



# Ketameko a new start

**R**onald\* and Malcolm\* are arguing about who should help to clean up in the kitchen. It is not much of a heated or serious argument as their bickering is laced with banter and humorous interjections from the rest of the 7 to 12 year old boys around the table. It's a cold Thursday afternoon at the St Petrus Parish in Narraville where a few local women have been running a soup kitchen for more than 13 years.

On this particular Thursday the hall is packed with close to 130 children ranging from 5 to 14 years of age. All of these children have homes, but there won't be a warm meal waiting for them.

"The children's smiles and carefree spirits hide the broken homes and lives they have to face each day. Some of these children have lost a parent or both to AIDS. Many are being raised by their grandmothers who

struggle to make ends meet with their small pensions. Some have parents who are alcoholic or drug addicts, while some of the older children have not seen their parents for months, and have to take care of their younger siblings. For some children this is the only meal of the day," explained Pilar Veiga, a local business woman and volunteer at the soup kitchen.

Veiga became more involved with the soup kitchen when she visited the charity to make a donation. She said that she was shocked and touched by the fact that the women who were running the soup kitchen, themselves did not have the funds to do so, yet they had been feeding destitute children for more than a decade. At the helm of the charity is the Johannes couple who continued the initiative that was started by Cecilia Clark.

According to Laura Johannes the charity has been running under the umbrella of the Roman Catholic AIDS Action. "The church allows us to feed the children here, but we still have to obtain funds and donations to buy the food. We prepare the food at home and have to ride taxis to the church to feed the children. It sounds like a lot of trouble, but who will look after these children if we don't help?"

"I am especially worried about the young girls who are reaching puberty. We have heard of other girls of that age who are being abused at home or who are forced



## More Support



“Children are priceless to all of us. They require our protection. When this crucial safety net becomes weak, often due to abuse, disease, environmental degradation or simply unforeseen circumstances, the wider community must come to the rescue.”

into prostitution to finance the drug or alcohol addictions of their parents. These are terrible things to hear as it is happening right under our noses,” Veiga said.

So far a few companies in Walvis Bay have donated food and items to the soup kitchen.



The First Lady of Namibia, Madam Penehupifo Pohamba made these remarks at an Awareness and Fundraising Function presented by the Walvis Bay Child and Family Centre. She praised the centre for their diligence and commitment to fulfill this role in the face of difficult conditions.

The Walvis Bay Child and Family Centre was established in 1995 as the Sunshine Centre to cater for the needs of the disabled and mentally challenged members of the local community. The centre was later expanded to include rehabilitation therapy for alcohol and drug abuse, life and vocational skills training for the disabled as well as a refuge for the abused and neglected. There are currently 64 children with various degrees of physical and mental handicaps at the centre, ranging from pre-and post-natal head injuries, cerebral palsy and autism.

“We are grateful for these donations. They do go a long way in filling hungry tummies. We are somewhat concerned that with each Thursday’s soup kitchen more children queue up for a meal. We have started registering the children who come to have a meal. We are also conducting follow-ups to find how the children are doing, whether their situations at home have improved or how we can help them or their parents.”

Veiga and Johannes have registered a charity called Ketameko (Oshiwambo for a new start or beginning). “We would like to obtain more funding and donations to continue feeding these children and maybe increasing the number of days. However we would like to give these children a new start. There are children who are very talented and we would like to give them

the opportunity to study by providing bursaries. These children did not have a choice in the homes they were born into and need a new start in life,” Veiga said.

The charity intends securing donor funding from Spain to build and equip a kitchen, as the church facilities only allow for a dining area.

For Ronald and Malcolm this is the afternoon they’ve been looking forward to. A Thursday afternoon they can count on for a warm meal, some fruit juice and a treat. What tomorrow will bring is another matter altogether.

For more information contact Pilar Veiga at 081 248 2799

\* Not their real names.

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