



"We get to play with children and enter their magical world. We watch them blossom and experience their joy at learning through play"

# Feeding young minds

Education and Training Award – Joint Winner  
Ntataise Lowveld Trust

The Ntataise Lowveld Trust was founded in 1986 and is one of the oldest independent non-profit organisations in Mpumalanga. It operates mainly in the "forgotten triangle" of Nkomazi, one of the poorest regions in the province.

Its aim is to provide a comprehensive early childhood development service to rural disadvantaged children, with a philosophy based on the Zulu proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Ntataise's director, Barbara Kenyon, says early childhood development is critical, as research in neuroscience suggests that brain development – including intelligence, personality and modes of social behaviour – occurs mainly during the first three years of life.

"I never knew how important the pre-school years were until I started working in this field," she says. "The future of our country depends on how we nurture the minds, bodies and the beliefs of these children."

The trust has been running early childhood training programmes since it was established. In recent years it has introduced

enrichment programmes with "value added" projects such as a food garden programme, a toy and book library programme, and an enrichment programme. These interventions are intended to cover all psycho-social aspects relating to pre-school children.

The enrichment programmes also include training and supporting early childhood development practitioners to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to maintain and manage an effective daily programme and a stimulating learning environment, focusing on literacy and numeracy skills.

Ntataise helps the practitioners to maintain a safe and caring learning environment that supports the healthy development of children in an inclusive and holistic way, and that meets the basic needs of children and their families within the communities in which they live.

It also helps them with the setting up of a stimulating learning

environment for babies and toddlers.

Kenyon says the trust's biggest challenges are finding sufficient funding and coping with the number of beneficiaries needing its services.

"There is so much more we can and want to do for early childhood development if we can find the resources," she says.

The rewards, on the other hand, are enormous: "We get to play with children and enter their magical world. We watch them blossom and experience their joy at learning through play.

"We also see how practitioners feed both the children's minds and bodies through the food gardens programme. It's wonderful to see them become school ready at the end of Grade R."

The Making the Difference judges praised Ntataise for making the difference to so many young lives and for its spirit of innovation.

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Barbara Kenyon

## Making the Difference Awards



(6%) and casualties (4%).

The Making the Difference judges singled out the initiative as a worthy example of corporate social partnership, and encouraged it to continue making the difference in remote areas where it is needed most.

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### Helpful Heroes

Vodacom's investment in communities is made through the Vodacom Foundation. The primary focus areas of its CSI programmes are education, health and welfare, and safety and security. Arts and culture, sports development and the environment are secondary focus areas.

Since its establishment in 1999, the foundation has contributed more than R500-million towards community upliftment programmes. Its Yebo Heroes programme creates a platform for employees to share their time, talents and skills with the community.

"Employees use their own initiative and resources," says Christoph Labuschagne, managing executive of Vodacom Mpumalanga. "It is a less formal and structured way of becoming involved, and suggestions come directly from employees."

To date, 2 046 Vodacom employees have registered as Yebo Heroes and have become involved in voluntary activities involving 269 projects. Their activities range from painting a wall and planting vegetables in a shelter for abused women, to cuddling a baby in a home for abandoned babies, spray painting their own and sports fans' heads in aid of a cancer charity, and cleaning up a sensitive wetland.

# Quality Time

Employees of Emnotweni Casino have been part of Camp Quality, a week-long fun camp arranged by the Rotary Club for children suffering from cancer, for four years. In 2010 the casino sponsored the buses which transport the children from Johannesburg; snacks and refreshments for the children; and transport in and around Nelspruit during the week.

Casino employees also donated money from their own pockets to buy each of the 38 participating children a brand new cell phone. Close to R3 000 towards the cell phones was raised by staff, and Emnotweni Casino provided the balance. Emnotweni Casino also sponsored the special meal and cold drinks for the children at the concert on the last evening of the camp.

But, for Emnotweni Casino and its employees, being part of Camp Quality is not only about pitching in financially. A number of employees went the extra mile, volunteering their time – and their love.

According to Ig Olivier, general manager at Emnotweni Casino, a group of employees, joined by some of their own family members, spent the week with the children, assisting at meal times, supporting them with obstacles and helping to make the children feel happy and comfortable. The team worked in shifts as some staff members still reported for their duties at the casino after helping out at Camp Quality.

"While initiatives like this would not be possible without sponsorships and donations from the corporate sector, it is the people who give up their time so willingly who really make it happen. Their helping hands, friendly faces and loving support for the children mean the most.

"Our employees are proud ambassadors of Emnotweni Casino and our social responsibility initiatives. We are very proud of the hard work and commitment they put into Camp Quality," says Olivier.



**EMNOTWENI**  
Good fortune. Good fun.