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It is always the minorities that hold the key to progress; It is always through those that are unafraid to be different that advance comes to human society.

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Raymond B. Fosdick

Gerard Mohamed

Partner to Gary Faulman

The opportunity to part-take in the **Partners for Possibility (PFP)** programme was indeed a life changing experience for me. I was in partnership with Gary Faulman who is the principal at Holy Trinity Primary School, which is in Elsies River, Cape Town. One of the most challenging aspects of our partnership was to a huge extent linked to the fact that our school is situated right in the heartland of abject poverty, characterised by teenage pregnancies, gangsterism, drug abuse, unemployment and child molestation.

Despite the fact that I spent most of my childhood years in another township on the Cape Flats, the extent towards which the dire socio-economic environment impacted on the daily running of our school was palpable. By example, a grade 5 learner challenged one of the teachers that reprimanded him for being disruptive in class, by insulting her with swear words that are too ghastly to even mention. Another indicator was the fact that the youngest parent with a child in grade R at our school was only 19 years old, so she obviously gave birth in her early teens.

The above background inspired me to bring about a few initiatives at our school to inspire an already dedicated principal and teacher complement. The aim was for them to look beyond the unseemingly endless challenges and truly work towards making the school a centre of excellence. In this respect, I facilitated a workshop with the teacher body where they were introduced to a thorough SWOT analysis. One of the immediate outcomes were various consensus ideas on fund raising, parental involvement and community participation. Our 2013 fund raising campaign was successfully implemented which resulted in additional finances for the school feeding scheme.

This financing initiative must be seen in the context of the daily school meal, being the main, and sometimes the only meal for many of the learners, especially where both parents in the household are unemployed.

As a senior manager in a multi-national organization, neither my high level professional exposure, or post-graduate qualifications, adequately prepared me for experience on the **PFP** programme. Complexity theories as learnt on my MBA course, pales in significance to the realities of dealing with a school where a grade 1 learner got shot, on the first day of school in January 2014, due to being innocently caught up in the cross-fire between rival gangs in the area.

One of my greatest personal learning area was about everyone having a role to play in making South Africa a better place. We all have a degree of expertise that we can use to contribute towards a needy cause especially within our disadvantaged communities. I have also learnt to listen more attentively when people speak and to leave my personal prejudices one side by focusing on the issue at hand. Often we hear people speak, but we miss the message because we are not actively listening or too busy formulating an answer to show others how clever we are.

I frequently talk about our school in my professional and social circles and there is even a strong possibility that a foreign based sponsor will come onboard in the not too distant future, which will result in additional funding on a consistent basis. This is ultimately another personal learning from the **PFP** i.e. if you have a good idea of what needs to be done and do not have all the resources, then beg, borrow or positively influence members in your network to provide the necessary assistance. My journey and partnership with Holy Trinity is an on-going one, as I am committed towards being an agent of change.



Gary Faulman

Matros Holy Trinity Primary



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