



Rob Smetherham  
**BEREAVEMENT SERVICE**  
for children

2008

New Beginnings

**ANNUAL REPORT**



# chairperson's report

## it was good ...

2008 has been another year in which RobS has again provided a service to children and families in communities. RobS has brought hope and healing into situations where there was anger and sadness and where there was no future to look forward to. Through **P**artnership with community and with organizations, the goals of RobS have been achieved.

The children of today are the generation of tomorrow and what they **L**earn and what communities **L**earn through the interaction with RobS will equip them for the future. The children **L**earn that they are valued and with this confidence they are able to move forward in their lives.

Passion and commitment within the organization means that the team is always **L**earning to be innovative and progressive in their thinking and planning so that the impact of the work in the communities will always be of maximum benefit.

What a year of **A**chievement and once again thanks go to each and every member of the staff for their amazing dedication and commitment to their work. RobS is clearly an organization that cares and with the highly skilled and trained team delivers all and more!

The **Y**ear has been remarkable. We thank all our partners, donors and interested supporters without whom the organization would not have been able to perform. We give God all the praise and glory for his abundant and great provision and we look forward to yet another year of bringing hope and healing to communities as we **P**artner, **L**earn, **A**chieve and move through the new **Y**ear.

**Helen Smetherham**





# ceo's report

## i was born free . . .

*"I was not born with a hunger to be free. I was born free. Free in every way that I could know. Free to run in the fields near my mothers hut, free to swim in the clear stream that ran through my village, free to roast mielies under the stars.....It was only when I learnt that my boyhood freedom was an illusion that I began to hunger for it!"*  
Nelson Mandela (*Long walk to Freedom*)

I came across this quote in a book written by Anna Trapido entitled 'Hunger for freedom: The story of food in the Life of Nelson Mandela', it is a story of key events in his life as told through their accom-panying meals. The synopsis states that this 'innovative approach to history shows that a great man's life can be measured out in mouthfuls both bitter and sweet. ....Tales told in sandwiches, sugar and samoosas, speak elegantly of intellectual awakening, emotional longings and always the struggle for racial equality'. I was struck by the power of the simple act of sharing a meal together and how much of our lives and stories, "high or low", take meaning in shared moments.

Play is another such activity for connection. It is a universally common human need and experience that helps us build bridges particularly with children in times when it feels as if hope is lost. We share with you in this report our simple tales of Hopscotch; "shumpu" ball kicking game; "Ingqathu" skipping; 'Who's afraid of the Lion'... as we allow play to help children and families make sense of their losses and strengthen each other through enabling togetherness.

We began the year with the addition of 5 brand new team members, and tackled the task of building and training the new

team. The year is a testament to the development of an effective team and our joint achievements. The women who are part of this team are remarkably skilled, talented, committed and professional people. Each brings very diverse views and strengths to bear on agreed values and intentions for the work, motivated by personal faith as expressed and lived out in service.

Our tales are told in the making of a team quilt; shaping our values in clay; drawing rivers of learning. We crafted a team picture, wrote a team story 'Mthokozisi', and danced the archetypes. We made dolls with gogos; we made noise with children and wept through many a book of loss. We wrote a children's book about child bereavement; developed 2 new programs; improved and strengthened people, practice and programs.

While challenges and pressures remain present, it has been a pleasure to lead this team and work together in what has been a year of outstanding achievements, a deep level of learning, reflection and professional quality of work. For me personally this has been the most exciting and rewarding year of my NGO career so far.

It is with deep gratitude that I extend my thanks to each member of the RobS team, each donor and all our supporters. Your support helps us bring a little more freedom to play and connect with children and their families. Thanks be to God in and through whom we have life, breath and everything else,

Humbly yours  
**Rachel**







Back: Pinky, Mary-Anne, Sarah, Nobuhle, Nontobeko, Ngobile, Rachel  
Front: Nomvula, Robyn, Faith, Angela (Maya Faye) Mary





their staff. This was tested out by Angela Hough in the course of the year with a number of Directors from organisations that we partner and there was clear agreement that this would be of great assistance to them in the future. We were also very excited about running Train-the-Trainer (a) in Foundation Play Skills with 5 organisations (**Kenosis, Ethembeni, St Mary's, Sinosizo and Save the Children UK**) where 17 people left equipped with skills and resources to setup and train 12 people each to run a play process with individual children.

