

## Pro Bono

Highlights from our Johannesburg office

### OLIEVENHOUTBOSCH DISABILITY CENTRE – A BEACON OF HOPE

"*Bana ke tshegofatso mo matshealong a rona*", meaning "*children are a blessing in our lives*" is the motto by which the Olievenhoutbosch Disability Centre continues on a daily basis. The Centre, set up for both adults and children with disabilities, was founded by Dinah Sekese in May 2006 in a small community called Olievenhoutbosch, situated on the outskirts of Pretoria.

Dinah's story begins in the 1990's when she started working as a domestic worker and nanny to her employer's children. After 15 years of raising a number of children in her care, she left to start her own family. Little did she realize that the birth of her child Kgaladi, would change the course of her life.

Kgaladi was diagnosed with Down's Syndrome. There was very little information and medical support in the township for children with physical and mental disabilities and Dinah struggled to come to terms with her daughter's condition. The life of her little girl was short lived as she passed away seven months later. While the death of her child was devastating, Dinah set out to create awareness in her community on physical and mental disabilities in children.

The establishment of the centre was the culmination of these efforts. Dinah wanted to make a difference within her community so that other parents would not endure the difficulty and suffering she had undergone.

In 2006 the Centre started with 7 children and 10 adults with little or no help from the community or government. There was no infrastructure and Dinah battled to obtain permission from local authorities to be allowed to take occupation of a piece of land. Once temporary permission was granted, Dinah set out to build a makeshift day-care facility for the children and adults. Dinah encountered financial difficulty, lack of staff and lack of support from the community. She nonetheless persevered and has now built a haven for disabled children who need love, care and support.

The Centre has been running for more than 7 years and presently provides care to 25 children and 10 adults, all with disabilities. The aim of the centre is to support children with disabilities in Olievenhoutbosch and to provide day-care facilities for children with physical and mental disabilities. The Centre also provides residences for adults with physical and mental disabilities. This is currently the only Centre of its kind in the area and provides care to the disabled, support and education for the adults as well as the parents and family of the children and residents. The Centre provides skills development for the adults who produce arts and crafts which are sold to generate income.

A graduation ceremony was also sponsored at the end of the year for the children who received certificates, gifts and goodie bags.

"We are forever grateful to Hogan Lovells South Africa for the support they have given us over the years, both financially and emotionally", says a tearful Dinah. "The Centre is more than just a day care, we would not be able to uplift the community and would not be able to provide the health and learning programmes for the children without this monthly assistance"

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The vegetable garden at the Olievenhoutbosch Disability Centre

### Key Contacts



#### Candice Pillay

Partner, Johannesburg

[candice.pillay@hoganlovells.com](mailto:candice.pillay@hoganlovells.com)

T +27 11 523 6044



Children playing at the Olievenhoutbosch Disability Centre