

New Beginnings in South Africa

Alexandra, commonly known as Alex, is a township in Johannesburg and one of the poorest urban areas in South Africa. Within this township lies St. Hubert Catholic Church, which hosts the *Ithubelisha* programme for girls aged 9–17.

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Ithubelisha means "new beginnings" in isiZulu, and this is what we aspire to for the girls: new beginnings in the

way they confront life, with hope and a spark of life for their future.

Many of the girls enlisted for *Ithubelisha* activities come from poor backgrounds and it is difficult for them to meet their basic needs. The club was set up to serve as a haven for girls to learn virtues that would mould them into individuals able to bring about positive change in their lives and those of their families. This is realized through classes, games, movies, ballet sessions and community service at old people's homes or orphanages. The girls are also taught culinary skills which enable them to prepare a variety of meals and desserts. Besides this, they are engaged in craft making and the girls produce handmade items such as gift cards for different occasions (e.g. Mothers' Day), stationery holders, bookmarks, etc.

Every year the girls showcase their culinary skills by hosting a family day event in which all their parents and siblings come together to enjoy a three course meal prepared by the girls. Recently, the girls participated in a Master Chef Competition in which they were required to do fruit craft, prepare a smoothie and cake decoration. Professionals from the hospitality industry volunteered to serve as judges for the competition. It was impressive to see how hard each of the teams worked to produce the above-mentioned items and how they tried to help each other finish the work on time. For many of the girls, the culinary skills session is one of the most exciting activities in the club and they look forward to practicing at home what they have learned. For many of the younger girls, the culinary session at the club is their first experience of preparing a meal. Some learn how to turn on the stove for the first time at the

club. The experience has been very good, because the mothers tell us that they now see their daughters making an effort to help out at home. This has also been possible because we not only teach them how to cook, but also how to clean the entire facility with the appropriate cleaning materials.

Some of the girls were asked why they come to the club. One replied, "I initially came because my mother said so, but now I come because each Saturday I learn something new and I am slowly appreciating the value of interacting with other people."

Another said, "It is so much fun being here. Before joining the club, I spent all my Saturdays at home in routine work, watching TV and I had no friends. It is different now and the experience is amazing." All in all, Ithubelisha Club provides a ray of hope to the community we serve in Alexandra. Many of the girls love

being at the club because the activities are both fun and educational.

E. T.

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