

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

– *Birchwood's helping hand to the community*

Five years ago, Maurice Strijp, Operations Director at Birchwood, started providing food to a crèche and supporting an under 12 soccer team, in a nearby informal settlement. Today the project has grown to include ten crèches, feeding five hundred children between the ages of two and six a day. This has now been adopted by Birchwood as their social corporate investment project.

“It began one day when I was sitting with colleagues. We were talking about how money handed to charities are often misused and frequently does not reach the people it was intended for, the excuse we use not to get involved. So we decided to just start something ourselves,” says Strijp.

Strijp's idea was to feed hungry people so the chef at Birchwood directed him to Angelo, a nearby township, where they discovered the informal crèche.

According to Strijp, the crèche was “absolutely horrific” with 19 children stuck into a tiny cardboard shack with no windows or toilets. Strijp decided to direct his efforts to improving the children's lives, with the help of donations gathered by family members overseas. At the same time, he adopted a local soccer team, supplying them with transport, training and kit.

**THE PROJECT SUPPORTS TEN
CRÈCHES AND BIRCHWOOD
GIVES DAILY FOOD AND
SUPPLIES EACH CRÈCHE
WITH R10 000 A MONTH FOR
MAINTENANCE**

Strijp soon realised the size and potential of the project and got Birchwood on board to help him finance and run it. “In the beginning I would go personally to all the soccer games every Sunday and run it all myself. That soon got a bit much so now we have a committee of



Maurice Strijp

people from the hotel that do everything and we've made it a Birchwood project."

“CHILDREN NEED TO BE STIMULATED AND PROPERLY FED TO ENABLE THEM TO SUCCEED”

The project now supports 10 crèches in the area, which Birchwood has either renovated or built from scratch, to ensure the children have sturdy, concrete, well-ventilated classrooms with on-site toilets and a kitchen. Birchwood gives daily food and supplies each crèche with R10 000 a month

for maintenance. Teachers are given small salaries and training. Birchwood also facilitates outings, parties and projects for the children.

“Before, only the children of parents that could afford it attended the crèches. By supplying food and assistance, the money made can be spent on other things, and more of those whose parents can not afford it are able to attend.”

The Department of Education is impressed with the project, recognising the importance of establishing a culture of education from a young age. “Some of our crèches have been approved by the department, affording the teachers small salaries from the government. But it is ironic because if there aren't toilets or electricity, the government can't approve them and then, because there is no income, the institutions can't be formalised or improved.”

“Supporting the most vulnerable members of society was the most obvious thing to do. Children need our help the most. They need to be stimulated and properly fed to enable them to succeed later on in life and they need to be safe while their parents go out to work during the day.” S

