



■ The current staff at the Tereo School in Somerset West, pictured above and right, Christiano Jordaan, Gurstiano de Vos and Donald Slingers playing at the school.

Tereo School offers hope, opportunities

ANN COETZEE

For many of us in suburbia, education and schooling in some form is the norm – whether it be at a traditional school, home schooling or online education.

We don't even consider not giving our children a chance to learn, as we strive to give them the best education we can afford, to provide them with a future.

While the South African Constitution stipulates that all children between the ages of 7 and 15 are compelled to attend school, the reality is that this is neither enforced or policed – so many children never receive any education, which means the only options open to them are drugs, gangsterism, crime and prostitution.

Tereo was started by a bible study group from the Somerset West Baptist Church in 1999, as a special purpose school for "street children". Initially there were just five children, and we now have 82 children registered, and have touched the lives of over 900 children in the past 22 years.

What is often not understood is what it actually means to work with and teach "street children".

I was appointed project manager in September 2020, and in the past eight months I have encountered the realities of what this entails.

We are not just talking about children from disadvantaged communities... these children are exposed to the horrors of the poorest of the poor, where drugs and alcohol abuse are the norm, violence and physical abuse are daily occurrences.

I have seen children that

arrive at school having been beaten, raped or molested themselves (or have witnessed this), and then still have to study – and all this often on an empty stomach, with no expectation to receive any food upon returning home.

Then there are the children who have physical or mental challenges, as a result of their mothers partaking in drug use or excessive alcohol abuse while pregnant, which results in brain damage, ranging from foetal alcohol syndrome and other behavioural and concentration problems, that can never be cured and in some instances may not be treated due to their financial circumstances.

While some of these children do have loving parents, even if they are extremely poor, many have no strong parental figure guiding and/or protecting them.

Our role then at Tereo includes not only providing education, but also emotional and physical care through our child protection officer – who works with the children, parents, families and social workers to bring stability and safety into the lives of these children.

Our mission at Tereo is multifaceted:

- Install Godly values into the lives of the children in our care.

- Build the gap between the current unschooled state of the children and mainstream education. We have 12-year-old children in Grade 1, having never been exposed to any form of education, so they know a comprehensive list of swear words, but not colours or how to hold a pair of scissors.

- Give them hope to break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy.

Tereo is registered with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and provides education, daily meals, clothing and much-needed emotional support to the children, no matter what the child's circumstances.

By providing them with this support, we strive to break the cycle of poverty caused by little or no education, and give them an alternative to turning to crime.

While we do receive a subsidy from the WCED, this only covers about 30% of our costs. The balance of our annual budget is made up by sourcing local and international funders.

We do ask parents to contribute to school fees, but in most cases this does not or cannot materialise, due to their circumstances.

At Tereo we strive to ensure that no child in need is turned away; acquiring donors and sponsorship is therefore key to ensure that we are able to find and keep quality teachers, who have experience with children from challenged backgrounds.

We currently employ six teachers and an assistant, who are amazing and inspiring women, with a passion for making a difference in the lives of these children. Our many success stories speak for themselves.

The sad reality is we often lose teachers to higher wages elsewhere, as we do not always have the financial resources to remunerate them appropriately.

To keep Tereo successful, and to continue to grow and develop the school and equip our pupils to meet the needs of the 21st



■ Rethabile West and De-Anne Maarman reading books at Tereo.



■ Tereo School does a clean-up at Strand Beach.

century, requires money.

We appeal to members of the community, and local businesses, to help with either a financial contribution, sponsoring a teacher's salary, food, clothing or any other support.

Tereo School is a registered NPO and PBO with a Section 18(A) certificate, and all donations are fully tax deductible.

For more information, call 082 6789077, 021 851 4005 or email ann@tereo.org

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