A Christmas party to remember

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The Doornkop Needy Children's Centre (DNCC) was started in August 2002 by Sipho Moumakwe who was inspired by South African President Thabo Mbeki's 2002 State of the Nation address where he urged South Africans to 'vuk'uzenzele', to 'arise and act'. He encouraged a group of mothers from Snake Park to volunteer their time to assist in setting up a crèche for children of impoverished families.

In May last year, Steuart Pennington CEO of South Africa - The Good News joined senior executives of First National Bank (FNB) on the Vuka programme, an initiative that has taken 14,000 FNB employees into the townships of South Africa to foster understanding of township life. Doornkop formed part of the tour. Steuart was so moved by the crèche, the commitment of the staff and the vibrancy of the children, that he decided to 'adopt' the crèche and to assist it in whatever way he could. He roped in the support of DigiPos Systems, Feedback, Fruit & Veg City, Cotlands, WesBank and Rotary for training, expertise and food donations and committed the support of South Africa - The Good News.

Last Friday, we hosted a Christmas party in Soweto for 100 kids from DNCC. It was humbling and joyous and beautiful and sad.

The kids from the DNCC are truely amazing. Their unconfined friendliness and confidence is remarkable in an age where kids seem to be so jaded and cynical. Their humility and purity of spirit touched and inspired us. They danced and sung and performed for us with shame-free abandon. They came forward to play and hold hands without reservation. They patiently waited in line – despite the advent of a highveld thunderstorm - as we braaied boerie rolls and humbly clapped in appreciation when it was finally their turn to receive their food and drink. The smallest went first and the elder kids stood back. There was no pushing, no shoving and no fighting. It was beautiful.

When Father Christmas aka Steuart handed out the stationery packs, the clothes, the sweets and toys, the kids again formed a patient line. They received their gifts with joy and the largest smiles. And after, when the DNCC staff asked the children to return their presents so that they could be packed into a box, they did so without complaint. I have never seen children so freely and willingly ‘give’ their recently-acquired gifts back – no tantrums, no tears!

But the joy we experienced in the company of these kids was also tempered with some sadness. Many of the kids seemed to have the glazed look of neglect in their eyes, while some had eyes that danced with the limitless potential of youth. They come from poor backgrounds and may never be afforded the opportunities to realise their potential and the thought of seeing the hope in their eyes snuffed out by the harsh realities of life was heartbreaking. I'm sure however that the indomitable spirit that so many of these kids seemed to radiate will pull them through. Sometimes one can feel so hopeless… and yet, so hopeful.

Although it may seem clichéd, the day was a reminder that Christmas is indeed the season of giving. As we traipse around the malls, burning holes into our credit cards in the build up to Christmas and Hannukah, it took a day spent with the children of Soweto to remind us what the festive season is truly all about.

By Ian Macdonald

A big thank you to the companies and individuals who made the Christmas party possible:
Brett Griffiths at BIC for the stationery
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Clover for the cooldrinks
DigiPos for the toys
Rod Cusens for the braai meat
And donations by the staff of South Africa – The Good News and TerraNova

The DNCC is our CSR project. Please visit www.dncc.co.za if you want to know more or if you want to get

involved. And if you are inspired, please pass the website address onto a friend.