

The Weekly

HOPE TO THE DISABLED

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A centre for people living with disabilities in Memel is offering them a sanctuary.

There are many misconceptions regarding mental and physical disability in society, and as a result communities often turn their backs on people living with disabilities instead of embracing them.

This was the main reason Gladys Maduna, the owner of Zenzele Disabled Day Care Centre in Memel, decided to establish a place of safety for vulnerable members of society. The centre cares for 35 people with various physical and mental challenges.

Maduna said caring for a person with disabilities is a challenge in itself and caregivers have to continually learn how to look after them. She said that many people refuse to pay to keep their children or parents in the centre.

“The parents do not pay and the food that we receive is not enough to supply to so many people.”

According to Maduna, the oldest person with mental disabilities at the centre is a 40-year-old man who was brought to the centre by family members.

“The older persons with this kind of disabilities are often used by community members to buy alcohol and forced to do bad things and because they are not in their proper mind set, they do it.” Those staying at the centre are involved in activities such as gardening and carpentry. They are also taught how to do things for themselves to help integrate them into society.

The Weekly

Maduna said one of the centre's major predicaments is that there is no medical staff to help take care of the patients, physical needs, such as helping them to exercise their muscles. "We need physiotherapists to help them with their muscles as some of them have a problem holding things."

The centre also needs transport that will be able to pick up and drop off the learners. It was officially opened in 1997, but Maduna started taking care of those in need in 1984. She started her centre in the backyard of her house, but later asked for assistance from the Department of Social Development. She then received the land and building to start a proper centre.

In an effort to further assist the centre, the MEC for Agriculture, Msebenzi Zwane, recently donated garden equipment and other necessities to establish vegetable gardens. Zwane said the department will assess the success of the project and determine what future support government will offer to the project.

He said it is important for churches, centres, and homes to use the little space they have available to establish vegetable gardens.

"Instead of buying vegetables from the shops, we aim to promote self-sufficiency. We appreciate what Ms. Maduna is doing with disabled people here. We have already built a tunnel and if the project is successful, we will provide more land and more equipment for them."

Zwane also launched a children's library programme where children with disabilities are able to play using ordinary toys to develop social skills. The library will also educate mothers about the importance of playing in the development of disabled children

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