

VRYGROND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT TRUST, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. REPORT on year 2008.

From Jonathan Schrire, Trust Chairperson.

15th March 2009

The Trust has three projects:

- Library
- Sunrise Preschool (220 children)
- Capricorn Primary School (450 pupils)

This report covers all three and also includes reports on other projects which are being established in Vrygrond on land owned by the Trust.

It covers the period from January 2008 to March 2009.

SUNRISE EDUCARE PRESCHOOL

- 1. BACKGROUND & PHYSICAL EXPANSION:** During 2008 Sunrise was subject to major development and improvements. The main building was originally built by the VCDT and opened in Dec 2000 with 4 classes. It was based on modified shipping containers. In Jan 2004 two new brick classrooms were opened.

In 2008 we built another two brick classrooms, a new office, and new toilet block, which opened at the beginning of the school year in January 2009. The costs of approx R500,000 (\$50,000) were paid by two UK based donors.

In addition during 2008 two Wooden Prefab units (locally called "Wendy Houses") were erected, funded and furnished by a local donor (Campbell).

As a result Sunrise now has 7 classrooms, with new offices for Management, a staff meeting room, a learning support room, new kitchen and additional toilet block.

There are now 220 children ranging from 2 to 5 years old, who receive food and preschool education here.

- 2. EDUCATIONAL REPORT:**

In South Africa children in Preschool do not generally learn to read or write. This takes place in Grade R, the first year of school, when the children are at least 5 years old. Therefore Preschools do not implement formal assessments of their children.

Having said that, the main thrust of our efforts at Sunrise is to focus on the preschool education being given to the children. Sunrise started many years ago as wood and tin structure which was a true Creche, where children were cared for rather than taught. **Our efforts have been to transform Sunrise from a place where kids get their noses wiped and given food, to a place where structured preschool education takes place.**

To do this

- a) We released our most qualified teacher (Rochelle Fleshman) from teaching a class and have made her responsible for the overall education in the preschool.
- b) From January 2009 we have employed a very experienced preschool teacher, Pat Jones, to further strengthen the education taking place in class.
- c) We have also employed an experienced teacher who is qualified both as a teacher and an Occupational Therapist (Cornelia Newton).
- d) Dr Louis Benjamin, a specialist teacher-educator, is including some of the Sunrise teachers in workshops he is running at our Primary School. His "Basic Concepts" methods (cognitive education) will then be applied in Preschool as well as Primary School.

3. GENERAL:

The difficulty in placing Sunrise Preschool kids in decent Primary Schools was one of the stimuli that promoted the creation of Capricorn Primary. Now that the Primary School has been such a success, it has encouraged us to "go back" and improve the Preschool.

This is partly because

- the funding needs of building and running the Primary school have raised the funding profile of the VCD Trust to a new level, and additional funding is now available for the Preschool;
- **Preschool and Primary School form one continuous educational process, and if we are to attain our overall educational goals we need Sunrise to deliver to the primary school children who have an adequate preschool education.**

4. **FINANCIAL:** In addition to the hiring of additional teaching staff, all staff received salary increases wef March 2009 and this has increased the running costs significantly. For the coming year the costs look like this:

SUNRISE PRESCHOOL RUNNING COSTS	Per annum
Running costs annual, including December staff bonus	R 895,000
Income from State subsidy & parents fees	<u>R 180,000</u>
Deficit to be made up by funding	R 715,858
One to One Children's Fund commitment	<u>R 350,000</u>
Balance funded from other sources	R 365,000

Government Subsidy: The pupils at Sunrise qualify for a Govt subsidy. For years the Government has paid subsidy for less than half our children. The Sunrise Management has battled in vain with bureaucratic red tape to get this subsidy increased. It is a bureaucratic nightmare compounded by the fact that the Preschool is built across two separate plots, one of which belongs to the Trust, the other to the local authority. This technicality appears to pose huge problems. I have now mounted a more aggressive campaign with local authorities which I believe will result in us getting an increased subsidy this year which will help reduce the funding needs of the Preschool.

