

## A MOTHERS 20-YEAR PLIGHT FOR SON'S EDUCATION BIRTHS POSTMANSBURG'S FIRST DISABILITY CENTRE



New building for Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled

Mme Precious Seleka and her son, Kagiso

Mme Precious Seleka with Board Chairperson (seated) Mrs Ellen Seboko and Board Members (left- right) Ms Sebonile Toli and Ms Ursela Snyman

**Postmansburg** - Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled, presently operating from the Newtown township of Postmansburg, will soon open the doors of its newly built centre to current and new learners with disabilities previously unable to access schooling facilities. The centre boasts amenities including 4 classrooms, fully equipped kitchen, an administration block, ablution facilities, sporting grounds, vegetable garden and will accommodate 120 learners. The centre includes a multi-purpose hall that can be repurposed for conferencing facilities to generate income for the centre.

The centre was established in 2005 with the aim of providing a secure and conducive environment for persons with disabilities to receive physical, emotional, psychological and social development services. Until recently, the centre operated without any funding and relied on donations in kind from local supermarkets, churches and scanty parent contributions as it was not formalised nor registered. Without these requirements, an organisation cannot register as a Partial Care Facility with the Department of Social Development (DSD) nor apply for funding from donors.

Back in 1997, Mrs Precious Seleka, a resident and volunteer of Newtown, initiated a makeshift care facility in her home, in Marantheng Section, to care for elderly persons and children without care during the day, street kids and those with disabilities. Through word of mouth, the demand grew and upon realising the magnitude of the problem she introduced night classes as well for adults who made the request

for further development. Unformalised, she solicited donations for basic educational materials. The municipality cleared a patch of land, previously a dump, to expand her space. This was halted and the space was closed amid health concerns by the Department of Health. Her application attempts were unsuccessful over the period of 1999 to 2003, when subsequently another care facility, Management Centre for the Disabled (MCD), was opened in a church building in the community.

By then, in 2003, she had given birth to a son with Down Syndrome and this fuelled the fire within her to seek a permanent solution. Accepting her defeat, she was still elated that there is a place of care for children living with disabilities. As a new parent together with other unemployed women, they volunteered and undertook to cooking, cleaning and develop a routine that provided basic learning (using elementary utensils to assess the children's capabilities) and social skills to the children – due to the lack of capacity at the time.

In 2012, she attended a 18-month Early Childhood Development (ECD) Training at Custoda Trust, receiving her Level 4 certificate and graduating in August 2013 with 16 other practitioners. During trainings, they would arrange for other volunteer caregivers to assist in their absence. In 2016, the volunteers again called on the community to formulate a Board of Directors that will assist in the formalisation and registration of the centre. At that time, the centre gave care to 27 children with disabilities and they were seeing significant progress

with behaviour, social skills, mannerisms and listening skills from the children. In kind donations from the church and local businesses assisted with daily provision for the children that could not bring their own lunch. In the same year, MCD was dissolved and due to the urgent continuation for the services, Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled was officially formed and the volunteers collected R1140 from savings and parent fees to open a bank account to deposit R900,00.

The centre moved to the Newtown Community Hall, amidst much resistance and vandalism, and began operating in January 2017. In May 2017, a community mobilisation process, informed by the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) development framework of the National Development Agency (NDA), an agency of government that has the responsibility of contributing towards the eradication of poverty and its causes in South Africa, led to Lebelelang and assisted with the formalisation and registration into a non-profit organisation. Further needs assessment revealed that the centre had been offered land in nearby Phuthaditshaba location by the Tsantsabane Local Municipality which lay vacant and unoccupied due to lack of funds to establish the centre. This land now occupies Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled that will continue catering for an ECD programme for children aged 0-6, learners with severe to profound intellectual disabilities programme for children aged 7-18 years and a skills development programme for youth and adults with disabilities aged 19-59.

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Through continued community engagements and its capacity programme, the NDA assisted the volunteers to register and constitute a Board of Directors who underwent organisational training including Community Development Practice, Governance and Organisational Management as well as Compliance to Registration Legislation to strengthen the formation structure. Further interventions will include Project and Financial Management. The Lebelelang Board of Directors and volunteers are actively involved in the running of the organisation, with the Board of Directors providing leadership and oversight while the volunteers see to the daily operations of the centre.

Mrs Ellen Seboko has been a Board member since 2017 and now serves as the Chairperson. “The NDA has been instrumental to the building of this new centre. Without their handholding, we would have never attracted the partners that are now on board. We wish to leave a legacy for Postmansburg, being the first and only centre to cater for persons with disabilities. Our Board structure has allowed us to attract the versatile and competent Board who contribute immensely to the centre.” Having capacitated Lebelelang, NDA granted funds to the value of R53 351,00 to erect a fence at the allocated site and secure the modular structures



Current Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled

donated by Lesedi Power Project. It was through consultation with the municipality that it became apparent that disability was everyone's business and it was in the Social Labour Plans of the mines in Postmasburg within the Tsantsabane Local Municipality. Through a resource mobilisation process the NDA facilitated and coordinated a public-private partnership towards the construction of a state-of-the-art facility to the value of R17 461 534,33. The said figure is comprised of contributions from Independent Power Producer, Lesedi Power Project, Assmang (Beeshoek) Mine and Anglo American (Kolomela Mine).

“We have never lost sight of the goal to establish a centre for the children to learn and grow. There are 6 practitioners, with qualifications up to Level 4 from Custoda Trust, that care for the 42 children who are all currently crammed into two classrooms using the sponsored educational materials and received support and regular trainings from DBE. The children's ages range from 3 to 25 years with developmental challenges, the older children are also taught soft social skills including societal behaviours and assertion skills to protect themselves. We also hold awareness campaigns to sensitise the community on care and needs of the children. This centre is crucial for this community, the nearest centre for services of this nature is found in Upington that is 220 kilometres away from Postmansburg. We are really looking forward to the move into the new centre” said Seleka.

“The NDA's mandate speaks to facilitating community development. We go into communities to find organisation that are already fully engaged in community development programmes. Ours is to ensure that we build more cohesive communities that can tackle their own triple threats of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

Persons with disabilities are vulnerable in communities. Enabling Lebelelang to register, opened doors for them to receive funding and use it effectively to respond to the needs of those with disabilities. Until they registered as a non-profit organisation (NPO), they could not have a bank account to access funds through. I am pleased with the outcome and the plethora of partners that have come on board when we made the call to them to assist as we pledged to have the centre built in a year. This timeline was not met due to challenges during construction, but we are pleased with the process to date as it has been fair and transparent. The NDA has unlocked the potential of Lebelelang by positioning it in such a way that makes them attractive for further funding and development. We will continue to facilitate the registration of a Partial Care Facility, so they access the necessary subsidies from DSD for sustainability. We will also build their institutional capacity to meet the requirements for funding from institutions such as the National Lotteries Commission and indeed international donors” says Mr Thabani Buthelezi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of the NDA.

Seleka's greatest lesson throughout this journey is that patience pays off and says that the realisation of the centre is a dream come true, a dream she is happy to have assisted to realised by just volunteering her time and love to the children. “My hope is to, one day, take the children to Robben Island where the children can go and see for themselves what it means to fight for their own freedom. Over and above the crafts created under the skills development programme, we also have plans of creating an arts programme where people with disabilities will showcase their talent at events that will be costed as a means of generating income for the centre.”

The South African Social Security Agency pays child support grants to children and disability grants to persons with disabilities who are beneficiaries of Lebelelang Centre for the Disabled.

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