

MEDIA RELEASE

R460 000 Delivery Vehicle Donation Ensures Food Parcel Distribution to Disadvantaged Free State Children

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Destitute members of the Free State's 'forgotten' communities, living in isolated areas, are receiving regular food parcels and fortified porridge, thanks to an early childhood education organisation's commitment to humanitarian assistance and the donation by the South African Muslim Charitable Trust (SAMCT) of a R460 000 delivery panel van.

Bloemfontein-based Lesedi Educare Association, an accredited early childhood development resource and training organisation, established in 1993, has long provided vital programmes for children who would otherwise be excluded from the undoubted benefits of such interventions.

Addressing a virtual hand-over of the new vehicle, SAMCT representative, Mr Gaf Osman said: "This is an organisation dedicated to the early childhood education of more than 13 600 urban and, particularly, rural children from disadvantaged backgrounds across the Free State. It reaches out to isolated communities - largely forgotten by society - where children have no access to vitally important early childhood development programmes."

He added: "In the course of its work in these largely forgotten, rural and massively disadvantaged communities, the organisation has identified another and extremely urgent need; the need for food parcel distribution amongst the needy people in its area of operation. Although food security does not form any part of its core business, Lesedi Educare Association could not ignore such a critical and rapidly escalating problem."

"The Lesedi Educare Association shows a deep concern for the well-being of young children. Whilst setting out to provide early childhood development, ensure the well-being of children and their families, the use of needs-based outreach programme interventions and the provision of mobile play centres for children in informal settlements and isolated rural communities, it has gone much further, demonstrating its commitment to ensuring food security as well," Mr Gaf Osman said.

The Association currently operates two vans, equipped to provide mobile playgroups. However, these vehicles are permanently active in the field, ensuring the continuance of outreach programmes and were not available for food distribution. Instead, the organisation began using a small sedan to deliver food parcels in a move which followed the formation of two invaluable partnerships, with Woolworths Northridge Mall and the Southern Lodestar Foundation, both of which provide vital sustenance for distribution to needy children and families.

He stressed: "The Association's distribution method was clearly not ideal and was far from being sustainable, given the vehicle's size limitation and the poor road conditions. The need for the effective and far-reaching distribution of food parcels and fortified porridge, provided by the donor companies, remained an ever-present challenge. The solution obviously lay in acquiring a third panel van. However, the organisation's financial constraints meant that this was a dream too far - until we, of the SAMCT, came to hear of Lesedi Educare Foundation's challenge."

He said the SAMCT recognised the 'vital role' transport plays in reaching some of this country's remote communities.

"We were extremely pleased to be in the position to assist the organisation by providing the delivery panel van staff so desperately needed to meet the humanitarian objective of a large-scale improvement in food security amongst the children and communities with which it works," he said.

The SAMCT was created in 2008 to provide funding, services and other resources for the improvement of the lives of vulnerable, deprived and disadvantaged. It has successfully delivered sizeable assistance solutions throughout the country, irrespective of race or religion and work to support needy organisations in the fields of health, social development, poverty alleviation and education.

"It is our hope that our Lesedi Educare Association intervention will make an appreciable difference to both the early childhood development outreach work the organisation delivers, and - most importantly - to the incredible food provision task that it has additionally and so willingly undertaken in the interests of the children of the region," Mr Gaf Osman said.

The Lesedi Educare Association intervention was established in 1993 and today operates across 21 rural Free State towns, 10 urban informal settlement communities on the outskirts of Bloemfontein, two large peri-urban towns - Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu - as well as in Bloemfontein itself, using training, education and support services to reach out to young children and families living in extremely difficult life-circumstances, in both rural and urban communities.

Commenting on the Association's educational efforts, Mr Gaf Osman said: "It does amazing work for historically disadvantaged children, in spite of the fact that accessing some of the communities it serves is extremely difficult, given the prevailing distances to be travelled, the isolated status of communities and really poor infrastructure. Because a vital need exists, this organisation is totally committed to operating in such areas, simply because the children here have no other access to any form of early childhood development."

"There can be no question that the formative years of childhood shape the basis of intelligence, personality, social behaviour and the capacity to learn. Early childhood development programmes provide the foundation children require and is, therefore, a vital part of the education process - a part which is sadly absent in so many of South Africa's disadvantaged communities."

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For more information about SAMCT or its Lesedi Educare Association donation of a new delivery panel van, please contact:

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