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HAPPY HOMES CRECHE

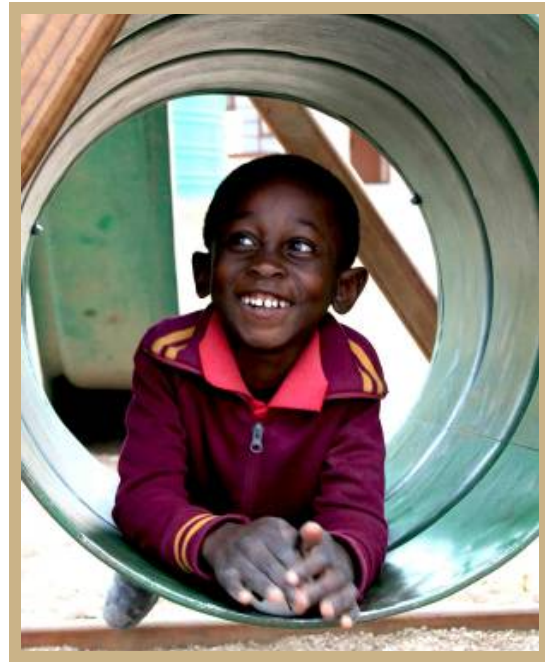
Justicia, Mpumalanga
South Africa

Partnerships across the seas... Over the last nine years, Happy Homes Crèche which stands at the junction road between Sabi Sands Private Game reserve and the village of Justicia has been rebuilt by many hands and many hearts. It is a living example of what is possible through the collective effort of individuals seeking to make a difference.

Lured by the sound of singing and laughter, many guests visiting the various game reserves in the Sabi Sand Reserve have had their heartstrings tugged by the scene of several dozen toddlers crammed inside a corrugated iron shack and sought to change this.

Today, the old makeshift crèche has been transformed into an immaculate school building where parents feel confident and proud to bring their children. Since 2001, ongoing donations from dedicated donors, such as the Church of Transfiguration in Dallas, Texas, have helped to build four brand new classrooms, a kitchen, a sanitation block and a vegetable garden where fresh produce is harvested to boost the nutritional value of the lunchtime meal. With the addition of playground equipment, the dusty yard has become a hive of activity as the learning and growing continues outdoors.

But while it was the generosity of donors that delivered the bricks and mortar and a myriad of gifts, it was the crèche leadership that inspired confidence in the facility's future.



Inspired by local leadership... Loster Mkansi started the crèche in 2001 with just 28 children. Back then, the shack that stands in a corner of the yard as a reminder of their beginnings provided the only refuge from the elements. Loster remembers how on very hot days they would 'cook' under the tin roof while rainy days would force them to retreat to the only dry corner. But despite her meagre resources, the tin walls inside tell a tender story. The original learning charts on colour, numbers and shapes and the most popular cartoon characters made from whatever materials Loster could find still hang on the walls.

Now that the crèche is functioning well it has attracted one hundred and sixty-five enrolments from the area. It has a staff complement of 11 - 5 teachers, a security guard, 2 gardeners and 3 cooks; who are all employed by government. As the only crèche in the village, Lotus Khoza, Africa Foundation's Senior Development Officer for Mpumalanga Province explains its value:

"Justicia suffers from 75% unemployment and a safe facility for preschoolers means mothers have an opportunity to seek work."

Foundation learning through creative play has proved to be a critical part in early childhood development and supports the growth of independent, well-balanced children. Although less than 35% of the mothers can afford to contribute towards the running of the crèche, at Happy Homes even the most vulnerable children have a chance to thrive.

