

# Powerful Beyond Measure

The late Bernice Manana Mohapi was born on the 04 April 1941 in Maokeng Kroonstad she was the first born of two children to her parents Maseemere and Kelebone Beleman. She was affectionately known as Mme Manana. The Beleman family relocated to Taung village in Lesotho where Mme Manana spent all her childhood years. Whilst living in Lesotho Me Manana attended school at Warata intermediate School in the Free State as this school was right on the border that divided South Africa from Lesotho.

Mme Manana married Mr Ephraim Makhetha and they were blessed with one child, a son called Lebohang Makhetha. When her husband passed away, the apartheid government forced Mme Manana to change her surname to that of the family members that she was staying with as this was the only way that she could obtain her ID and other legal documents.

Mme Manana then moved to Bloemfontein and started working at the Bloemfontein Hotel, she later got employment at National Hospital and then moved on to work at Pelonomi Hospital in the children's ward (kindersal). Mme Manana loved and adored children immensely and this love became even more evident when working at Pelonomi Hospital. In 1995 the hospital had a set of twins that were abandoned and needed someone to love and care for them. Me Manana decided to take the twins who were 14 days old home and named them Thato and Lerato. Her family was supportive but little did they know that this would be the first of many more children to come.

Mme Manana started taking in more children who were either orphaned or whose parents couldn't care for them. In 2008 she opened a home for children living on the street and these children were housed at the former Bloemfontein Prison (Ramkraal). In 2012 they got evicted from Ramkraal and Me Manana converted her house into a children's home registered as Ikhutseng Children's home which has 8 committee members. The home was taking care of 20 children at the time and is now taking care of 27 children who are referred by families, extended families and Social workers where families cannot take care of orphans or their own children.

Mme Manana had to sacrifice her old age grant and a foster care grant she received for only 4 children. She had to provide meals on daily basis so that these children would not go to bed on an empty stomach and her son Lebohang had to get used to the idea of sharing his mother's love and attention with 27 other children. Their house became a home and a place of refuge for many other people and Mme Manana did all of this without any financial assistance from anyone. Mme Manana passed away in April 2016 living behind 27 orphaned children who were in her care at the time of her passing. Her son, Lebohang had to take over the responsibility that his mother had left behind.

"I remember the day that I received the call to say my mother had passed on, I walked into a house full of children who were all depending on me as their confidante was no longer alive, these children had fear in their eyes they didn't know what would happen to them now that Mama was gone, they had many questions, to ask and in my heart I knew I couldn't let them go, I just couldn't", said Makhetha.

"My Mother was receiving a foster care grant for only 4 of the 27 children and since her passing the grant has been withdrawn, we survive on donations from committee members, Shoprite and Anchor Church Group. Committee members contribute money and other resources as required, this is difficult because we are unemployed and for everything you contribute to the centre, it means you are taking something away from your family, but we soldier on because we need to keep mama's dream alive". Lebohang said

The MEC for Social Development Me Sisi Ntombela spent a day with the children and also took them on a shopping spree just before the cold winter season started. Me Ntombela bought school uniform for the older children and warm clothes for the younger ones who are not yet in school. This was her contribution to the excellent work that was done by Mme Manana, the MEC also promised to send social workers to further assist the family.