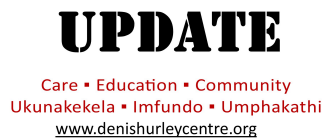


If you cannot see the pictures, use the right-hand mouse click and select 'Download pictures'. If you are still having problems, [email us](#)

You are receiving this information about the Denis Hurley Centre because you have shown an interest in the work done by us or one of our partners. We hope that you will enjoy receiving this monthly update. If you have any comments please [email us](#).

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May 2025

We send blessings to Christians marking the Ascension, Jews celebrating Shavuot and Muslims preparing for Hajj.

The Municipality reacting to the homeless
Churches working together
A homeless German man arrives home
Support from a loyal Dutch partner



**Sorting clothes
for Street Store**



**Homeless man
flies home**



**10 year tribute in
Dutch Town Hall**

'SOMETHING MUST BE DONE'

We often hear this cry when people see the state of Durban's CBD and the rising number of homeless people. Of course, we agree that 'something must be done' – but that does not mean that just doing anything for the sake of looking busy is a good way to respond.

It seems, however, that in recent weeks the approach of eThekwini, the Municipality that includes central Durban, has been to do whatever comes to mind – no matter how destructive, expensive, illegal or ultimately pointless.

Not surprisingly, residents in an area get agitated when there are a lot of homeless people there and so demand 'something must be done'. A recurrent strategy of eThekweni has been to march in and harass people so they move away. But, of course, that does not solve the problem: it just puts it somewhere else.

So when PRASA complained about dozens of homeless people sleeping alongside the train lines, eThekweni stepped in with full force and moved them. Most of these then settled in Albert Park – a broadly invisible problem thus became a very visible one and the residents near Albert Park said 'something must be done'. So, eThekweni intervened again and moved them out of the park – in part to enable a R3.6 million project to create fan parks for one afternoon to screen the football cup final. Many of those same homeless people dispersed to nearby Glenwood and so residents there rightly are now also exclaiming 'something must be done'.

Not only was the problem not solved but actually these costly interventions have just made it worse. Because when the Government steps in, it does so with big boots that destroy people's belongings at the same time. As a result, homeless people lose their ID's so they cannot access the few Government services to which they are entitled; they lose any printed qualifications they have so they cannot apply for jobs; and they lose their medication which not only puts them more at risk from HIV and TB but also increases the danger to others. The personal impact of these interventions was captured in this item that ran on [the main SABC news](#).

The most recent attacks by the Municipality have been vicious. Our clinic team, which has been providing healthcare to homeless people in the Albert Park area for years, was barred by a local councillor from accessing the site. We know for certain of at least six people who have died directly as a result of not being able to obtain life-saving medication.

Now the latest wave of harassment is targeting homeless people who live in the dunes behind the beaches – once again forcing them to move from one place to another, where they will be more visible, more of a nuisance, and more vulnerable to attack.

We do agree that 'something must be done'. But what eThekweni has been doing is clearly no solution. As if things could not get worse, they are now planning to spend tens of millions on a dumping ground for homeless people far from the city which has very little chance of succeeding – as discussed in a [recent news item in The Post](#) by our director.

There are good solutions that have been implemented by Johannesburg, Cape Town and other metropolitans. To be effective, responses require empathy, compassion, thoughtfulness and an approach that sees homeless people not as a problem to be removed but as part of the solution to the problem. We continue to hope that eThekweni will stop reacting and start listening.

Photo: an encampment of homeless people pops up in Glenwood from those who were just moved from Albert Park, prompting justifiable anguish by the Umbilo Business Association.



HOW MUCH MORE CAN BE ACHIEVED WHEN COMMUNITIES ACT TOGETHER

We report situations when people act in ways that lack compassion (often Government officials); so it is good to also report about people who do act with compassion and energy (often local residents, whose taxes fund the Government officials).

As this newsletter goes out, our annual Street Store event is taking place at the DHC in collaboration with Grace Family Church and other partners. The preparation for this does not happen overnight and we want to thank the many people who have donated probably 10,000+ items of clothing to make this event possible.

Many of the donations come from members of Grace. Their four campuses, all north of the Umgeni river, were also drop-off points for others who live in those areas. But this year we expanded the footprint for collecting clothes by adding in six churches in other parts of the city: three Anglican and three Catholic. We want to acknowledge the generosity of the parishes of St Agnes, St Cyprian, St Dominic, St Joseph, St Thomas and our Lady of Lourdes who were willing to collect clothes not only from their parishioners but other local residents.

We asked these churches to focus particularly on the clothes that we need most but get least: thin men's sizes, since most of the people we see at the DHC are men and are thin! To further add to the collection, seven high schools joined in - the clothes that teenage boys use (and quickly discard as they grow bigger) are often exactly the sizes that we need. So let us further acknowledge the good efforts of the boys (and sometimes girls) of Clifton, Crawford La Lucia, Holy Family, Kearsney, St Benedict's, Thomas More and Westville Boys High.

It was very generous of Kearsney to include several boxes of old school uniforms (badges removed) since often they are warm and hard-wearing. This put us in mind of a story of the young Paddy Kearney, when teaching at

the Marist college in Johannesburg, who recalled that old uniforms were “carefully thrown away instead of being given to poor black children in case they ruined the reputation of the school”. He reflected on how that was what the school regarded as the reputational damage! (This and other stories about Paddy can be read in Raymond’s book about him which is back on sale for R320 after the first print run was sold out. [Email if you would like a copy](#)).

