

ONE BIKE, ONE LIFE

Towards Transformation

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Fixing the Future

May 5, 2009 by [markinthedesert](#)



Moreen, one of 6 mechanics at King's Daughters Bicycle Empowerment Centre

Women in blue overalls and grease-stained hands smile widely as they greet a customer carrying a broken bicycle.

This is precisely why they came to work this morning: to assist customers in need of bicycle repairs and to sell quality, second-hand bicycles at affordable prices.

Quickly noticing a loose pedal, Moreen Gaweses – a mother of two, grabs a wrench and begins to tighten.

"Time by time fixing bikes gets easier," she says. "At first I didn't know how to service bicycles. But after the training, I learnt. And as we've opened, I've learnt more."

Located at CCN in Katutura, the King's Daughters Bicycle Empowerment Centre

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Churches in Namibia (CCN). Sick of her life on the streets, she and five other sex workers, sought help to get out of Namibia's sex trade.

At the same time, Esme Kisting was also searching for recovery. A mother of two, Esme had recently lost her husband who was killed in a car crash. Unable to cope with the pressure from work, Esme quit her job in mid-level management at a bank. She too turned to the church to strengthen her faith.

In the mysterious ways of the universe, the group of six women and Esme would become linked.

"It was God's hand in action. He has a bigger plan for your life, one you can't imagine," Esme says.

Offering spiritual guidance, CCN asked the Pentecostal Protestant Church to lead the group. The Pentecostal Protestant Church happened to be Esme's church and after she completed a counseling training course, her pastor asked her to offer support and lead a Bible study for the small group of women.

While spiritual guidance and Bible study was initially offered, it was quickly realized that women needed more help to get off the streets and stay off them.

HOPE

While there is little doubt that the women of King's Daughters have suffered in the past, new opportunities have presented themselves. Along with spiritual guidance and Bible study, counseling was provided. And through partnerships with other NGOs and support from the church, some basic needs were provided for the women, along with training in needlework, computer literacy and cooking and baking.

"The goal is to empower them through skills training, to help them gain employment to earn a decent income and to better their lives and the lives of their children," Esme says. "It's effective. Some of the women who came to King's Daughters are now employed as secretaries, cashiers, cleaners, working at lodges and one is even a kindergarten teacher."

In total, at the end of 2008, 65 women were taking part in King's Daughters activities.

Most of them call Esme 'Mama'. She has become a one-woman organisation who does just about everything: counsellor, spiritual leader, media relations, life-skills leader, clothing distributor, etc. etc. etc.

THE WORLD OF BIKES

Most recently, King's Daughters became involved in the world of bicycles.

Early in 2009, an agreement between the King's Daughters and the Bicycling Empowerment Network Namibia (BEN Namibia) was signed to set up a bicycle workshop at CCN in Katutura. In February, a container of donated second-hand bicycles arrived from Ottawa, Canada. In the same month, six women underwent six weeks of skills training in bicycle mechanics and small business management. In March, the King's Daughter Bicycle Empowerment Centre was officially opened by the Deputy Prime Minister Libertina Amathila and Quentin Bryce, the Governor-General of Australia.

"The bike workshop really gave the six women a sense of worth. It really gave them a better view of themselves that they could now earn their own income," Esme says.

INCORPORATED

On March 13, King's Daughters became a registered Section 21 organisation. The goal, Esme says, is to offer more assistance to the women and to build a centre that provides more support for commercial sex workers who want to get

themselves and their children. King's Daughters needs more funding, more staff, more resources to effectively run its projects and get more women off the streets.

Currently, the organisation receives no donor funding (aside from what's provided by CCN). Volunteers, Esme says, would be greatly appreciated.

"We still have a long way to go, we pray for help," Esme says.

TODAY

As the group of bicycle mechanics take a break from fixing bicycles, they talk about the importance of transportation for women. Bicycles, they say, offer freedom at a lower price than taking a taxi. Plus, they're a lot faster than walking.

Speaking about gender-stereotypes, the women of the King's Daughters Bicycle Empowerment Centre offer encouragement to other women. The bicycle mechanics of King's Daughter are among a handful of female bike mechanics across Namibia.

"We have to do things on our own," says Moreen. "Learning a new thing is better in life."

Back at work, the customer with the broken bicycle watches as the mechanic carefully repairs the pedals. As the women laugh and joke light-heartedly, the bike is quickly repaired after just a few minutes. The customer offers his gratitude, pays a small fee and leaves smiling. Throughout the day, more customers visit. More bicycles are repaired. And interested buyers investigate the bikes for sale.
