



KLEINOOD FARM

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Kleinood Farm project 2013

Weber Gedenk Primary School: Centre for Special Needs Education

The refurbishing of the old house on the Weber Gedenk Primary School grounds is our flagship project for 2013. As with the Centre for art and culture we consider it as the beginning of a long-term project that Kleinood farm can support in a sensible and constructive way in future as well.

With this project we are planning to create a special environment for learners with special needs who cannot function or develop to their full potential in a mainstream academic classroom. I find the work done in that class extremely inspiring not only in an academic sense, but also in the very important social upliftment role it has to play in the wider community.

Many of the children in this class were born with foetal alcohol syndrome, but there are also children with Downs syndrome and others who have just been so neglected and abused that they simply need a special space where the structures are less severe and they can develop at their own pace in a nurturing, calm and safe environment. By taking special care of the needs of these children, I am hoping to create a special awareness in the surrounding community as to issues like alcohol abuse, responsible parenting, child abuse and empathy for people with disabilities.

In 2012 we successfully constructed a centre for art and culture, which is now being used by the whole school. We are also in the process of making it available to the rest of the community in the evenings for adult education, art classes and life skills like baking and sewing for the women of the area.

These projects are multi faceted. After the construction or refurbishment the spaces need to be furnished and then supplied with the necessary tools and equipment to make them fully functional. At the moment we are busy cleaning up and creating a workable shell. The house is fortunately structurally sound, but we will have to do some work on the plumbing in both the kitchen and bathroom, where the children will be taught basic cooking and baking skills as well as personal hygiene and doing washing and cleaning. We have to replace the ceiling in the bathroom.

The other rooms will only need painting of doors, windows, walls and ceilings. For practical reasons we will paint all the walls with high gloss enamel paint. The electricity is sound and we will only need to replace light fittings. The floors were covered with linoleum tiles. These are however very broken and we have already removed them. It would be the most practical and hygienic option to recover the floors with linoleum again and then only use loose carpets where the children will be working on the floor.

The furnishing will consist of wooden cupboards, shelves, tables and benches. The rooms need to be very specifically furnished to enable the practice of individual activities. These children need to learn very basic things in very special ways - they need to learn to identify and fetch the things they need and to put things in order again. Some of them do not function well in groups, but need quiet, private spaces to do their little projects.

The classroom where they are trying to work at the moment is too small and does not support any of their needs. This room will, however not go to waste. It will become the workshop where they can learn to weld, do woodwork, tiling, framing and glazing.

Eventually we would like to have the area surrounding and between these two venues to be functional gardens where the children can not only acquire further skills but also develop an understanding and love for their environment.

KLEINOOD



SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS

From the Blaauwklippen Valley one can just make out the unassuming brown brick buildings of Weber Gedenk Primary School high up against the hill in Jamestown.



This is where most of the primary school learners, whose parents work in the Blaauwklippen Valley, go to school.

HISTORY

The partnership between Kleinood farm and Weber Gedenk Primary evolved in a very natural way and somehow seems as if it was always meant to be. Weber Gedenk is where all the children of the people of Kleinood farm receive their primary education. On the When we decided to become involved with the schools of the area we originally decided to work with the high school. We made an appointment, but on the day the headmaster was not available and we decided, on the spur of the moment, to visit the primary school. As chance would have it, the headmaster, Mr. Bernard Williams was available and we spent a pleasant morning and very valuable time with him. It was also during this time that we realised that our family is closely related to the Rhenish pastor, Weber, who was the father of James Town and Weber Gedenk Primary School.

“The Rev. J Weber bought a piece of ground, Jamestown, which he divided into plots and sold to coloured families, in order to alleviate the housing shortage. In 1903, fifty plots had been sold, and by 1924 most of the people had paid for their plots, and the ground now belonged to them fully. In 1923 a small church was inaugurated, which initially also served as a school. In 1925 a second teacher was appointed.” (The Rhenish Mission Society of South Africa Elfriede Strassberger.)

After this short visit to Weber Gedenk Primary School in February 2010 we decided that the school should become the pivot point of all our social development programmes. The school identified its most pressing needs and together we decided how best to approach and coordinate these projects.