We greatly enjoyed and benefited from our partnership with **Footsteps**, a local organisational development organisation funded by Rockefeller Brothers Foundation to support our organisations development and growth. A number of workshops on "organisational learning", quarterly reflections and strategic work was facilitated by their very skilled team that has made us stronger and richer in our understanding of ourselves and what we bring to our partnerships.

Eleven Australian doll makers from **Uthando Dolls**, a psychiatrist and a film-maker spent 3 weeks with us in October. This partnership that brings dolls into our project for the children that we work with in groups, as well as teaches doll-making alongside a psychosocial support process to strengthen caregivers. Just recently,

Dr Julie Stone wrote to RobS reflecting on her experience of partnering with us.

"Working in partnership with RobS has given the Australian-based **Uthando Project** an invaluable opportunity to strengthen their vision, sense of value and contribution. As Uthando's Director and infant, child and family psychiatrist, I am inspired by the way that RobS team has distilled all the knowledge and theory about children's developmental needs to their essence, and by the clarity and integrity with which they share their complex understanding with others. RobS work has an elegant simplicity and their understanding is a rare and precious gift which is so willingly shared with others.

The purity of RobS intention and the passion of the teams' commitment continue to inspire Uthando's work. RobS day to day work midst the suffering and need of courageous yet over-burdened families and communities, keeps all involved with **Uthando** connected to our responsibilities as members of the human family. RobS work and hand of friendship and partnership they extend to us, enables us to keep our eyes open and not to turn away from the reality of the hardships, but, to make a small contribution towards alleviating suffering and to, hopefully, enrich the future possibilities for our world's children".  
Dr Julie Stone (Director of Uthando Project Inc)

Other organisational partners worked during 2008 are **MIET Africa, Noah, Matthew 25, Umvoti Aids Centre, LETCEE, School Trade, Tabitha Ministries, Cerebral Palsy Association, Hope Trust, Gift of the Givers, Lilly of the Valley, Zehlele Project, Clowns without Borders and Olive Leaf Foundation.**





the continued communication of care; and most significantly trusting the child or the care giver or the CBO that they know best what they need and support them in finding their own solutions. This process helps open possibilities for things to change in amazing ways.

**Layer 5: Structure & support, around implementation** We have strengthened our skills transfer model and approach this year. We have focused more on what is left behind in the hands of the trainee/ partner organisation at the end of the process. Our explicit model includes invitation and choice; good contracting; learning in training and using the skills independently; reflection, evaluation and feedback. These are as important as the training, as is debriefing and support for adults working with children.

**Layer 6: Independent Learning** *The learning process is not complete until you can make it your own.* We know how to support bereaved children and families, and our goal is to take what we know and share it in a way that it becomes the property of others.

**'What can everyone do?'** Our intention is to show that it is the 'being' with the child, the interaction, the listening and exchange that is most important not the resources. We teach puppet making with socks, scraps, leaves and sticks. We focus on resources that most people can access in their homes and around them. We have learnt to focus on 'can

do', what is possible, what can be strengthened, what is there. This strength based, solution focused approach is not new but it is fundamental. The play technique is the vehicle through which you open the connection the healing is about you being with the child, trusting them, trusting their power and insight into their own needs and journey.

**'Its not about what I do it's about what I help you to do for yourself'**

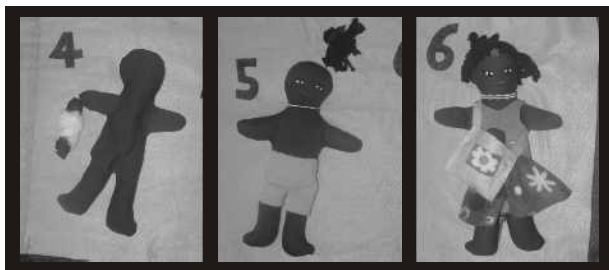
What are those we train able to do without us? The principle is equally as relevant to training as it is to work with a child or a family. The child is the one who has to cope on a daily basis therefore the focus of work must be on what the child can do and what the child needs.

