

Wattville Day Care Project
now named - ZAMOKHULE CARE CENTRE
submitted by Rev Pam Tolmay

In 2005 my husband, Jock Tolmay and I began volunteering at various Outreach projects run by Bulumonyako, a charitable organization under the auspices of Benoni Central Methodist Church.

One such project was a day care in Wattville, in the municipality of Erkuhleri (previously Benoni). The conditions under which the children were being cared for were minimal at best and abysmal at worst. The only toilet facilities on site were a few little plastic potties and hand basins out in the open. Water was available from an outdoor faucet. The office was in a tin shack and a kitchen without water also in a tin shack with a gas cooker and no place to wash dishes. These were washed outside and piled up to dry on the grass.



The Day Care is located in a poverty-stricken area with very few services. In the winter the children would huddle together in a tin shack to try and keep warm. In the summer they were cared for on dirty old carpets completely exposed to the heat of the sun - for shade they huddled in the shack with little respite from the heat. Playground equipment was minimal and totally

unsafe and unusable.

On my visit to the Day care in 2010 I heard myself muttering “Someone has to do something about this, this is unacceptable” – and I heard myself answering “You are seeing this, you can and should do something”. When I returned home I talked to the Outreach Committee of Melville and Vanneck churches where I was serving and a unanimous decision was made to take a proposal to raise funds to build a proper facility to Middlesex Presbytery Outreach committee (which I was chairing at the time). This committee gave the proposal its support and from there myself, along with Rob Hockin (treasurer of Melville United) gave a presentation at Presbytery and the project was approved. When the treasurer of Presbytery announced that he would not be prepared to handle the finances, Rob interjected “**Melville United will**”. The next Sunday an urgent meeting of the Session was held to get official approval after the fact.

In the years up to this point, starting in 2005, Melville and Vanneck United churches had a project going to help feed the children augmenting their meagre diet with fresh fruit, vegetables, meat and fruit juice. Loose change was collected every Sunday and when enough accumulated Rob would transfer the money to the Bulamonyako treasurer in Benoni. Ann Heslett, a member of Benoni Central Methodist Church, would purchase the food from a local Green Grocer - who would give her a discount and deliver the supplies to Zamokuhle (the name the teachers have chosen for their Day Care, which means “We do Our Best”). This project is still on going. We named this project along with the fundraising to build the facility “Kare for Kids”.



The goal for the fundraising to build a new facility was \$120,000. Together with the support from many churches in Middlesex Presbytery, we reached the goal in October 2013. With great enthusiasm I travelled to South Africa in Jan 2014, where we engaged the services of an architect (who donated his services). Soon we had a building plan and were ready to turn the sod EXCEPT we hit a snag – the architect presented the drawings to the municipality to obtain a building permit and was told “We cannot issue a building permit without a Deed”. And so, we began the hunt for a property deed. There was no deed because under Apartheid the government had only assigned properties to churches but never gave them deeds because the properties were

in so-called White areas. For several years, the minister of the property, along with myself, did everything possible to meet the requirements of the Housing Dept in order for them to issue the deed. In January of 2017 we paid yet another visit to this Dept and found it in utter shambles with no one willing to talk to us about the case. I was on the verge of giving up.

HOWEVER – one of the very wise teachers named Sibongile, sidled up to me and gave me a gentle jab in the ribs and said, “Pam you must get us Containers”. She told me that there are companies who do amazing things with containers and because they are movable structures there would be no need for a building permit – I LIT UP.

I came home and Middlesex Outreach committee gave Rob and me permission to form a sub-committee to investigate the possibility of creating the facility for Zamokuhle Care Centre using refurbished containers. We spent about 3 or 4 months doing this, getting quotes and connecting with companies (and thanks are due to Ted Hyde, Shirley Green, Don Langford and Rob Hockin for their tireless work).

By September of 2017 we all agreed on using a local company “Container Conversions”, and on the recommendation of Chris Gunning (part-owner of Container Conversions) a sub contractor company called “Adah”. We also agreed that if the project was going to get going I needed to visit and liaison and negotiate in person. With this goal in mind I flew to South Africa mid October 2017.



The staff of the Day Care Centre and I met with Chris at the factory and planned every detail of the project in the board room. We were taken on a tour of current projects still under construction. The staff gave input and make decisions from the tiniest to the biggest details of what their facility would look like and what they felt was needed. After that Chris came to the site and met with members of the congregation which had been providing the space for the makeshift facility for the past 13 years. He answered their questions and gave them input and they agreed that the

project could go ahead. In addition, he got input from the leaders about where the containers could be placed. He met the children and was most enthusiastic and anxious to be part of this worthwhile endeavour. Back in Canada the contracts were being scrutinized by the

sub-committee under the guidance of Ted Hyde, a quantity surveyor, and by the end of November the contracts were signed and the date of delivery of the containers was set for January 12th.

Jock and I travelled back to South Africa to be there for the big event and to oversee details of the project and refurbishing of the facility. The day before, some last-minute clearing of obstacles in the way of the trucks had to be executed with everybody pitching in. According to the contract we had to visit the factory to give our approval that everything had been done according to specifications (including Pumla, who gave the cook's stamp of approval of her brand new kitchen). With great excitement we witnessed the arrival on the 13th of January of the massive trucks with their precious loads. It was quite nerve wracking to watch the cranes swinging around and gently placing their loads in place. Much careful measuring and manoeuvring had to be done, but by the end of the day I was able to sign off on behalf of Melville United Church and Middlesex Presbytery Division of Outreach that the containers had been delivered.



