

# Poverty strangling potential of children

*"Many days and nights, when it rains and storms and it leaks in the shack...it is very wet in the shack...and there is no food for them, I don't know what to say to my children when they look at me. They cough and they are sick and they cannot sleep. It breaks me everyday," says Joyce, a mother living in a squatter camp in Belhar/Delft in Cape Town.*

**Photo: Quinton Adams, lecturer and educational psychologist at the Educational Psychology Department at SU (middle) with Frederick, also known as Trane (left) and with David (right), also known as Vlam. The little boy is Iqlah. They all live in Freedom Farm.**



If you have never gone to bed hungry on a daily basis, have never feared for your life every time you leave your dilapidated shack, have never had to constantly risk the chance of being raped or sexually harassed around the next corner, you could never know what it means for a child to grow up in extreme poverty.

About a half million people forge a living in Cape Town's 165 informal settlements. Yearly an additional 16 000 people move into these settlements.

It was with this in mind that Quinton Adams, a lecturer and educational psychologist in the Educational Psychology Department at Stellenbosch University, decided to expose his students to the lifestyles, challenges and experiences of children and families living in poverty at Freedom Farm squatter camp in Belhar/Delft. He does this by bringing together practical experience and theory, and by growing a new generation of educational psychologists that are able to solve problems in society based on the realities of South African communities. For this reason practical experiences are incorporated into the student's community service and used during lectures. Many students also draw on the project for research purposes.

"There is a huge need for students in the various faculties to be exposed to poverty, because we are dealing with a population where about 18 million children are living with no food to eat or a safe, warm place to sleep," says Mr Adams.

He initiated the Freedom Farm project after meeting a community mother, Mary Byneveld, who had taken in a boy from the local squatter camp. The young boy had come knocking on her door on a daily basis for something to eat and out of concern for the boy, she approached the mother and asked to take the boy in. Ms Byneveld requested support from Mr Adams, a former guidance teacher who had dealt with the effect that insufficient support systems

had on a child's potential to develop into a productive citizen.

From there Mr Adams involved the Stellenbosch educational psychology students and started reaching more families in the environment. The environment spoken of here includes homes built of wood and zinc, where exposure to treatable diseases such as TB, asthma is still a reality and where misinformation and uneducation are rife.

"This is an opportunity for postgraduate students to be exposed to the life and circumstances of people who live in squatter camps and it also gives those children and families an opportunity to draw on the necessary support systems in place," he says.

"Here, there are no recreational facilities for the children. There is also a huge shortage in sanitary facilities for the community. Many children who leave school are pulled into gangs and the world of drugs. Adults are often unemployed. Others pick up scrap metal and try to sell it for a living. But there is no doubt that these people live in constant danger from their environment."

What makes this project exceptional is that it has been running without any funding for the last two years.

"I believe in starting a project from nothing and if one receives funding down the line, that's great, because usually when funding runs out people are quick to say there is no money to continue. You cannot walk into these people's lives and offer them support and all these opportunities and just pull out when the going gets tough. "Those who have access to all basic human needs and more owe it to the poor of South Africa to have the chance at least to access those opportunities. These children have the potential to become amazing individuals, but poverty is strangling their development."

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