

# VOLUNTEERING LEADS TO GOLD

**A survivor of child abuse, Jakobine wanted to help children rise above their circumstances**

A little girl sits beneath a solitary tree and whispers to herself. "Not now but one day. Not now but one day. One day." She spoke to herself under the tree because she had no voice in the house where she was often severely beaten for anything and shouted at for nothing. She lived with family members in Windhoek. Jakobine's mother had sent her to Windhoek at age five thinking she was giving her daughter a better chance in life. She could not have imagined the abuse her child suffered, having to do chores all day and being physically and emotionally tortured. Her voice was further quietened by another refrain in her head, "your mother cannot afford anything". For this reason Jakobine went to school with clothes too small and no shoes. She received her diplomas and even best student awards with bare feet and no proud family member in the audience. Talking to herself and believing in God's love for her got Jakobine through these years.

Despite her good Grade 10 grades Jakobine quit school to go home and take care of her younger siblings because of their mother's deteriorating health and addiction to dizzying liquids.

The next 16 years passed in a wink of an eye. 1988 saw her working as domestic worker. She then worked at Alfa Ko-op from 1989 until she was

Jakobine Rhom: surviving through self-talk

retrenched with many others in 2004. Instead of rushing to formal employment Jakobine became a volunteer at the Evangelical Lutheran Churches AIDS Programme (ELCAP) as a home-based carer for the elderly and HIV patients. ELCAP provided the household with basic food and cosmetic needs. Additionally each of her siblings received N\$30.00 and Jakobine received N\$20/ month for her work. When USAID donated clothes to the sick the volunteers also benefitted. Jakobine received training from the AIDS Care Trust, NA WA Life Trust and Philippi Trust. After becoming a group leader at Philippi, she started seeing her future differently.

As a carer for the elderly and AIDS patients in Okahandja Park, Jakobine could not help but notice the children who lived in these households. In different ways they reminded her so much of herself. Her time had come. Here was her opportunity. She succeeded in getting permission to run the usual ELCAP programme during the mornings and in the afternoons, with two other volunteers, assist these hungry eyed children who peeked at her from behind cardboard walls. The Lutheran church availed space for them. They provided afterschool care and counselling. Life had taken on a sweet rich quality for Jakobine. With wisdom beyond her years she helped the children in countless ways and brought out the best in them. She taught them gratefulness through taking good care

of the stationary that were donated to them. She also instilled in them the principle of giving thanks and taught them to make birthday and appreciation cards with basic materials. These cards that used leaves for decorations showed them how far one can get with little and how possible it was to be self-reliant if one stopped looking to have what others had. One could make do with what one had. Jakobine also started a recreational club with the children. Here they were given responsibilities to teach them the value of ownership. And a miracle was slowly birthed from all these lessons.

Children had to learn to take ownership of the club by suggesting activities. Since they had learned the principle of making do with what they had, singing became the primary suggestion. And thus a kiddies and youth choir was born. Jakobine named it after her great-grandfather for whom the church they practiced in was named. In 2008 ELCAP came to an end when donor funding stopped. Jakobine's colleagues went off to find jobs, but she could not simply move on with her life and abandon the children. She had come too far with them. Too many had blossomed under her motherly care and some even called her Mother. She had seen school drop-outs return to school. She first taught them that in helping others you open a door into your own future. She would therefore have the

children who believed they were stupid tutor younger children and thus regain their confidence in their own academic ability. Jakobine also taught them to talk to themselves. They learned how to think independently and become strong minded despite the heartache and difficulties in their lives. She taught them to close the fingers on the one hand that pointed out the negative things in their lives and open the fingers on the other hand that made the positive statements. Hope and faith were nurtured in many children through this hand-talking and the consolation that one day things will be better. So how could she leave them after having built their self-esteem and after having taught them to rise above their circumstances? She stayed.

In 2010 her house burned down and for a while she returned to housework. The lady whom she worked for needed someone to help out at her day job. Jakobine volunteered to help and not long after a post as receptionist became available. Today the ELCAP volunteer is receptionist at Be2Gold. When Oryx Gold changed to Be2Gold and had their groundbreaking ceremony at the opening of their Otjikoto mine, Jakobine's choirs performed. At the end of their performance people were smitten. After an email by Sherri Lytle, the Corporate Social Responsibility Manager, to Be2Gold board members and their wives, the necessary funds were raised to enable the recording of a CD by children who once had nothing - not even belief in themselves. Jakobine has given children like herself a voice in more than one way.

Choir members in Okahandja Park



CD to be released in December 2013