

July 2008 Newsletter

Good news! We passed the winter solstice here in Cape Town and from now on the days are getting a little bit longer as we are slowly heading towards summer. Many of us seem to be surprised to find ourselves in the second half of the year; it is as if our planning is one step behind the daily demands made on us.

After leaving full time employment at the end of last year, I spent the first few months of 2008 in setting up an office at home, with lots of natural light and views of the garden. TOPS was registered as a cc and we designed letterheads and logos and a website with the help of **Shaune Rogatschnig**, who has always impressed me with her calm and smiling efficiency and resourcefulness. You can visit us at www.tops.org.za.

TOPS managed to get a great variety of assignments in the first half of the year, which has been really stimulating. We translated the English **SKEEP** handbook into Afrikaans and prepared both versions for printing. These manuals contain wonderfully creative lesson plans and are used by primary school teachers as part of the Succulent Karoo Environmental Education Project. This forms part of the much larger **SKEP** 20-year programme – the Succulent Karoo Ecosystems Programme.

The **Salesian Youth Capacity Building Programme**, which is part sponsored by an EU grant, needed TOPS to evaluate it. Here I joined forces with Estelle Geldenhuys, who had formed her own business called **Write Hand** last year and has lots of experience in dealing with NGO donors. [Thorough planning and regular evaluations are highly valued by donors, but there is often tension between donors and recipients because they focus on different aspects of development - the NGOs are acutely aware of the great need for help and support among the poor and those not empowered yet, whereas the donor organisations focus on accountability. Ideally one reaches and maintains a balance between these two aspects.]

This was an extensive evaluation, involving individual interviews and focus group discussions with the training and administrative staff as well as the students, leading to a one-day joint session. We also developed the annual report for the EU grant. The project is very rewarding and involves the skills training and capacity building of street youth as well as young unemployed women. The Salesians' YES project had done excellent work and trained 233 young men and women in 2007. Their statistics show a high percentage of trainees finding employment, which means that they become economically empowered, with all the ripple effects that that has in society.

Two small businesses training people in speaking African languages also approached TOPS to help get them SETA accredited as training service providers. **African Voices** and **Xhosa Fundis** are dynamic organisations and have developed humorous and lively training programmes to help people learn conversational Xhosa. It is a minefield of red tape and SETA employees do not have a good reputation for being logical and/or

communicative, but we remain optimistic that all will be in order by the end of the year. The ETDP has three phases and is generally quite well organised. Tessa Dowling and Kyle Hudson are both very ambitious and conscientious, so we have a winning combination!

The **WESSA AGM** in June provided a fun opportunity for us to do catering – wholesome home cooked food that made a welcome change from the usual platters of finger foods, especially on a cold winter's night after work. WESSA is one of the oldest and biggest NGOs in South Africa, with branches in several regions. The Western Cape region's AGM was well attended and had a surprisingly vibrant feel to it, on which they are to be congratulated. So many organisations allow AGMs to be reduced to dry events which are held only because their constitutions stipulate that they had to. Well done also to Roshan, Wendy, Maureen, Sharon and Patrick for their amazing competence and calm while preparing for the big event.

We have just helped the Catholic **Justice and Peace Commission** to develop a booklet for domestic workers and gardeners in order to explain their rights in accessible terms. These will be published in English, Afrikaans and Xhosa and should be of great practical benefit to the domestic employees as well as employers of domestic workers, who often seem to be unaware of their obligations in terms of Sectoral Determination Seven of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Anthea Nefdt and her colleagues are doing lots of things to work for justice so that there can be peace, for example raising public awareness of issues through discussion fora and submitting documents to Parliament, commenting on draft legislation.

We have formed good partnerships and made lots of friends this year. We are really enthusiastic about Estelle's idea that we advertise our services together. So you will see on our website that we provide an opportunity for associates to advertise. You provide the text and we will be happy to host you. When an organisation is featured on our website it means that we have worked with them and found them to be reliable and creative partners. But we don't guarantee this so kindly don't sue us if anything goes wrong!

We hope that you are finding a cosy spot to spend the rest of winter, have good food, loyal friends and rewarding jobs! Thank you for taking a few minutes to read this newsletter and please pass it on to others who might be interested in our activities.

Warm regards

Sandy Dowling



Sandy Dowling
BA Ed Hons (African Studies)

021 783 2509 084 896 7182 sandy@tops.org.za
"Karoo" 6 Weavers End, Kommetjie 7975