COMMUNITY LIBRARY:

The Library continues to act as superb resource for Vrygrond at a relatively low cost of around R7,000 per month. It continues to be very competently managed by one of our Trustees, Elizabeth Everson, together with her Assistant Jane Sylvester. **There are 725 adults and 1,022 children and youth who are members and take out books. In a community of 12,000, most of whom are semi literate at best, that is exceptional penetration and indicates what a useful resource the Library has become.**

In addition, Elizabeth & Jane continue to involve the community by holding weekly reading classes for children, running a small computer training centre in one of the back rooms, taking over 45 children away for 4 days to a seaside camp in December 2008, and generally acting as a community information centre.

The Library was equipped with a new computer in Jan 2009, and now has internet access. ADSL Broadband is being installed in the next month. So not only can the library be in touch by email, but the pupils who come there for homework can access the internet, - one of the first places in Vrygrond to have this facility.

CAPRICORN PRIMARY SCHOOL:

1. PHYSICAL EXPANSION:

The school opened a year ago in January 2008 with 12 classrooms, and included 4 Grades, - Grade R through to Grade 3. In the second half of the year we made arrangements to build new classrooms so that our Grade 3 classes can remain on into Grade 4. We had neither the money nor time to build brick buildings, and the new classrooms are mobile units which are constructed on site. They nonetheless provide substantial, bright and roomy classrooms.

By end April 2009 we will have funded and built another 6 classrooms (3 double units) which means that we have increased the numbers of classrooms by 50% one year after opening!

As a result of this we will have 18 classrooms which will house our expanded pupil body plus giving us dedicated rooms for

- A new BRIDGING (Remedial) Class for children with learning and behavioural problems;
- An ENRICHMENT class for our brightest children;
- A dedicated room for our MUSIC Dept.

The number of pupils has increased from 370 to 450, - an increase of 20%.

If we carry on incrementally following our oldest class up each year, and adding one grade each year, we will achieve our aim of **becoming a full primary school with 8 Grades, and approx 800 pupils by January 2012.**

See further discussion of the cost implications of this expansion under FUNDING NEEDS on page 13 below.

2. EDUCATIONAL EXPANSION:

a) **REMEDIAL- BRIDGING:** Capricorn Primary has no admission criteria, - we simply open the doors and take a cross section of children on a first come first served basis until each class is full (30 pupils). We therefore have a representative cross section of children which includes some who are very disruptive in class, either through behavioural problems or learning difficulties. These children require an inordinate amount of teacher attention and their presence in class detracts from the education being given to the majority.

We have hired an experienced Remedial Teacher (Beverly Coetzee) who will take these pupils, - maybe 3 from each class, - and run a separate class for them, to be called **Bridging Class**. Not only will this enable these kids to be given focused attention appropriate to their problems, but more importantly it will remove their disruptive impact from the mainstream classes.

b) **MUSIC:** We have employed a senior Music Teacher, who is a specialist in music for Foundation Phase Education, (Denise de Kock), to start a proper music department in the school. We have bought musical instruments as chosen by her, and our pupils will now be getting professionally organized music education.

c) **ART:** Our Art Dept was established early last year and has now been permanently housed in the Art Loft in the big hall. Driven by the passion of Lella Kondylis, who works as a volunteer, it has thrived. We have employed an assistant (Rejhanna Fennie) to work with Lella and keep the dept running when Lella is away.

As a result the pupils at Capricorn Primary will, mostly for the first time in their lives, be exposed to the richness of properly taught Art and Music as part of their regular syllabus.

3. **STAFF:** The Dept of Education requires all teaching posts allocated to a new school to be advertised. The teachers who are there are temporary appointees, and have to apply for their own posts along with all others. This procedure took place in November and gave us the chance to improve the general quality of our teachers.

PRINCIPAL: The above applies to all staff including the original Principal, Ridwaan Samodien. His appointment was temporary and after 6 months he returned to his previous school. He has been replaced by **Mrs Siddieka Hassen** who has now been confirmed as permanent Principal by the Dept of Education. Like most of the people who choose to come and work at Capricorn Primary,

Siddieka is motivated by a desire to work with, and make a difference to the lives of, some of the most deprived children in our society. She is a superb Principal who is very dedicated to the educational model we are building in Vrygrond.

