

## Equipping gang-traumatised communities with the tool for equality.

Mrs Asa Grant had very little education, but the Hanover Park grandmother is a trauma counsellor, safety officer and vice chairman of the School Governing Body at Mount View High School, an oasis of calm, structure and learning on the bleak litter-strewn flatlands not far from her home.

And recently, her achievements won her the opportunity to study at the University of the Western Cape for a qualification that could further equip her to do her chosen work. She was assessed through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programme at the University of the Western Cape, that certified her to continue her education at tertiary level.

Mrs Grant, who has brought up three children entirely on her own, admits that her contact with the school prompted her to improve her education and she echoes

the sentiments of most of the educators in schools that have received halls through the Archway Foundation. 'It's a fantasy come true,' she says of the Archway hall



that stands as a beacon on the battlegrounds where opposing gangs, the Hard Livings and the Americans, terrorise the community.

The school has had its hall for two years and it's one of 34 completed in the past seven years since the Archway Foundation was established by the 92-year-old Cape residential development Company, Garden Cities. The

halls are built and funded by the Archway Foundation together with contributions from the Western Cape Education Department. The Archway is supported by profits from Garden Cities. In the past few years, other corporates and foundations have added their financial weight to the effort.

Founder of the Archway, the company's CEO John Matthews, says however that 'as each year passes, we realise that the need for the halls grows. We know that our efforts are going to take too long without help. We started with 700 halls to build, and that number has remained more or less the same because of the increasing school population. Our 34 halls have done incredible good, both for the schools and surrounding communities, but still a million kids need halls in the Western Cape.'

Matthews also attended school where assemblies and school events were held outside in all weathers and swore he would mitigate this inequality as soon as he could. When he was appointed CEO of Garden Cities, one of his first projects was to obtain his Board's approval to use some of the profits to build school halls, and they formed the Archway Foundation. Today the halls cost up to R4 million each.



**'It is my absolute belief that to create equality in any society, you have to provide all its members with the same opportunities. By handicapping some with inferior equipment you just increase their potential to fail. As I have said before, and this has become the principle by which we operate: One cannot just bestow freedom and equality, you have to create a climate in which they can thrive. Until they are put into practice, freedom and equality are just concepts.'**

Archie Benjamin the headmaster at Mount View knows just what it's like to fight inequity. His is an 'apartheid' school, wooden prefab classrooms and very little by way of extras. And to make matters worse, it's falling apart. But that's not all, his courage has been tested by visits from local gang leaders who offer violence and other unpleasantness if he doesn't toe the line - it usually has to do with financial remuneration. He resists them with sheer logic. 'I'm here to help educate the kids. Intimidate me, and that job can't get done.' The argument remains effective.

The Archway hall, he says, is a godsend. It's a symbol of assurance that someone cares enough to do something to improve matters. It's a big, strong, real building, with bricks and concrete and steel. And he pays tribute to it by creating a wonderful indigenous garden to

celebrate its imposing façade, and a beautiful parking area for visitors.

His school's partnerships with Cape Town's leafy suburb schools like Bishops, Herschel and SACS, plus associations with big UK and European institutions, means he hosts some very surprised people in his Archway Hall.

#### **AN ARCHWAY PARTNERSHIP**

**If you want to be a partner in the Archway Foundation's effort to provide the kids of the Cape with what they deserve, call John Matthews on 021 588 7181 and visit the Garden Cities website at <http://www.gardencities.co.za/>**

