

OTHANDWENI REPORT TO SEEKERS STEWARDS

Sometimes growth and development is slower than what we expect or hope for, as in the case of Othandweni (Otha), but the Board's, and our continued persistence through call, and equipping the Center with appropriate tools, has resulted in a forward-looking picture, heretofore unexperienced in the history of this organization.

The delightful news from Othandweni for 2017 is that a thoroughly competent person has begun running the Center. This is Hilda Ramakone, former member of the Board that has been so effective. This Board has struggled long and patiently to make improvements, which a reluctant management was not ready to accept. The manager's vision was bigger than her ability to cope, resulting most recently in the Bakery project of St. Andrew's School not getting off the ground. Equipment which could have been a great source of funds for the Center lay idle. The bookkeeper/administrator and the two new teachers were the bright lights in an otherwise troubled atmosphere.

We had explored with the Board how to go about installing a new director, since this would have to be approved by the Executive Committee, consisting of the 4 original staff, who had ultimate constitutional authority. We wrote directly to this committee to approve the appointment of Hilda to move Otha forward, in order to have Seekers' and our continued support after our consulting with Roy, who offered to sponsor her for a period of 6 months, to get her started in that position. In September Hilda became a constant presence at Otha, studying all aspects of how the Center functioned, often not getting the cooperation of the older folks, but still persisting. Subsequently, the Board held a meeting with the Executive Committee, in which they asked that "Hilda be given a chance to make a change, as she is qualified and more skilled than everyone" The Committee then agreed, even the manager dropped her opposition. Hilda was hired with the title of Consultant on an interim basis to manage the Center. Our and the Board's intention is to see her become Director with a reasonable stipend starting in March after an annual general meeting is held.

Hilda immediately went to work and achieved the following:

- ★ She produced detailed monthly reports which outlined the current situation in all the separate components of the Center, and what needed to be done.
- ★ She holds regular staff meeting, posted rules of conduct, and ensures staff accountability.
- ★ She prepared a lot of documentation: e.g. certified copies of ID, resumes, proof of residence, bank account confirmation, and letters of appointment.
- ★ She has registered the staff at the Dept. of Labor, to get unemployment benefits, for which each staff member pays 1% of their stipends and the Center pays an equal amount.
- ★ She has built relationships with the parents that had not heretofore existed..
- ★ In the After Care program, parental consent forms for students' field trips have been established.
- ★ She has pressed for regularity in collecting school fees.

- ★ She has worked out a system of petty cash with a reliable staff member
- ★ She is preparing a business plan and a budget to assist her and the Board in managing Otha and securing donations from big companies and embassies in Pretoria.
- ★ An example of her outreach was a meeting with the Coordinator of the Enterprise Development Powerhouse company which works to promote business empowerment. This is expected to finally get the bakery going in March to become an income-generating enterprise like the guesthouse. They would provide stipends for 3 bakery workers.

This is a new beginning by an energetic, qualified, and enthusiastic person, but the fruits of her labors are still down the road. Other components worth mentioning are the following;

Re The Board - We have had the best Board since our involvement in 2013. They stay in communication through email and telephone, are open to listening, and explain to us what is possible and what could be a serious challenge. They were the first Board to secure funding, but have not been able to repeat this success although they have applied in other places.

The Bokamoso/Othandweni relationship is getting stronger, through the financial support of some Foundation members, and through the direct feedback, we get after their return from a visit. Since October, a youth from Bokamoso has been volunteering to help the After Care students with homework; in turn she gets college credit. This has resulted in academic success which has pleased the parents.

The 2 Level 4 teachers hired in 2016 have made a tremendous difference. An inspector from the Dept. of Social Development has acknowledged Otha's Day Care as the best in Winterveldt, and has praised the teachers for their classroom management skills, and their ability to teach in English. Yet they are still paid their probationary wages.

The possibilities are promising, but in the meantime, the financial needs are immense. With the robberies, the need to replace goods and computers, secure qualified security guards or/and installing a security system, the increase of transportation costs for fundraising trips, paying auditor fees, finding a benefactor to offer a reasonable stipend for Hilda as Director, and offering decent stipends to those who merit them, lest we lose them to other day care centers. This has us spending more time fundraising, and continuing our mentoring of how donors' money is spent.

Bill Drehmann & Linda Nunes-Schrag

February 10, 2018