TEACHERS: We retained six of the best teachers, and have **employed nine new teachers to start this year**, - a mixture of experienced teachers and enthusiastic younger teachers who have just finished their 4 year courses at Teacher Training College. This is a stronger cohort of teachers than we had when we opened.

TEACHER ASSISTANTS: We began the school last year with a Teacher Assistant in every class. Many of these were young unemployed women who had just matriculated. It became apparent that in some cases the Assistant had herself to be guided by the teacher, and in effect became an additional burden instead of a help. This year we have settled on a reduced pool of the best Assistants who will be deployed as they are needed in the school. Most of them are themselves able to run classes in the event that the teacher is absent. We still have 11 Assistants, covering 16 classes, so the ratio is still very high.

LANGUAGE: We are continuing our policy of seeing that in the youngest grades both Vrygrond languages are available and if the teacher speaks Afrikaans, then there will be an Assistant who speaks Xhosa. The main aim is for the children to become fluent in English, and we are an English medium school. One often hears the children talking to each other in English in the playground, which is a dramatic new development for Vrygrond, and confirmation of how quickly they learn.

So, **the school has a total staff complement of 36, of whom 17 are qualified teachers** (compared to 12 teachers a year ago), and 11 are Teaching Assistants. That is an increase in teaching staff of 40%. Included in the above total are 2 who volunteer their time for free, and the rest are paid. The gross salary bill for all employees who are not paid by the State is now around R1.1 million pa (£76,000 or \$110,000).

4. **TEACHER TRAINING:** Dr Louis Benjamin ran his 5 day Basic Concepts training course last year for Grade R and Grade 1 staff, and then monitored their implementation in class. He running the same 5 day training course this year (2009) for a total of 9 teachers who did not undergo the course last year. This course, together with the improvement in the quality of our staff, should make a big difference to the level of in class teaching given to the pupils this year. Dr Benjamin's report is attached.
5. **COMPUTERS:** This has been one of the outstanding success stories of the school.
 - a. **SMARTBOARDS:** The SA Dept of Education has created and funded a special computer promotion body called Khanya. Last year Khanya selected Capricorn Primary as a model school in how to use computers in Early Childhood Education. They have now provided a computer

driven SMARTBOARD in every class, and trained our teachers in how to use them. These are touch sensitive screens driven by educational software loaded onto a laptop. In most classes they have completely replaced the traditional chalk blackboards as medium of instruction.

- b. COMPUTER LABORATORY: After this report period Khanya installed (in April 2009) a fully equipped computer lab with 33 desktop computers, a server. Local area network and internet connectivity.

Not only is this a monetary commitment which we would not have been able to fund on our own (over R750,000), - it also indicates that the Dept of Education has recognized Capricorn as an effective and innovative model in educating deprived children. This Governmental confirmation is gratifying.

This school is becoming one of the leaders in computers as educational tools, which further adds to our profile and educational delivery.

6. LEARNING SUPPORT:

The dedicated learning Support Room continues to provide the educational "turbo charge" which is essential if our pupils are to make up the educational deficit imposed on them by their circumstances. Two children at a time get an hour concentrated literacy teaching once a week. The process is supervised by our Professional Educational team, Wordworks, led by Shelley O'Carroll.

- a) We have 28 volunteers from neighbouring communities and **we have now increased their activity in school to three mornings a week.** In 2008 150 children received special teaching in this room, over half the pupils in Grades 1, 2 and 3.
- b) The same pupils stay with the same adult volunteer teacher for half the year. This is almost certainly the first time in their lives that any of these children have received such attention from an adult; this has an **emotional impact** which goes far beyond the educational. Many of the kids visit the houses of their "teacher" at weekends, and many of the adults buy stuff for the children, like clothing, books, toys. Some visit the children in their homes.
- c) For years the residents of the middle class suburb of Marina da Gama, which is literally the other side of the road from Vrygrond, kept out of Vrygrond. It was a no-go area for them. The Volunteer program at the school has been a catalyst which has ended this isolation and **brought these two very different communities together.**

In addition to the Learning Support Program

- d) We have **employed a Special Needs Coordinator**, Jenny Silberbauer, who has worked for several years in the special needs section of one of the London Boroughs I(Kensington & Chelsea). Jenny will also act as a backup

for the Learning Support, training new volunteers and enabling the school to extend this important program.

e) An **Occupational Therapist**, Georgina McConnachie, has joined to work in both School and Preschool.