Weber Gedenk Primary is a small school with a wonderful history, but also because of our infamous political history, bears the burden of endless social problems. It is a semi rural government-funded school, with children that mostly come from poor and often troubled households and thus few amenities to create an ideal educational environment. For a parent body with little or no educational background to support it, it is very hard to give or understand the support a government funded school needs to survive and create the necessary structures and amenities for a 21st century educational institution. Because the government does not own the property on which the school is built it is also not willing to aid in the upkeep and development of the buildings or grounds.

Although Libby and Gerard initiate and manage the projects in deliberation and conjunction with the needs of the school quite a few other role players have also come on board as the collaboration developed over the years.

Ever since his arrival on Kleinood, Joey Plaatjies has been involved with and concerned about the welfare of the children of the Blaauwklippen valley. He has seen and experienced the damage alcohol can do and has initiated various schemes to eradicate the

violence, abuse and hardship he sees around him.

He spends a lot of time and energy exploring the different avenues in which he and the farm could be actively involved in improving the lives of these children and giving them reasons and the tools to survive their often troubled lives. Joey has become a father figure to many of the children in Weber Gedenk Primary school where he is especially involved with the special needs class. He has also organized sports days, a go-cart building competition and race, works in the garden with the children and helps to run all the community projects for Kleinood.

Other members of the Kleinood team, some of whom are parents of children at the school, have also joined in and helped to establish a healthy relationship with the school. However, it is no longer only Kleinood, but also friends from Germany and the wider Cape Town and Stellenbosch communities that have become involved and contribute where and what they can.



The children of Jan van Riebeeck High school joined in 2011 in a joint initiative with the ATKV. They upgraded the playgrounds, provided facilities in classrooms, provided stationary, art materials and the beginning of a small library. This has so far been only joy and a wonderful success story at that. Jan van Riebeeck competed against many schools in a national ATKV-Handevat competition and managed to walk away with the first prize of R30 000.00 towards the Weber Gedenk coffers. The school will now use this money to further develop and upgrade their classrooms.



SMALL SEEDS

Joey with Pieter, from the gardening team at Kleinood immediately established a small vegetable garden. The children, who have special needs other than a mainstream education, water and weed the garden during the week. Joey and his team do the spadework and maintenance on Wednesday- and Saturday mornings. In this way they develop a much-needed skill and spend valuable time outside, learning about seeds, plants and vegetables with their teacher.



BLAAUWKLIPPEN SPORTSDAY

Joey is also fully aware of how important a role sport can play in the healing of a troubled community. In 2010 he organised a sports day for the whole of the Blaauwklippen community. Stellenzicht provided the venue and the farms sponsored snacks and drinks for the day. For Joey it was very important that it should be an alcohol free day – which it was. Much fun was had and a small sum of money was made for the benefit of Weber Gedenk. By popular demand this was repeated in December 2011 and will now be a yearly event in the valley.



BOX CARS

The children at Weber Gedenk still play traditional games during break. They play marbles, jump rope and throw tops. This led us to the idea that box-cart racing would be something they would enjoy and would give us a way of teaching them some skills as well as encouraging parent participation. It proved to be very successful in all those areas. Kleinood supplied the wood and wheels for the carts. The children had to make up teams to build and take turns to race their cars, they had to give their cars names, make drawings of their cars and decorate them. All the participants received special t-shirts for the day and there were prizes for participation, the winners and the best cars.





Although the day was cold and wet there was a great excitement all round. Parents and teachers helped with organising, the teachers painted banners and parents sold food and drinks towards the school coffers.



THE KLEINOOD CENTRE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

On Monday 13 February 2012 the construction work for a new building dedicated to art and culture commenced. This building forms an integral part of the idea to be involved in sustainable and concrete projects that will create facilities and opportunities equal to those for children from privileged backgrounds.



As always there were many partners. Contractors and suppliers helped with materials and labour, members of the Kleinood team helped as well as members of the community were always supportive and helpful. By the end of May the building was ready.

During the June holidays 2012 the final year art students from the University of Stellenbosch spent time there doing projects with the children from the community. They painted, drew and built objects with recycled materials. These works were then also exhibited at the GRADEX exhibition at the end of the year.



