

children speak

about home and school at hostels in the western cape

The Lwandle hostel complex is one of many similar complexes in the Western Cape. Most are state-owned and -administered, and were built during the 1950s and 1960s as 'single sex' accommodation for male migrant workers. The number of women and children actually present in hostels has vastly increased since the formal abolition of influx control in 1986.

Lwandle is situated about 3 km outside Somerset West on the False Bay coast. There are 56 hostel blocks containing 2 200 beds: each block is divided into a number of 6 m. square rooms, and each room contains 8 beds (some converted into double bunks). Rooms are populated, on average, by 32 people resulting in a bed-to-person ratio of 1:4. Toilets - heavy duty plastic buckets (often lacking seats), in unpartitioned rows - serve 64 to 85 persons each. These

conditions conform with those documented in other hostels in the region.

Some school children of Lwandle wrote as follows about 'The Place Where I Live':

A 13-year-old girl in Std 1:

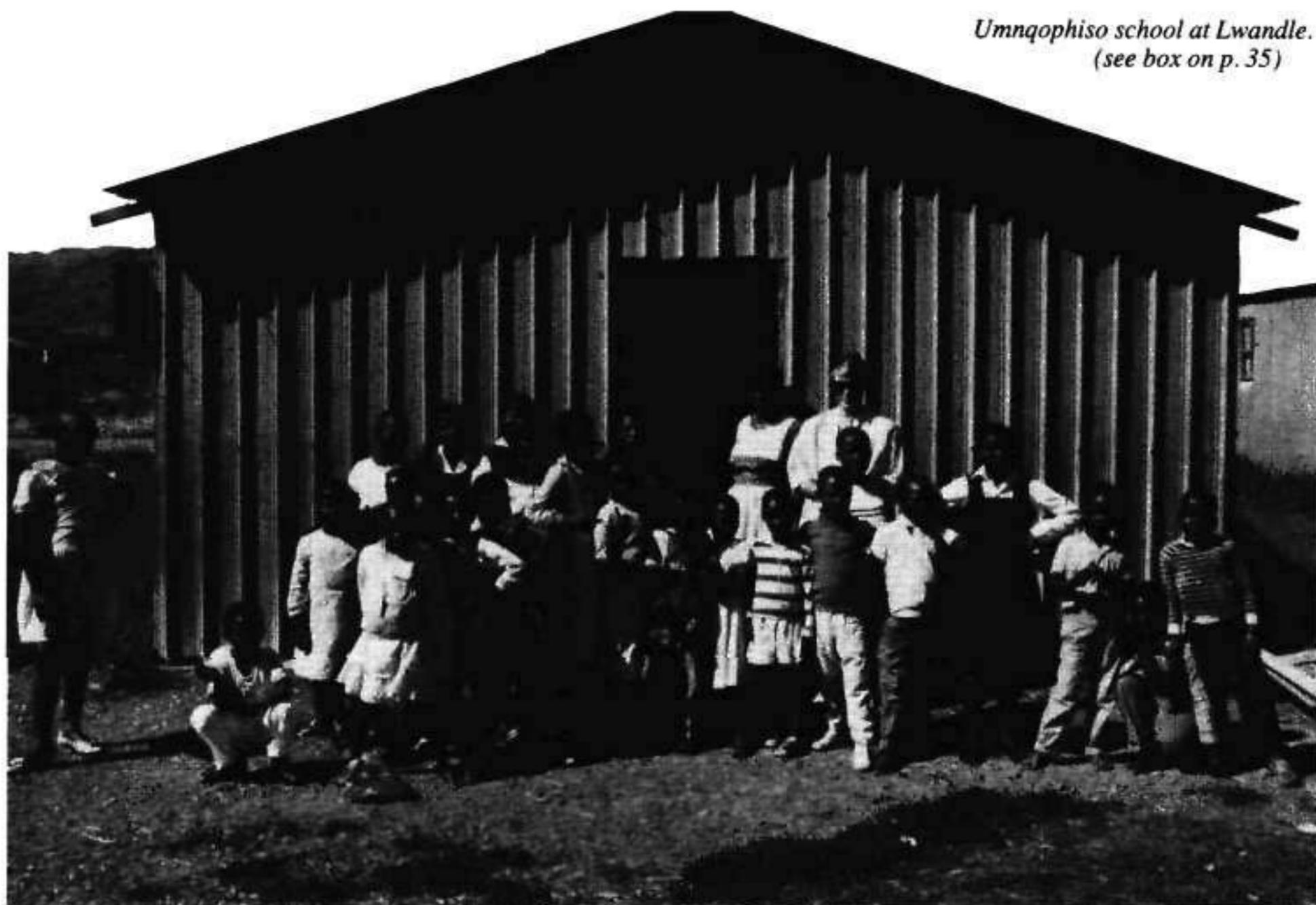
The hostel I live in is very dirty and unhygienic. The hostel is overcrowded. Most of the people in the hostel are youngsters. I stay with my parents, brothers and sisters. The

place stinks. People urinate and excrete in the hostels at night. The hostel is noisy. In our house we try to clean and discipline ourselves. In the room there is someone who sells beer. During the weekends the people sing and shout.