7. **SOCIAL WORKER:** The Social worker we hired beginning of last year did not work out, and she has left. The feeling of Senior Management at the school was that we should not hire a replacement. We have however hired Beverly Coetzee who is an experienced remedial Teacher and she, together with the Special Needs team including Jenny Silberbauer, are able to do in-school Counseling and refer the most disturbed children to social services outside the school.

In addition the new Children's Centre which is opening opposite the school in April (see below page 12 "Other related developments") will include social workers among their staff, to whom our pupils can be referred.

8. **EDUCATIONAL:**

The pupils have been assessed at various periods during the year, enabling the school to assess improvements. The results have been analysed two ways: -

- Firstly we analysed the progress made by the **same PUPILS** who were part of the learning support program. These children were selected because they scored very poorly in tests conducted at the beginning of the year. We wanted to ascertain whether our program was in fact helping to close the gaps for these children.
- Secondly, we compared the educational level of the same **GRADE** at the beginning of each year, ie not the same pupils, but measuring the up-coming grade level against the level of the previous year. So for example, are the Grade 2 pupils in January 2009 better educated than the Grade 2 pupils in 2008? Are more of the children at the appropriate level for their grade ? Using the 2008 intake as a benchmark we could also begin to assess whether the last year spent in our school had made a difference.

There is a more detailed educational report attached; this is an overview.

a) The impact of our education is very apparent. Our pupils show huge improvements over the year. Some illustrations of this.

- In January 2008 our Grade 1 class (6 to 7 year olds) knew on average 2 letters of the alphabet. By December they knew 20 letters. This might not seem to be remarkable as children should learn their letters in Grade One – however, when one considers that the Grade Three's who started at Capricorn in 2008 knew an average of 18 letters, then we have done well to ensure that the Grade One's have finished their first year of school with this important foundation in place.

- At the beginning of last year our Grade 2 pupils could write on average 2 words on a simple graded spelling test. By the end of the year they could write 11 words on average.
- In 2008, only a quarter of the Grade Two's scored more than two on a graded spelling test. In 2009, three quarters of the Grade Two's were able to spell more than two words correctly.
- In January last year only 25% of our Grade 2 pupils were within 6 months of where they should have been academically. This January 74% were at that level. A massive improvement which indicates the difference made by having a year at our school.
- In Grade 3, last year only 16% were within 6 months of where they should be academically; this year the figure was 35%.

CONCERNS: The figures also highlight causes for concern.

- b) The depressing news is the devastating impact which poverty and social deprivation have on even the very youngest children. One of the motivations for building a Primary School was the realization that it is "too late" at High School to make up the educational deficit of the previous 8 years. What I, as a layman, was unprepared for was that even children of 6 years old are already 2 years behind the age-appropriate benchmarks in literacy! We are playing educational catch up even in the youngest grades of Primary school.
- c) Although we have radically reduced the numbers of pupils who are a year or more behind the academic benchmarks, there are still not nearly enough of them who are **at the appropriate level for each Grade**. For instance, only 17% of this year's Grade 1 intake are "school ready", ie at the proper level for Grade 1. These are children who have been through our own Grade R last year, and it is disappointing that only 17% have been "brought up to speed". Typically Grade R pupils in SA get very limited literacy education, but a decision was taken in March to expose the Grade R's to more focused emergent literacy education. Similarly, 27% of our Grade 2 kids are still only at early Grade 1 level.
- d) The other shocking thing is the desperate level of many of the schools in the area. We had Grade 3 children entering last year who knew 2 or 3 letters of the alphabet. What had they done for the two years they had spent in other schools?! How can a child sit in class for two years and not learn more than 3 letters of the alphabet?
- e) Part of the problem in other schools is the children get promoted irrespective of whether they are at the right level or not. Which is why you get children coming into high schools who are functionally illiterate. Our school is not doing this. We have kept back almost 30 children who came into Grade 1, in order for them to repeat the year. As a result we will now have 5 Grade 1 classes this year, - the repeat class plus the 4 Grade R classes coming up from the previous year. In order to keep within the total

number of classrooms we physically have, we have had to reduce our Grade R intake this year to 3 classes, instead of the 4 we had last year.