The centre is now officially open and fully operational. The school uses it for art classes during the school day as well as extra mural activities such as music lessons and choir practice in the afternoons. Furthermore they are planning to let the facility for adult education and art classes in the evenings in order to raise funds for the school and especially in order to be able to maintain and extend

the possibilities around the facility. We hope to supply them with a pottery kiln quite soon and will assist with art supplies and maintenance until the centre has become wholly independent.

FUTURE PROJECTS

As the box-cart race was such a success the school chose to repeat the event this year and to add other traditional games. They wish to make it a full day event, which will also offer them the chance to raise more funds as well as accommodating more children and a wider range of activities.

We would like to change the vegetable garden into a herb garden, which will be easier for the children to maintain. The teacher from the special needs class would also like it to provide a greater sensorial experience for the children with perfumes, textures and the remedial qualities inherent to herbs.

We will be very involved with the special needs class in general as to providing equipment and materials as well as events and visits to museums etc.

The big general project however will be to clean up the school grounds, educate the children and surrounding community to love and take care of their environment, not to litter and recycle.

TO CONCLUDE

It is obvious that the children love their little school. It is a safe and stimulating environment for young children as it stands. Therefore we do not wish to take ownership of the school, but rather to create the tools and environment for the children and community at large to create an educational institution of excellence of which they can be proud and where the children of James Town can receive an education that will stand them in good stead for the rest of their lives.



kleinood

Kleinood Farm
Blaauwklippen Road
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To Whom It May Concern:

National Teaching Awards Category: Special Needs Education.

I am in the very privileged position to contribute to the nomination of Ms Roelien Loots, as put forward by Weber Gedenk Primary School, for the National Teaching Awards Category: Special Needs Education.

Our farm has been involved with Weber Gedenk Primary School for the past five years. Although our relationship with the school is aimed very much towards aid and support in general, the focus of our involvement has been drawn more and more towards the relief and aid of the Special Needs class at Weber Gedenk Primary School. I honestly believe that this is purely as a result of the enthusiasm, dedication and overall involvement of Ms Loots.

I have not been involved in a single project at the school where she has not voluntarily contributed with unequalled enthusiasm, informed guidance and a hands-on approach. Her love for children and dedication to the teaching profession is to my mind unequalled in any teacher that I have come across in the twenty years that I have been involved with various schools and teachers.

However, my reasons for supporting the nomination are based not only on these outstanding characteristics inherent to her personality and character.

Ms Roelein Loots is to my mind a leader in her field of education. Her approach to children with special needs and Special Needs Education, per se, is fresh, innovative and incredibly well informed. She does not approach a class or a group as a unit but has a very specific and individualised approach to the needs of each individual child. By taking their individual backgrounds, problems and needs into consideration under all circumstances she applies her exceptional teaching skills to manage and direct each child to find his or her specific strengths, talents and areas of interest. From here she gently leads each child to develop these specific qualities into meaningful and sustainable skills.

In her gentle way she creates a safe and nurturing environment of love, discipline and support where the children, who more often than not come from troubled homes, can grow and become fully functional and responsible citizens.

In closing I would like to add that over and above all the above-mentioned qualities, I have the greatest respect in the way that she leads by example in matters concerning emotional support and basic moral values. Without ever being flippant she helps them along with humour and happiness without ever being judgemental in any way.

I believe that a teacher like Ms Loots, is not only an inspiration to the children she works with, but serves as an example to colleagues as well. At the same time she is the type of person and teacher, who, through her own expertise, dedication and energy serves as an inspiration to the whole wider community.

In times like these, where our children are growing up in an exceptionally competitive world and where they have to negotiate their way through the maze of neglect, poverty, drugs and abuse which is now prevalent in all societies and communities everywhere, people like Roelien Loots are more precious than ever before.

However, her dedication comes with a price. She is not teaching applied math to gifted and privileged children. She has to wipe runny noses, sew on buttons, feed hungry stomachs and wipe away tears. She has to love the unloved and nurture the neglected before she can teach them anything. She has to forfeit weekends and afternoons to be where the children need her. She has to be extra strong to make their troubled lives her own and help them to carry their, often unbearable, loads.

We need to acknowledge all this in some way. We have to show our respect and gratitude for someone who is prepared to do the things so many of us shy away from and salute the effort she puts into what she so clearly sees as a calling.

Yours truly,
Mrs. E. M. De Villiers.