**'If you can't do it, you can't teach it'**

We have learnt that there is a big difference between the conceptual knowledge of how things should work and the more chaotic reality of supporting bereaved children through psycho-social support. Actually making the process work in practice feels very different to how it looks on paper in the training manual. We have found that using direct work to inform training provides an excellent combination and brings a depth, realism, credibility and effectiveness to scale-up work through others.

Sound PSS starts with you, how you live, how you manage and care for your team, how you set boundaries. Setting realistic boundaries we have found

facilitates change as it helps us focus on what we can do and even if it is a small start, the small things count and create the possibility of change!





sufficient skills, understanding and mastery for participants to take and use what we give them; 3) indicates that the measures put in place in negotiating with partners at management level is working as our goal to increase the implementation by partners has shown effects; and, 4) that the training and programs serve those who use them to better support children.

### **Effective Mentoring towards independence**

The following are the achievements by community members in year 2 of our process:

- **Nkabini** 38 Community members trained; 16 (42%) active in 2007; 9 (56%) still active in 2008. Total number of children supported independently by community members = **175**
- **Khokwane** 36 Community members trained; 28 (77%) active in 2007; 6 (21%) still active at the end of 2008. Total number of children supported independently by community members = **315**
- In communities in year 2 while the

percentage of those trained continuing work with children drops, the average number of children reached per person is much higher than any of our other stats. A staggering 13.5 children reached per person mentored in year 2 of community work.

What is important to note is that this is purely community driven response, we provide skills training and play materials and support food for groups. Community members are not paid and work according to their own motivation and availability. When compared to stats in say starting a business, 80% of businesses will fail in the first year, and of those that survive less than 20% will get to the end of year 2. Our stats over the years have shown much greater return than that.

### **Effective Child Participation:**

RobS invited the children that we had worked with to evaluate their experience of participating in groups and tell us what they valued, what they had learnt, what had helped them and what they thought we should add to what we do to help children that we would work with in the future. A final event was attended by children and AB's and a fun filled day was enjoyed by all.

### **Our first External Evaluation:**

At the end of 2008 on RobS request, Patricia Flederman facilitated an evaluation as an opportunity to reflect and learn, to look at our own processes, what we are doing, how we have changed and what we can do better. This process was deeply affirming and added to our learning for the year. (document available on request)

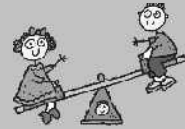


8  
play



# Year at a Glance

## CHILDREN'S GROUPS



## FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS



## TRAINING



## FEEDBACK



### JANUARY

- Welcome new team: Angela, Mary and Pinky
- Induction of new staff and values workshop
- Visit from Stephen Lewis



### APRIL

- Team Workshop (reflection on team roles)
- Lulu leaves us and Nomvula is appointed
- FPS training cont in comm.



### FEBRUARY

- Entry into Kwamafunze Awareness
- Arrival of Nontobeko (New community facilitator)
- Faith returns from Maternity leave
- Sign MOU with TCF



### MAY

- Staff Story Telling Workshop
- Foot Steps Workshop of organisational learning



### MARCH

- Entry into Copesville
- Mass Awareness
- FPS training in community



### JUNE

- KNH visit
- Childhope visit
- Thembeke resigns and leaves
- Sarah Tupper arrives
- Nigeria and Zambia



### JULY

- Mary and Pinky enter comm.
- Children Groups Family Support (test out revised programme)
- Staff Reflection: Quilt and reflection on learning
- Staff Awards
- Write wellness policy
- Nobuhle arrives: Comm. manager



### AUGUST

- AIDS conference in Mexico
- Strategic Work: Organisational Partners Unit and Community Unit
- Marketing Strategy Design
- Organisational Partner Research begins "most significant change"



### SEPTEMBER

- Staff Training with Amanda Gifford
- Staff given a long weekend to rest



### OCTOBER

- 3 weeks Uthando Dolls
- Gcina Mhlope Story Telling workshop
- Project Njabulo (8 schools)
- TTT (a) with 5 partners
- UNICEF presentation