- f) Improvement is less dramatic in the older class, who have already fallen behind in other schools. I am not sure that our oldest class will ever really catch up and get to the appropriate level. We are this year strengthening our teaching staff, which should help. But the real educational benefit is felt by the kids who start young in our school and go up through the ranks. So we need to rejoice in the startling academic improvement of our first 3 Grades, who are the future of this school, and at the same time see what we can do to improve the oldest class who have suffered the most from poor or no teaching in other schools.

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

As the scope of our projects has grown, it has become important to broaden the organizational base of the Trust so it is less dependent on me. Last year I needed to be very involved when the school opened and was establishing itself, but I am this year taking steps this year to transfer responsibility for much of my administrative and financial control. The Trust is: -

- a) Hiring office space in an established office set up and using their bookkeepers and administrative people to help with the accounting and bookkeeping of the Trust and its projects. This will give the Trust an ongoing administrative structure.
Our Auditors, Mazars Moores Rowland, do our annual financial statements for free, but it would not be reasonable to expect them to undertake regular bookkeeping work for free, and if they were to charge for their time it would be expensive. The part time employment of an established bookkeeping office setup makes more sense.
- b) Employing someone to help manage the affairs of the Trust. Melanie de Villiers has offices in Cape Town where she already works with one of our long term funders, the London based One to One Trust, and organizes their major HIV-Aids conferences (PATA). So there is already a welcome connection here.

Melanie knows Vrygrond and our projects, and has met the most involved Trustees. She is enthusiastic about spending time in the community, which is essential for anyone involved with such projects. In addition she has a background in education, and is deeply interested in the educational programs which are the thread running through all our activities. I have no doubt her presence will make a major difference in strengthening the Trust and relieving its dependence on me.

- c) Structuring the Trust projects so that they are largely managed by their own management teams, - something that has been established over the last few years. **The Trust does not want to, nor does it, actively manage any of our projects. Our job is to establish community**

facilities and then find people to run them, - wherever possible using people from the community.

The Trust raises the money to pay for the costs of running the facilities, and exercises a general overseeing role. We provide funding in a very controlled way, and are consulted on general policy and developmental issues other than day to day management. **We make a very clear distinction between governance and management and have inculcated awareness of this distinction in all the people who manage our projects.**

This means that Melanie de Villiers will be coming into an organisation that is securely established, and also organizationally defined. Her job will be made much easier by this organizational clarity.

OTHER RELATED DEVELOPMENTS IN VRYGROND:

- a) During 2008 work began on a major **Community Centre for Vulnerable Children**. It is being built by an NGO called Etafeni (the driver is Stephanie Kilroe) which already has an established successful centre in Nyanga, a poor area about 20 kms away.

It is situated on a site opposite the Primary School which is owned by the VCD Trust. The projected cost of the Centre is R13 million which is being funded by the Elton John Aids Foundation UK and others. The first Phase is due to be completed by May 2009. Although Etafeni is responsible for funding the centre and setting up management, the Centre will be owned by the VCD Trust and will therefore fall under our overall responsibility. It will provide for vulnerable children, largely those affected by HIV-AIDS, and their caregivers, and will include income generation for adults, Preschool and Aftercare for children, large vegetable garden and kitchen, HIV and TB testing and counseling, and outreach nursing. This is going to be a major facility for Vrygrond.

