

Learning skills for life



Photo: Kate Truscott

Nosipho Kwetane and Jessie Gqozo sharing ideas about literacy work in Khayelitsha

Jessie Gqozo says she joined a literacy group because she wanted to work in a hospital, but couldn't speak or read English.

Nosipho Kwetane says people started to come to Khayelitsha in the 1980s. It was the dumping ground for squatters who were forcibly removed from places around Cape Town like Crossroads, Langa, Gugulethu, as well as Cape Town itself. People also came from Transkei and Ciskei.

The Trust for Christian Outreach and Education started literacy groups in 1987, Kwetane says, adding that some women wanted to be able to

read the Bible, others wanted to read and write letters.

For example, she says, a woman may leave her children with her mother in the Transkei for schooling. Then a child sends her a letter, but she can't read it.

Kwetane stresses that the literacy classes are not like school.

"It is important to remember that the women are adults. There is that stored knowledge we must dig out. We start with Learners' Life Stories. These are real life stories of women we have worked with. Where they come from, why they moved here. Some of these

Nosipho Kwetane is a literacy worker in Khayelitsha, 20km from Cape Town. Jessie Gqozo is a member of a literacy group there. Kate Truscott found out from them that literacy is more than learning to read and write

stories we have written into easy readers in Xhosa.

"We try to build people's confidence by taking topics they know about, and we build up their reading and writing skills from there."

Jessie Gqozo describes what happens in the class she attends.

"We talk about our lives, like our housing problems, water, toilets. We talk about our children. Sometimes the violence and the fights. And we do some dramas and singing. We have a choir. We learn many words when we sing. We like to read English."

Many women want to learn English, says Kwetane. "They



think it will help them to get a job, but it is also because they can't fill in forms at the Post Office or the clinic. For example, on forms you get words like 'marital status' or 'occupation' and people don't understand."

The classes don't just teach people to read and write, she adds. "We are teaching them how to deal with the society in which they live. We also teach people how to take minutes, chair a meeting and report back.

"Then some groups do embroidery and sewing which they sell. Some have a credit union or *umgalelo* (*stokvel*) and they contribute five rand, five rand. They use the money for when the children go back to

school, to buy books and uniforms."

Starting a new group involves meeting the residents from an area and finding out their needs. Kwetane believes most organisations decide from the outside what is needed in a community, like a clinic. They don't ask the people themselves.

She thinks people must be involved in development from the beginning.

We are training three local people to run projects and be trainers themselves. We give back to the community," she says.

"In future we want to start pre-schools with each literacy group," she continues. "We think the groups can do it

themselves. We are teaching them how to write proposals and draw up a budget, so that everyone learns these skills, not just the three people we are training. We can help get things started. When they can manage on their own, we will keep in contact.

"We are also trying to get our Learners' Life Stories printed, so more people can use them. We are giving a voice to the voiceless." ✪

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