

## "An Occasion to be Cherished": SOS Africa Launches Education Programme in the Western Cape

Monday 20 January, 2014

I have had the privilege to work on your project for the last year from it's very conception in the Western Cape early in 2013 and it was with such pride and humility that I stood at Grabouw Primary school on Wednesday to welcome all ten children to their first day of school. It has been such an honour to orchestrate this amazing opportunity for them and their families.

As we all know starting school is a big step for any child but for eight six year old's from Pineview, the day marked an even bigger occasion. Their backgrounds are ones of disadvantage and poverty, immersed daily in a struggling community. Each child had been selected by SOS Africa as showing great potential coupled with an eagerness to learn and a great attendance record during their pre-school year.

SOS has committed to educate them through the next 12 years at a school outside their community but close to their informal settlement. Grabouw Primary School has a very good reputation with excellent results and has embraced the opportunity to include these children at their school.

One of the most rewarding things about being involved in an organisation such as SOS, is seeing how the children (and their families) respond to opportunities such as this. The children rarely disappoint you and it was wonderful to watch their excitement grow as they tried on their new uniforms and received their stationery kits the day before school started. So many children take these things for granted but a new item of clothing or pair of shoes for many children in South Africa is an occasion to be cherished.

First day of school and the children arrived by themselves in transport organised and sponsored by SOS, and I was delighted to see that some of the parents also arrived by their own means to see their children into their new classrooms. The children were welcomed by Prefects from Grade 12 (Grabouw High School students), who were both warm and reassuring. The classrooms proved to be a little overwhelming for some of them but I managed to get them all seated, as the parents were also a little shy and hung back. For these parents, education was a luxury when they were young and most of them have had very little in terms of schooling years.

We left at the teacher's request after making sure that they were settled in their respective classrooms. The parents that were there, thanked me and SOS profusely for this wonderful opportunity for their children and I received warm hugs and kisses from all of them! There is no comparison between the level of education that they will receive at Grabouw compared to the community school that they would have attended. These schools are over subscribed, under staffed and very poorly resourced. The parents were so proud of their children and full of appreciation and emotion for everything that SOS and the sponsors are doing for them.

The children were picked up from school at 1.30pm and dropped at the After School Club centre in Pineview. Ami from Agape (who is working in partnership with SOS and lives in the community) reported back that they had all had a wonderful day and were full of excitement. As from next week, the children will be provided with food and a drink on arrival at the club and then will be doing their homework under supervision. The club will be run by two girls, who have educare training. The day will end at 4pm when they will be taken home. The after school club is vital in terms of making sure that the children keep with the level of education provided by the school. Homework would be very difficult for the children to do at home due to the environment they live in.

A great big thank you from all of us here to the sponsors who have made this possible, to the trustees for their support and everybody involved in the organisation.

Best wishes,

Anna Lusty,

SOS Africa, Western Cape

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