The many thousands of clothes collected were then sorted by keen volunteers at Grace Cornubia – discarding what was not useful or clean, making small repairs, and dividing into different types and sizes (*see photo at the top*). So further thanks to the volunteers who tirelessly worked last Saturday to get us ready for today’s Street Store. We will provide a full report on this next month and photos will appear on [our Facebook page](#) as they become available.

Photo: Learners from Westville Boys High School showing that they take seriously their motto “May I not shrink from my purpose” as they sort through clothes they have collected.



SR CATHY’S PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF!

The caseload for a busy social worker like Sr Cathy Murugan and her team is seemingly never ending. And it can throw up some very bizarre stories. There was one this month though which did reach a happy ending.

With his permission, we can share the story of Rolf Schönhöfer, a 69-year-old German man who has been stranded in Durban for the past 18 months (*photo at the top*). Rolf suffers from schizophrenia which has affected his ability to think or behave clearly. He left his home country because, in his mind, he thought the German government was persecuting him for a crime he did not commit. And somehow – he does not know how – he ended up stepping off a plane at King Shaka airport in December 2023.

Without any plan or much money, he was basically homeless on arrival. He stayed 7 days wandering the streets of Durban until someone offered to take him to a ruined house for shelter. Rolf agreed and ended up staying there for this whole time. However, he soon lost his passport, cell phone, and other valuable belongings and so had no idea how to find his way home. Towards the end of 2024, Rolf met someone who told him to come to the DHC for help and there he met Sr Cathy Murugan.

With Cathy's help, Rolf began the journey of getting his papers in order, the first crucial step towards helping him return home to Germany. She was able to get in contact with Rolf's wife but discovered that they were no longer together. But through her, Cathy did manage to get in contact with Rolf's psychologist. He was able to access money from Rolf's social grant so we could buy a plane ticket for Rolf to go back home.

Now that the financial side was in place, it was time to get Rolf's papers in order. Cathy and Rolf were shuffled back and forth between the German Embassy and the SA Department of Home Affairs. But eventually, Cathy received assistance from an official at the Embassy who provided the necessary documents for Home Affairs to approve. After a year and six months of being stranded in South Africa, Rolf boarded a flight home to Nuremberg where he is now safe and reunited with people who know him (and speak his language!).

Rolf's story serves as a reminder of the human spirit's capacity for determination – his own and Sr Cathy's! With the right support, even the most difficult challenges can be overcome. As we reflect on his story, we are reminded of the importance of kindness, compassion, and understanding in making a difference in the lives of others.

It is also interesting to look at how the German government responds to homelessness, a growing problem there in part because of people moving to Germany from the east and ending up on the streets. Whilst no solution is perfect, one aspect that is very noticeable is the commitment to involving homeless people themselves in the process of identifying and implementing solutions (*the photo below shows a process in Cologne*).

We may not have the resources of Germany, but that need not stop South African government officials being willing to listen to homeless people, instead of deciding what they think is best for them and excluding their voices.



How can people with current or former homelessness experience be involved during policy-making processes regarding housing?



MANY THANKS TO A LOYAL PARTNER ACROSS THE YEARS

Fundamentally, the DHC aims to be a Durban solution to Durban problems. There is, after all, more than enough money in Durban to fund several DHC's – our job is to help the money flow from the parts of our city where there is a lot, to the part where we are where there is not enough!

At the same time, we are privileged to have overseas supporters – we have some key donors around the world and also the very committed Denis Hurley Association in the UK who make it easy for British supporters to donate to us and also gain an extra top-up from His Majesty's tax collectors!

We have been honoured that since 2018 we have also been supported by a small but keen Dutch NGO called the Izingane Happy Foundation. They, like us, recently celebrated their 10th anniversary and the photo at the top shows some of their Trustees at a Mayor's reception that was held for them in the town of Naarden-Vesting.

Our main contact has been Lonie Vles-Rosenmöller who travels to South Africa at least once a year to visit us and the various other projects Izingane support around the country. This enables them not only to follow up on how their funds have been used but also to provide advice and connections between NGOs engaged in similar activities. Their main focus as an organisation is on children (which is what the Zulu word 'izingane' means). So, in our case, they have been supporting the small but invaluable creche that we run. Lonie was here recently for a visit and she met Nombulelo Bambayi, the wonderful teacher who is on loan to us thanks to the generosity of the International Montessori Association.

She saw how the 16 children are thriving under Nombulelo's care. But she also saw how much worse the situation is at Dalton. The Municipality has repeatedly failed to address the build up of sewage; they have also still refused to connect the sinks and toilets in our converted containers to the mains water supply so we have to spend money each month on a portable toilet. At least we are now capturing rain water – though a recent bullet hole

in the jojo tank was a reminder of what a tough area this is for the children who live there.

The Dutch visit this year was further enhanced by the arrival of the MS Artania in Durban's fancy new Mandela ship terminal. On board was Lieveke Andriessen-De Rond, who as a volunteer does the back-office work for Izingane. She was travelling with her family and friends because her son, Ramon, was one of the entertainment crew on the ship. Accompanied by three of his fellow performers, they came off the cruise ship and gave our Dalton children a memorable morning of song and dance. One of the dancers has 1.2 million followers on her tik-tok account (!) and she posted [this lovely video](#).

In small ways and in big ones, people can be so generous with their time, their talents and their treasure to reach out to people they have never met and link hands across the seas!



Director: Raymond Perrier (raymond@denishurleycentre.org)

Bookings: Leanne Banks (leanne@denishurleycentre.org)

If you wish to support our work, you can donate by EFT:

First National Bank Durban Main branch 221426

Account: Denis Hurley Centre Trust A/C No. 622 0426 1002

For more information, and to donate from outside South Africa, see:

www.denishurleycentre.org

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