### NOVEMBER

- KNH visit: Christmas radio campaign for Germany
- Footsteps: organisational learning
- Child participation process and event
- External Evaluation x 2
- 3 Trainings
- Ang has baby (Maya Faye)



### DECEMBER

- SLF: PSS learning process in Malawi
- Design bereavement book with Sally
- Staff Xmas Party
- Close 12/12 for leave



CHILDREN'S GROUPS - 1st QUARTER

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS - 1st QUARTER

CHILDREN'S GROUPS - 2nd QUARTER

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS - 2nd QUARTER

CHILDREN'S GROUPS - 3rd QUARTER

FAMILY SUPPORT GROUPS - 2nd QUARTER

CHILDREN'S GROUPS - 3rd QUARTER



# our plans for 2009 . . .

RobS enters the New Year with a clear vision and plans for the steps ahead. Because our very way of “being” means that we will do a lot of learning through the year ahead, things will adapt and change along the way but the steps that we take will enable us to:

## **Increase reach through our 4 emerging strategies**

- Work in communities direct work and training community members in direct work; training and joint in practice training and support over 2 years;
- Work in partnership with another NGO in communities training in direct work, strengthen an existing and resourced community based structure;
- Combination of partnership work at community level and train the trainer with a strategic partner organization (testing this with the NACCW, National Association of Child Care workers in 2009);
- Use our learning re skills transfer, our professional skill and partnerships to jointly develop,



implement and test psycho-social support programs to address current gaps identified by partners (aim to test this with Childline in 2009).

Part of our value is that we provide free training to many partner organizations who ordinarily would not be able to afford this training. Hence our strategy is to keep raising funds to be able to provide this support to others.

We have also set plans in place in 3 key areas to increase our sustainability as an organisation:

- Strengthening our monitoring and evaluation system;
- Change our name;
- Increase awareness and profile of our work through launching a new website.

## **Why a new name?**

Our name, the Rob Smetherham Bereavement Service for Children and the story behind our name has shaped our organisation in very significant ways, Rob gave his experience, his art, and his compassion and our founder Liesl Jewitt courageously formed a new NGO around that gift. The focus on bereavement and children was visionary, inspired, and ahead of its time. The selection of the pink cow as our logo, a striking piece of RobS art, challenged us to look at the world and children's world with new eyes and encourage creative expression and play as a way to cope.



# what the children said . . .

## What children said made them feel strong:

Vegetables and fruit, making fun, exercising my body, going to school, passing at school, playing, dancing, laughing, netball and football, running and singing, talking to people how to listen to me, staying with my family, reading, forgiveness and listening, being able to wash, music, being able to share with other people, drama at school, staying with my grandmother, praises

## Where children said they felt safe:

- School, home and playground
- Home, playground, school
- Home, school and church
- Home and school
- When I can go out to play
- Home and school
- Church, library

## What I learnt in the group?

- To keep a secret
- To cope with loss
- To be in a group where we can share our feelings
- To see ourselves as the same as

other children

- To not feel different
- To help each other cope with loss
- To take care of each other
- To feel happy because the activities made us happy
- To know that play helps when I am angry
- To not laugh at other people when they are talking about serious matters or when they are sad
- To listen to teach other
- To keep confidentiality
- To respect people
- To face our emotions
- To face our difficulties
- To listen to people and not laugh at others opinions
- To be considerate
- To be compassionate
- To have people listen to my problems
- To feel better knowing that others have also lost their parents
- To share our feelings (especially sad feelings)
- To talk about our parents
- To speak for ourselves
- To feel important
- To know that God loves us
- To comfort and console each other
- To manage our anger
- To sit down and talk to a person that makes me feel sad



*I learnt to  
respect myself*

Sbu - 10 years - a child participant



## Financial Contributors:

We thank you for your contributions that allow us to play with children, and teach others to play with children, play that is play for healing.

### *Donor Organisations*

PIETERMARITZBURG DISTRICT & COMMUNITY CHEST  
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