

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I have been typing and deleting this letter for a zillionth time and it has to be finished one way or the other. I kept restricting my thinking around the fact that I am new with the organisation and my point of reference being annual reports by a director with a memorable history with the organisation. It was during this dilemma that I thought of an advice that I was given, that I must write from the heart and that is exactly what I am going to do.

When I got to Empilweni I was reminded of a little girl, who always felt like an outsider in her environment, at home, in school and in the community. This girl was an only child who was brought up by a single parent (parents divorced while she was a baby). She only stayed with the mother from the age of ten and recollects staying with her loving maternal grandmother and upon her death stayed with her loving aunt. In the old days it was believed that a well adjusted child is a child who has been brought up in a rural community, this is why the child was being brought up by other family members, and her mother was earning income to support her and the extended family.

Upon staying with her mother, she had petty fights with her mother, who was not around most of the day and when she is around she had all kinds of expectations including not being talked back at ('you talk too much, just do as I say' was the course of these fights) and after three years of staying with her she decided to send her to boarding school. At school she was always in trouble, not for what you must be thinking, but for standing up to her teachers and challenging their ways. In those days that was unheard of and the label that follows such behavior was and is still is that the child had no manners.

With peers she was always in trouble for getting into fights, which ended up in daily reports from parents whose children always came home with bloody noses. Oh believe me she was no bully, did not swear but just wanted other children to be good to others and behave well at play time. As a result in the community she was also misunderstood and labeled troublesome. When she got into adolescents she stopped fighting and became withdrawn, thanks God her spirit remained. When she was in varsity she was almost raped but fought her way out of the situation. How many young girls and boys out there are described in this short story? I also get into fights with my son, because he says I do not listen to him and make promises which I do not carry through half of the time.

Empilweni is here for such children, some of whom are not spirited enough to fight and win their battles. It is only a pity that it has been in existence for the past 15 years and is struggling not only to exist, but to spread its service throughout the Western Cape. We have big businesses and other charity initiatives contributing to building of new schools nation wide. Do we keep track of children who drop out of school due to situation experienced by the girl I just talked about? Oh she was lucky; apart from being spirited she had a mother, who even though she could not develop a relationship with her, was a provider. What about all those children, who are not only victims of injustices against them but also come from families who cannot make ends meet.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, the Board of Management for giving me this opportunity to be part such a good and necessary service. Thank them for their support in the trying times that the organisation is experiencing, in relation to funding. The staff has been my rock; they have opened their arms and welcomed me, and thought me so much about Empilweni. They do not tire to teach me about the proud work that they give to children and adolescents from Khayelitsha, Mfuleni and other surrounding communities. I cannot leave Gill Douglas behind, for the support that she gives to me and the staff; she keeps all of us sane. I also want to thank all our clients as well as our networking partners and colleagues, both in Khayelitsha and throughout the Western Cape.

I especially want to thank all our donors, sponsors and the Department of Social Development who continue to strengthen our services at grassroots level, and who provide ongoing funding for our service to continue. Empilweni, like most community based organisations is dependant on the good will and funding of the donor community, as well as hoping that donors understand the therapeutic service that we provide.

*Mhongwe Mtshotshisa  
Director, Empilweni*