche.

Four of our initial staff at **Indawo Yentsikelelo**, the two Crèche Teachers No-



makhwezi Manzana and Ntombizodwa Madaza, and the two sitters Xolisa and Bongwiwe Majambe, who managed our After School Care and the therapy project in Nyanga, and who, in 2006 created the stage show "Zabalaza - African Performance Art", decided to "move" with me to the farm plot to start and build up the new project Vulamasango. The other staff, mostly family members of Mama Hollow, stayed behind in Nyanga to continue running the old project. We also took the 15 oldest children from the After School Care with us to the farm, as we had already funded all of them through our School Sponsorship Programme for several years, some of them even having travelled overseas with us in 2007 on our first "Zabalaza - Songs of Hope" concert tour. Most of those 15 children and youth are still actively engaged with our project. Four of them have passed their Matric (South African A-Levels), one of them is working for Vulamasango as a permanent staff member and is studying Social Work, and some of them are still attending school through our School Sponsorship Programme.

Mama Hollow is still running **Indawo Yentsikelelo** in Nyanga, albeit on a smaller scale. She is still facing the same problems and obstacles. For me, the project was an immensely important learning experience. I got to know the township communities very intimately and got a chance to learn a lot about the culture, traditions and language of the "Xhosa". I learnt to understand the societal structures in the townships, and learnt how to deal with difficulties and obstacles in this line of work. But after this "apprenticeship" it was also important to retreat from a battle that couldn't be won and start over under different circumstances. This "new beginning" was made possible through the purchase of the plot and the founding of Vulamasango under new conditions in a peaceful atmosphere on our beautiful farm!

Florian Kraemer

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