

CHIPPING AWAY AT INEQUALITY

Archway Foundation school halls tackle disadvantage

They have been the inspiration for poetry and have reawakened the dreams of children and their teachers. They were born out of schooldays when wishes didn't often come true.

After 11 years, Garden Cities' Archway Foundation school halls continue to chip away at the gigantic legacy of inequality in Western Cape education.

After an assessment of educational disparity back in 2003, John Matthews, the then newly-appointed CEO of the Western Cape's oldest residential development company, uncovered the gigantic shortfall of more than 700 school halls in the Western Cape, among disadvantaged schools.

Why he chose school halls as his mission, and that of his company's CSI project, the Archway Foundation, could be partly ascribed to personal experience. Matthews, who was driven to attain high levels of tertiary qualification, didn't have it easy. His schooling took place in conditions that were not privileged, and by no means equal.

He knows first hand, the searing summer days and icy wet winters in which more than a million Cape children still today gather in the open for their schools' assemblies, with nowhere to express their creativity, or gather for cultural expression.

School halls are still not a hugely popular cause, simply because, unlike classrooms and laboratories they are widely not viewed as being key to the task of educating young minds. This is entirely untrue.

A survey was conducted among principals, teachers, schoolchildren and their parents covering the then more than 30 Archway halls already handed over to Cape schools. It revealed that the presence of a hall on the school grounds had made an extraordinarily positive difference to the academic performance at the school, the levels of self-esteem among the entire school body, including the surrounding community, and the status of the school among potential pupils.

Children's attitude towards school and learning changed, and those who were polled all said coming to school had become something to look forward to. Creative energy was rekindled. And the relatively few who have previously made it into the mainstream of arts, culture and entertainment are predicted to become a flood. It shows in the academic results and in the achievements in cultural and artistic competition, sport and leadership.

The effect of the halls on the children has been remarkable and there have been many expressions of thanks over the years, but none more heartfelt than that of the little rhyme penned by a Cape Town pupil:
Garden Cities, toe dit lyk of niemand luister na ons gepleit, het julle nie geskroom met die verwesenliking van ons droom!

The Archway Foundation has so far, in its 11 years, provided 60 halls for disadvantaged schools in the province at a cost totalling over R206 million, made up primarily of its own funds and those of the WCED and other corporate donors.



John Matthews, Group CEO of Garden Cities

However, there are still around a million kids in the province going to schools without a hall. They are still gathering in open quadrangles for assemblies, and hired halls for special occasions.

No education system is perfect, but providing the basic necessities for a holistic education is an unarguable necessity. Redressing decades of neglect is a monumental task and more help is needed. The Archway Foundation calls on other corporations to assist with their CSI funds to level the opportunities for all South African children by providing one of the basic educational necessities.

John Matthews would welcome a call on 021 558 7181

www.gardencities.co.za



The Garden Cities Archway Foundation Hall at Sullivan Primary School in Steenberg, one of the milestones in the now 60 halls built by the foundation.



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