The grand opening was set for Saturday Jan 20th. In the mean time some children were still arriving every day and had to be cared for in whatever shade was available because the electricians and construction workers, the plumbers etc were all working feverishly to do the hook ups and finishing off all of the connections in the containers.

The kitchen was not yet accessible and everyone on site had to be fed. We made sandwiches, sliced up watermelons, poured juice and gave all a sundry respite from hunger and heat exhaustion as we all worked together. Chairs which had been crammed into a make-shift storage shack needed cleaning scrubbing and rinsing. Tires for the playground needed painting. Much shopping needed to be done so much so that the staff from Macro (like Cosco here) got to know me and my entourage of staff by name. At one point I was trying to buy a space heater for Zameka's office and the sales person whom I asked to show me where they were looked at me as though I had lost my marbles (it was 40C at the time). He responded with "Pam what do you want to do with a heater - take it back to Canada with you?? Because you know its Winter there.".



Finally, the classrooms were ready and we could start cleaning them and setting up the tables and chairs which for years had been unused due to lack of facilities. Our budget allowed for us to create a playground and what used to be a garbage dump was levelled and thoroughly checked for any shards of glass. The playground contractor arrived and work got underway. Lawn sod was delivered and laid.

The morning of Jan 20th - the day of the dedication - the classrooms were all ready and decked out for the big event. The community gathered with joyful singing and dancing.

The minister of the church joining with me in doing the dedication. He also translated for me. Much singing and praying and thanksgiving ensued followed by the unveiling of the plaque of dedication.

I used a banner given to me by Melville UC when I left at the end of 2011. This banner now hangs in Zameka's office. The plaque reads as follows: Zamokuhle Care Centre created in partnership with Middlesex Presbytery and Melville and Vanneck United Churches. The children threw smiley faced balls into the air in celebration. The state of the art playground equipment, was unveiled and inaugurated by all the children.



No event like this would be complete without some feasting and much of that was done with everyone enjoying visiting and celebrating together. Monday 22nd January Jock and I were back

to see the first children enjoying their beautiful new facility which now included brand new plastic covered mattresses. I had found “Hello Kitty” fabric at a bargain price and then spent a few days with my sister in law who helped me sew 30 covers for the mattresses. Now, the children have safe, hygienic facilities with hand basins and toilets. Pumla the cook has a hygienic, clean and well-equipped kitchen to cook in. Zameka has a well equipped and comfortable office.



A roof and concrete floor between the two containers provides outdoor sheltered space for play and other activities. A solar water heater provides hot water for much more hygienic washing of



dishes. The state of the art play equipment with the extra strong kikuyu grass is a delight to both children and teachers.

The staff of Zamokuhle Care Centre, Buyi, Zameka, Pulisiwe, Mary, Sibongile and Pumla send their heartfelt thanks to each and every person who contributed in time or money, to make possible the creation of a safe, hygienic, beautiful Creche (or as we call it here a Day Care). The creche meets all of the health and safety regulations of Erkuhleni municipality and Social Services, which will enable

them to qualify for assistance towards the running of the Day Care. But those who are most thankful and thrilled are the children from the surrounding suburb of Wattville, who are now cared for in these beautiful new facilities.

My husband Jock gave me constant encouragement and help throughout the years of working towards our goal. The staff never gave up hope and kept working faithfully under dire circumstances and taught me many lessons - one being that I need to slow down. Walking into Makro (like Cosco) one day one of the salespersons asked Zameka “Does she always run?”. Zameka answered “yes” and the lady said “tell her to slow down she is an old lady and she can’t keep that up”. Howls of laughter ensued.



Sibongile, who put the idea of containers into my head, also came up with the playground. I wanted it in a different spot because of the sorry state of the spot where we put it. She saw the potential, and sidled up to me and whispered while giving me her signature gentle prod in the ribs “Pam, do you think we can put a playground here?”. This was followed by the gentle prod “Pam do you think we can get some lawn?”. Sibongile taught me to follow the advice of Don Langford who always says “Listen to the locals” when you do projects like these abroad.

Chris Gunning, Ambrose de Lange and all their employees were excellent. We were very

fortunate to have their services. I had to engage the services of a lawyer to draw up the contract required by Revenue Canada, she also arranged insurance of the property and the installation of a security system - I had no idea where to start and could not have done it without Roelien Watson. There have to be hundreds of people in Middlesex Presbytery who raised funds and contributed to this venture and wherever they are - we say Thank You. Congregations did Advent Fund raising, held dinners and auctions, the list goes on and on. Strathroy United raised just short of \$20,000 and Melville and Vanneck did approximately the same. One congregation which closed down donated \$10,000 out of its left over funds. Special thanks to the congregations of Melville and Vanneck and the Outreach Committee. Ted Hyde spent countless hours doing the costing, negotiating with Chris and Ambrose and Rob Hockin deserves a medal for the way he meticulously handled all the finances and Revenue Canada requirements.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY AND HONOUR FOR GOD'S FAITHFULNESS AND PROVISION THROUGH GOD'S FAITHFUL STEWARDS AND DEDICATED FOLLOWERS IN MIDDLESEX PRESBYTERY AND ESPECIALLY IN MELVILLE AND VANNECK UNITED CHURCHES.

(Pam is available to visit any churches which might want to see a Power Point presentation depicting this story. Contact Pam at pamtolmay@gmail.com)