A 14-year-old boy in Std 1:

We live in a very bad hostel in room XX. Some people are sick. They have TB. Many people smoke. The

*Umnqophiso school at Lwandle.
(see box on p. 35)*



toilets are also bad. There are many germs there. It is very dirty because the people are careless. Some people steal from others. It is worse over weekends. If someone goes on holiday, when he returns he will find that some things are missing. There are no doors.

A 10-year-old girl in Std 3:

In our house I stay with my older brother and sister, Hlumisa and Yoliswa. We always try to clean our house. There is a small shop inside the house. The house is not so clean, but we try by all means to keep it clean. Here in our hostel there are also children who drink. I hate children who drink wine at the age of 11 or 12 years. I wonder what is going to happen to such a child when he or she is old. My mother and father like to see us working and cleaning the house. My father likes to make an example of his brother's house which is very clean.

A 14-year-old girl in Std 4:

What I observed here at Strand [neighbouring town] is the beauty of it. If only houses could be built. My mother said that she would like to buy a house here if they are built. If people could stop selling wine there

would be less fighting and death. If houses could be built, there could be many places to hold church services

in the empty hostels. There can also be nice netball and soccer fields to play on.

Lwandle School (see box) is housed in a single-roomed, corrugated-iron shack. One unqualified teacher handles 80 to 100 children, ranging in age from 6 to 15. The school goes to Std 4 but around 80% of the children (some in their early teens) are in Sub A or Sub B. Under half the children have desks - the rest do their work sprawled across the floor. In their diaries, the children sometimes comment on their school:

A 14-year-old girl in Std 4:

27 July 1989 - Yesterday I went to school and arrived early. We were taught standard 4 maths. We were also taught how to knit jerseys. After school I went to play. After that my mother made some coffee because it was very cold. I put some water on the burner for my father to wash. I always wash our clothes on Saturdays. I love my family.

28 July 1989 - Yesterday we did maths and we wrote notes. We studied our books. During break-time we played netball. Before two

o'clock we ate soup and bread. After our meal we swept the floor and cleaned the school. When I arrived at home I went to fetch water. After that I cooked supper. After supper I washed the dishes and then I went to sleep.

A 14-year-old boy in Std 1:

12 July 1989 - When I arrived at home yesterday, I saw two guys who were selling a bicycle. Its price was R15. I asked my mother to buy it. She said I must wait for my father. When he returned, he told me that he does not have the money. He said



making a school from scratch

Lwandle School began in January 1987. The Lwandle community asked the Somerset West branch of the Black Sash to help open a school as there was none provided by the government.

We started very chaotically on a Monday morning in the community hall with around 60 children, but were promptly told that as the children were not supposed to be living in the hostels, they didn't exist and we could not use the hall. We moved to two corrugated iron buildings, the Methodist and Apostolic churches, divided the children into 'primary school' and 'crèche', found two local women willing to take charge of the groups - and so it began.

We begged and borrowed equipment and, sometimes seemingly miraculously, raised R500 each month for the salaries of the teachers and the cook (who prepares Operation Hunger soup and bread donated by church groups). Towards the end of last year we were able to move the crèche into a far better building belonging to the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk in Africa and received much-needed support from an inter-church group formed in Somerset West.

Since then things have improved steadily. The climax came with a meeting of community committee and Black Sash representatives with the Department of Education and Training (DET) in the first week of October. We were told that the school has been recognised, registered and named Umnqophiso - 'school of the covenant'. Moreover we were promised two trained teachers for 1990, with salaries, books, desks and so on provided by the DET. Lwandle consists entirely of hostels which makes it difficult to attract professional staff but hope lies in the fact that it has been declared a township, with the expectation that family housing will be built. □

Mary Comrie and Lin Helme, Cape Western Region

20 July 1989 - After school as usual I went to play soccer with my friends. When I arrived home, I saw my father and mother sitting together unhappy. I asked them what was going on. They told me that both of them had gone to town to look for a job, but no one was lucky. They said they were worried about taxi fares for the next day. I also felt worried.

15 August 1989 - Yesterday I did not come to school. My mother did not have the money for school fees. She said she will give it to me on Thursday. Our teacher said that those who do not pay the school fees must not come to school. That is why I was not at school. □

Information about the Lwandle hostels was supplied by Sean Jones, MA student in Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town.



The scenes on the opposite page and on the right show activities inside the Lwandle School

What do you CALL that thing?



