



## Vrygrond Community Project

### History

The name Vrygrond literally translates as "free land". Local people believe that Vrygrond was given to fishermen and their families, some 60 years ago, by an Italian aristocrat landowner. Under apartheid, however, the land was declared public land and therefore land to which those living on it had no legal rights. Despite having been ejected and many inhabitants forcibly returned to other parts of South Africa, a core group managed to survive, facing constant official harassment. Shacks demolished by the authorities during the day were surreptitiously rebuilt at night and the squatter camp gradually grew in size. By the time South Africa held their first Democratic elections, Vrygrond contained 7000 people.

### From squatter camp to township

In January 1996, the people of Vrygrond formed a community trust to fight for a better quality of life of their residents. Their first achievement was to convince the Cape Town City Council to officially transfer ownership of the 52 hectares of land on which Vrygrond was situated to the squatters. Whilst this may have provided security of tenure, it failed to address the poverty and squalor. There still was no electricity, no sewage, no piped water. Homes continued to be built of tin, wood and plywood. Unemployment continued to be high. In the summer, the camp was exposed to blazing heat and dust and in the winter to severe flooding.

At a second stage, the people of Vrygrond engaged with the local authorities and the Southern Cape Department of Housing to obtain state subsidies for all the shacks. The funds were used to build 1,600 brick houses with toilets, water, electricity - at the time the largest delivery of sub-economic housing in the Southern Cape Peninsula. In April 1999 the Vrygrond Community Development Trust was short-listed for the President Masakhane Award for outstanding Non Governmental Organisations.

The housing took about four years to complete. Since the formation of the trust, nearly 300 families have been re-housed into proper accommodation with flushing toilets and running water.



## **One to One Children's Fund's involvement**

### **1. The crèche**

One to One Children's Fund (121 CF) has been involved in supporting a crèche and pre-school centre for up to 150 children to receive early learning skills and a balanced lunch each day. From day one in 1996 until today, 121 CF has financed the running costs of the crèche, including water, electricity and all salaries and providing vital vitamins, early nutrition for babies, pre-school education for toddlers and health training for the mothers.

In 2000, the crèche was still made of tin, wood and plywood and 121 CF organized a trek through Namibia to raise funds to contribute towards the construction of a brand-new crèche and nursery school, which opened in January 2001 to 178 children.

In March 2003, a One to One Children's Fund container full of toys and clothes was dispatched to the children at Vrygrond. The container was then used as an additional classroom for the school, its contents having been distributed to the township's residents.



### **2. Playground and library**

One to One Children's Fund's next objective was to raise money for an outdoor playground for the children to play, socialise and exercise in safety. We also provided a library and computer equipment for both the children and the wider community to enhance their learning skills. Thanks to the generosity of our trekkers and benefactors all these goals have been achieved.

In 2006, the Library won an annual award, made by the Library & Information Association of South Africa, for the best Branch Library in the Western Cape.

### **3. Mentorship and Teacher Support**

It has been documented that the educational success of underprivileged children in South Africa is poorer than those in other African countries. This seems to be due to a complex combination of circumstances: the legacy of apartheid, in which teachers themselves did not receive adequate education; under-resourced schools, where class sizes are up to 50 children per class, and extreme

poverty, with all the attendant problems of crime, alcohol and drug abuse, poor housing, neglect and malnutrition.

In partnership with Herzlia Pre-Primary School, One to One Children's Fund provides mentorship and support for teachers at the Vrygrond crèche. Now we are also funding a programme to help children develop their attention, listening and language skills, which includes a programme for parents to help their young children to acquire literacy skills.

#### **4. The primary school**

Vrygrond has no primary or secondary school. When the new township of Vrygrond was planned, space was left for a school and playing field. The school site, in the centre of the township, measures 1.74 hectares, so the land is available at no cost.

Vrygrond's current population of approximately 9,000 includes large numbers of children of varying ages. The schools in the surrounding areas are often of poor quality, and many kids are deterred by bad weather and the risk of muggings from going to these schools. Although the Western Cape Government Department for Education acknowledges the need for a school in Vrygrond, it is unable to finance the building of the school. However, the department has agreed to run it as a state school if the Vrygrond Community Development Trusts finds funds to build the school.

So, in 2006 One to One Children's Fund resolved to redouble its efforts to help Vrygrond realise its dream of a new primary school. A variety of donors have contributed through our charity, which has acted as a focal and coordination point for Vrygrond and channelled the funds to the Vrygrond Community Development Trust.

Construction works started in May 2007 and the new school opened in January 2008. The school will be a *Foundation Phase Primary School*, catering for four grades (1 through 4) with twelve classrooms and approximately 360 children aged 7 to 11. The school is designed to allow for an extension at a later stage to accommodate the remaining three grades of primary school.

The Vrygrond Community Development Trust, under the chairmanship of Jonathan Schrire, is determined that the school be a model of best practise and quality education for a disadvantaged community (much as the library and pre-school crèche have become in their own spheres). The Western Cape Department of Education shares this vision. The Vrygrond Trust has already established a monitoring committee of educationalists to oversee and advise on educational issues.



For more information on the Vrygrond Community Project, visit <http://www.vrygrond.co.za/>