

Two hearts for children; two heads for education

A supportive and inspiring partnership is making a difference

THEO GARRUN

AMONG the many problems facing under-resourced schools in this country, the inability to deal with unreasonably big pupil numbers is one of the greatest.

Schools are not built to accommodate the numbers enrolled in them and the lack of resources means that there are too few teachers and class sizes are way too big to be manageable.

These are among the main reasons so many of our schools are dysfunctional and why so many school principals have become disillusioned, demotivated and non-functional.

The response, too often, is to complain, demand, then sit back and wait for a solution to be supplied from somewhere else.



WINNING TEAM: Margaret Chauke and Gerhard van Greunen.

The Partners in Education programme, an initiative started by Symphonia – which sees business leaders paired with principals of struggling schools in a co-learning partnership – has as its premise that solutions to these sorts of problems have to come from the school

and the community it is located in. Sediba-sa-Thuta Primary School in Mamelodi has all the problems outlined above.

It is, in fact, two schools in one. Pupils from another area of the township are being temporarily housed there while a school is being built for them.

The upshot is that there are 2 000 pupils in a facility built for less than half of that, with no immediate relief in sight.

Margaret Chauke, the principal, was moved to the school to run it and was battling to keep her head above water and keep her staff motivated, when, as she put it, “the miracle of Partners in Education” came her way.

She met Gerhard van Greunen, a CA who works for the Maravest Group – a private educational organisation – and they have been together for two years now, to the benefit of both of them and the school.

“We immediately got along,” Chauke says. “I think it’s because we share the same values – we both have a strong faith, a passion for

education and a love of children.

“I believe no one is fully developed and you cannot grow on your own, and that’s why Gerhard has made such a valuable contribution to my growth over the past two years.”

Van Greunen says his perceptions of what goes on in townships, and the state of education in the country, have been turned on their head.

“I have come across wonderful people, and a community that can make a huge contribution to the development of our school. That is what the partnership between Margaret and myself has been trying to tap into.

“The solutions to our problems lie in the community and ourselves; that is where we need to look for them.”

When the partnership began, they drew up a list of priorities for the school. Apart from the physical aspects like facilities, security and a vegetable garden, they realised human development was going to be the most important.

“Since then, we have held bos-

beraads to improve teacher morale, we have had training for the school governing body and for the management team and it is all beginning to pay dividends,” Chauke says.

The partnership has been a leadership journey for Van Greunen too.

“We, as business leaders, all seek significance in what we do; we want to belong and to feel empowered. My partnership with Margaret has brought all of that, and we are uplifting this community in the process, using the school as a catalyst. It’s a practical business education that you don’t get at business schools,” he says.

Chauke is in the process of completing a PhD degree and is clearly destined for a higher role in education and, Van Greunen says, he wants to be next to her when that happens.

She, in the meantime, does not entertain the idea of the partnership ever ending.

“I need to talk to Gerhard every day, even if it’s just to have him ask me how the day is going,” she says.