

METALLOYS CONVERTS DISUSED EMPLOYEE HOSTEL TO A CENTRE OFFERING CARE TO AN HIV/AIDS AFFECTED COMMUNITY

Samancor Manganese's Metalloys plant is located at Meyerton in the Gauteng Province of South Africa, a region where the HIV/AIDS infection rate in the community is as high as 30 per cent. When the plant's accommodation hostel was vacated in 2000, an opportunity arose to transform the complex into a facility to serve the community, particularly those who are infected and affected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Following extensive consultation and planning with a broad cross-section of the community, the Kotulong Community Centre was developed and opened in January 2004.

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of the world that is most affected by HIV/AIDS. The human toll and suffering due to the disease is enormous. It is now by far the leading cause of death in the region, claiming over 2.4 million lives in 2002 alone. According to World Health Organisation and UNAIDS figures, approximately 3.5 million new infections occurred in the region in 2002, bringing to 29.4 million the number of people presently living with HIV/AIDS. Ten million young people aged 15 to 24 and 2.8 million children under 15 are infected. An estimated 7 million children have been orphaned by the disease in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Background to the concept

Over the last decade, the practice of recruiting migrant labourers and housing them in single-sex, mine-style hostel accommodation became increasingly unacceptable. At the peak of this practice, Metalloys housed more than 600 employees in its hostel facility. Metalloys also moved away from this concept, with the result that the hostel became vacant.

An idea grew within Metalloys management that the hostel facility could be converted to a centre that served the community. To discuss the concept and determine the best use for the complex, a community meeting was held in March 2001. It was attended by community leaders and representatives from community-based organisations, non-profit organisations, service clubs, government departments, trade unions and religious organisations.



► Kotulong Community Centre

The meeting wholeheartedly endorsed a proposal that a family care centre be created to help relieve the health, social and economic impact of HIV/AIDS on the local Sedibeng District, home to approximately 850 000 people. The facility would operate as a non-profit organisation, caring for sick and terminally ill community members as well as orphaned children. It was also determined that the centre should be environmentally sound, socially just and economically viable.

Realising the vision

After numerous planning meetings, in August 2001 a board of directors, comprising community members and Metalloys representatives, was appointed to manage the centre. Kotulong, meaning 'place of harvest', was chosen as a name for the centre, with the vision of it being a place of 'harvest' that brings help to the people of Sedibeng whose lives have been affected by HIV/AIDS.

To ensure that the centre would meet the needs of the community, 40 volunteers were trained to visit 1500 homes in the region and obtain information on which decisions about facilities and services could be based.

In December 2002, the BHP Billiton Development Trust approved funding of US\$600 000 to convert the hostel to a community centre. Architects were selected, with a brief that included a requirement for the conversion to be environmentally responsible, including recycling existing building materials, using local materials and labour and choosing solar energy for heating.

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METALLOYS CONVERTS DISUSED EMPLOYEE HOSTEL continued



► World Aids Day at the centre



► Skills development programs are among the community services provided at Kotulong

Answering the need

The Kotulong Community Centre gradually became a reality and opened in January 2004 with a range of much-needed facilities including:

- a 15-bed hospice unit (that will expand to 18 beds)
- seven foster care units providing accommodation for 42 orphans aged from 1 to 13 years (with potential capacity for 70 children)
- an after-care centre with library and toy centre
- workrooms for sewing, beadwork and seminars
- accommodation for 60 young people for sports and youth training weekends
- administration offices
- a kitchen and community hall
- laundry and storage facilities
- permaculture gardens
- a floodlit soccer field (with an all-purpose sports court to come).

The centre also conducts a program for training designated caregivers to support home-based care initiatives. Additional facilities planned for the future include a paediatric ward, a testing facility and laboratory, and counselling rooms for patients and their families.

In addition to offering this extensive range of facilities and services, the centre provides permanent employment for 60 people and is actively involved in delivering skills development programs.

Overcoming challenges

While the community benefits associated with the centre are widely acknowledged, the process of converting a concept into reality presented many challenges. These included:

- building the trust and involvement of the local community
- securing the support of local and provincial governments
- gaining acceptance from local NGOs
- converting a hostel complex to a functional hospice and community centre
- applying environmentally responsible standards to the construction
- appointing a community-based board of directors to manage the project
- staffing and operating the centre.

The vision and drive of the Metalloys management team, in particular the successive human resources and HSEC managers, contributed to the realisation of the project.

The Kotulong Community Centre has been embraced by the community and operates with the support of local and provincial authorities, local NGOs and UNAIDS. It is seen as an important contributor to the government's Integrated Development Plan for the region and a model for participative involvement of community stakeholders in regional development initiatives.



► Garden project at the centre