- b) A group called **Home from Home** (Pippa Shaper and Jane Payne) is building two Houses for orphan children in which a "house mother" looks after a family of 6 children of various ages. They already run 12 similar houses in other communities. This facility is also being built on Trust land and resident Trustees (Berenice Bougaard) is taking responsibility for overall mentoring of the house mothers.
- c) A neighbouring businessman Douglas Gorrie, has established a large, well-run **Soup Kitchen** also on land made available for free by the VCD Trust. They distribute free food to a variety of Vrygrond residents.
- d) Two Christian based organizations, **Living Hope** and **Joshua Children's Mission**, have each built substantial facilities on Trust land elsewhere in Vrygrond where they organize youth groups and run educational programs as well as providing counseling and home based caring services. Living Hope in particular is a

substantial organisation which already has major facilities in other parts of Cape Town.

- e) We are fairly advanced in talks with **Lufthansa** group who want to build and run a large Preschool in cooperation with our Trust on a site provided by us. This will further add strength to the "educational cluster" that is developing in Vrygrond.

What is happening is that the projects established by the Trust over the years in Vrygrond have acted as catalysts for other NGO's to come into Vrygrond. This has accelerated with the building of the Primary School, which is in many ways a focal centre for the community.

This process has been facilitated by the fact that the Trust owns many pieces of land in Vrygrond and we follow a policy of making such land available free of charge for those organizations able to build and manage projects which deliver significant benefits to the community.

It is an unusual model in that outside agencies are spending a lot of money putting up buildings on land which does not belong to them. These facilities built on Trust land then become part of the assets of the Trust, which means the Trust has ultimate and long term responsibility for them, even though they do not form part of our directly funded projects.

The relationship between land occupier and Trust is regulated through a formal Occupancy Agreement, - like a Lease but without any rental. This Agreement includes a protection clause which permits the Trust to step in at any time if the facility is not being used for the socially beneficial purposes for which it was established.

FUNDING:

Both Sunrise Educare Preschool and Capricorn Primary School have expanded beyond our anticipation. This is mentioned above, but in summary:

	JANUARY 2008	MARCH 2009	NOTE
CAPRICORN PRIMARY SCHOOL			
Primary School classrooms	12	18	3 for extra mural activities.
School pupils	370	440	
School employees	32	37	More teachers & educationalists.
Salary bill annual	R704,400 pa	R 1,030,800 pa	

SUNRISE PRESCHOOL	JANUARY 2008	MARCH 2009	NOTE

Sunrise Preschool classrooms	6	7	10 rooms including prefab offices and extra mural rooms;
Preschool pupils	180	220	
Preschool employees	16	20	
Salary bill annual	R425,000	R 585,000 pa	

As mentioned above, Capricorn Primary has expanded in the first year far beyond what was anticipated. When we opened the Primary School in January 2008, it had four Grades and 12 classrooms. By April 2009 it will have five Grades and 18 classrooms, including special needs rooms for struggling pupils, enrichment class for talented pupils, and Music Dept. It is now clear that **our goal is to expand until we have a full Primary School of eight grades (Grade R to Grade 7)**. That will need another 8 to 10 classrooms until we have a full complement in 2012.

The Trust has received wonderful support from donors, and we are in a good financial position to meet the running costs of our present facilities for the next few years. Our main funding needs relate to the EXPANSION of our facilities and the added costs associated with such expansion.

- a) CAPITAL: - the cost of providing the new mobile classrooms each year. A double unit with 2 classrooms now costs around R400,000 (\$40,000 or £27,000) built and furnished. It is more economical to buy doubles, instead of singles. **So if we get 2 double units each year, that is a CAPITAL cost of around R800,000 (\$80,000 or £53,000) per year for the next 2 ½ years** (at present prices).
- b) RUNNING: Since the Dept of Education funds only half our teachers, and none of our assistants or remedial teachers, each new classroom will impose **additional direct RUNNING COSTS of around R6,000 per month or R72,000 (\$7,200; £4,800) per year**.

FINDING THE MONEY: Based on present funding success, and in the expectation that funders will approve of the way their money is being used to deliver education, I hope that enough funders will continue to support our projects to enable us to fund our present facilities plus the expansion.

Thank you for your support and for being part of this important educational model.

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