

Feeding the nation one child at a time

LUMKA

OLIPHANT speaks to two remarkable women who wake up early every day to make sure the pupils at their local primary school are fed

GLENROSE Matyhlo and Angela Twala of Freedom Park are ordinary women doing the extraordinary for the pupils of Olifantsvlei Primary in Eikenhof, south of Johannesburg.

Every morning at 5am the two women wake up to make sure the children at the local school won't go hungry. By the time the little ones and the teachers arrive at 8am the women have finished the breakfast run and are ready to serve.

The education department runs school feeding scheme programmes at many of Gauteng's previously disadvantaged schools. The learners get two meals a day – in the morning and afternoon.

The department provides mealie meal and soup, but adds nothing else to make the food tastier.

So Twala (42) and Matyhlo (46) make sure there is some yummy, soft porridge to eat when the first child enters the school gate.

The two women are unemployed and when they are not at school cooking and dishing up for the children they are collecting recyclable scrap to sell to a nearby recycling centre. So dedicated are they that they sacrifice buying luxuries for their own children. They buy oil, vegetables, salt and meat for the school kids when they make enough money from selling scrap.

"We want to provide different meals for the children because they'll eventually get tired of eating the same food," says Matyhlo.

They need about R15 each every day to travel to and from the school.

"We have to take a taxi every morning to arrive on time and after school

we use the bus provided by the department, but we pay for it; it's not for us it's for the children," says Twala.

They say they get a lot of fulfilment from their work and sleep peacefully at night knowing they have contributed to children's lives.

"You know we come from these communities and we know what these children face. We know that many of them depend on these meals so we need to be there for them," says Twala.

When City Press visited the school this week, Twala said she was concerned because one of the girls was having difficulty walking.

When she approached her and asked what was wrong, the girl disclosed that she had been raped the previous weekend.

"When you are working with children you need to be alert and able to see if the child is happy or sad," she says before going to report the matter to the school principal, Freddy Maphula.

"Nipheka kamnandi maan! (you are great cooks!)" says little [REDACTED] (9) in Grade 3.

He says that he would be very sad if they were to stop cooking.

"We would just have to continue coming to school, but it wouldn't be the same if they weren't here any more," he says.

[REDACTED] (11), also in Grade 3, says he looks forward to coming to school every day and dislikes weekends because he knows he will go hungry.

"My parents don't work and we sometimes don't have food at home so I'd rather come to school than stay at home and eat nothing."

Maphula is also reaping benefits. His pupils are punctual and absenteeism has decreased dramatically.

"Late-comers are a thing of the past. The children want to be here on time because they want to get the porridge in the morning," he says.

He jokingly adds that he can now enjoy his lunch box all to himself without having to share it with hungry pupils.

"What touches me the most is that they never complain. If there's no oil or salt they find a way of getting it and never ask for anything in return," he says.

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HUNGER AT BAY ...

Olifantsvlei Primary School principal Freddy Maphula says absenteeism has decreased dramatically thanks to a school feeding programme

Picture:
Dudu Zitha

