



UP students gives hope to the children in Kameeldrift

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As part of their studies, the students studying towards a BA in Criminology (Honours) at the University of Pretoria were given a community engagement assignment at the Kameeldrift early learning centre north of Pretoria. Their task was to renovate and improve the conditions at the centre. The class was split into three groups, with each group being responsible for a special focus area, and they had to complete the project by the end of their studies. Their first combined visit took place in May 2014, during which they had to evaluate the problem area and identify the community's needs. This was undertaken as a requirement for the fulfilment of the Criminology and the Criminal Justice System (KRM 710) module.

In order to raise funds for their project, the students decided to host a Barnyard Theatre evening - they managed to sell 220 tickets, resulting in a profit of R12 100 for the community project. The group also held a raffle competition, raising an additional profit of R12 740 for their project. Since the students raised the money collectively, they decided that it would only be fair to split the money between the three groups as the money was going to benefit the same project. Each group was allocated a budget of R6800.

Different focus areas

The first group focused on the playground area and also addressed the needs associated with all outdoor activities. Their goals included revamping the playground area at the early learning centre and painting all the exterior walls of the centre. Because of all the hard work

"I realised how lucky and privileged we are to get the education we are getting, and it made us happy to be involved in improving those children's environment, hopefully preventing them from growing up and engaging in criminal activity." - Logan

"Throughout the entire project, I learned that it is very important to fix that which is broken. The reason for this is that if things are left broken, more things will end up being broken, which in turn will lead to an increase in crime." - Bianca.

that they put into scrubbing and cleaning the playground swings, the "Rust removers" coined their name - as most of the swings were covered in rust. In addition, shading cover was put up over the front fence to give the children's playground more privacy.

The second group decided to focus on education. Their vision was to create a space where children could experience the magic of reading. Even though the children are still too young to read by themselves, the educators could use donated books to read to them. They decided to create a reading room by changing an existing storage room into a space more conducive to reading. Many of the books that were kept at the centre were not appropriate for the little ones and those that were appropriate were packed away in the main store room. They needed to be unpacked and sorted before any appropriate books could be found or used. The children were therefore not being exposed to an environment that encouraged reading. The group did a book drive to acquire books and items that could be used for other activities, such as stickers, stationery, baskets and art and craft supplies. Three new tyre swings were secured onto the frames of the existing wooden jungle gyms and clean sand was delivered and placed into the sandpit. The group also expanded the vegetable garden that the inmates at Baviaanpoort Correctional Services had already created. The idea behind this was to create a sustainable vegetable garden which the staff at the pre-school could maintain and use to make sure that the children are provided with food that has nutritional value.

The third group focused on three aspects, namely painting the outside of the crèche, fixing the Wendy house and paving some parts of the outside area. This group had additional sponsors who helped them throughout the whole project, including **Pick n Pay** which provided them with vouchers, **Gypsy Trading** which provided them with





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concrete mix for the cement for the pavement and **MCL Construction** which provided them with workers who helped to erect the pavement. **Vision Works Wonderboom** sponsored chocolate hampers for the raffle and educational posters that could be used for the reading room. They also received a cabinet, blankets, nappies, soft toys, baby creams, cleaning materials and wood varnish that was used for the Wendy house.

Even though the original group was divided into three groups, they all helped one another in making this project a success. They all took part in raising the money for the project and in selling the raffle tickets. When one of the groups had an amount of about R1600 left after their work was done, they gave it to another group so that they could buy paint for the exterior of the learning centre and also to fix a part of the fence that was stolen while the students were still busy with their projects. Once all the renovations were done, the "Rust removers" organised a hand over party where the group members explained to the staff what they had done and how to maintain some of the upgrades they had made. They also handed over the donations that they had collected for the centre. The children were given snacks to enjoy and the students had the opportunity to engage with the little ones.

What did this project mean to the students?

This project was a life-changing experience for the students and they all learnt different things. One of the students said that it was a heartfelt experience to know that their efforts and hard work had improved the lives of the children at the Kameeldrift early learning centre. They also mentioned that one of the challenges was learning to work in new fields such as organising, problem-solving and keeping to schedules. The other group members said that this community project taught them the importance of group work and that a project like this should be

"While working at the early learning centre, particularly in creating a reading room for the children, it felt as though as a group we were making a difference in a child's life whose life might have been headed for failure and most probably criminal behaviour." - Sophy.

"The purpose of studying criminology is being able to make the world a better place, and this project was the start of contributing to a better place." - Mariëtte.

properly sustained. They also said that it was fun and liberating to have been part of it. The third group said that they had an amazing experience and that it was fulfilling for them. They also mentioned that it had been an incredible journey to have been able to create something that will have a lasting and positive effect on the community.

Photos:

Top, from left to right:

1. The exterior walls of the Kameeldrift Early Learning Centre before the renovation started

2. Some of the students

3. Some of the students

4. The reading room before the big cleanup started

Top, second from right: It was important for the group to clean the outside and start a veggie garden

Bottom, from left to right:

1. Some of the students

2. The mess in one of the rooms that greeted the students

3. Taking the books out of the room, to clean them and sort through them

Bottom, third and fourth from right: The refurbished reading room: what a difference!

Bottom, second from right: One of the Correctional Services staff members lending a hand in the veggie garden

