

Epiroc reaches out to learners at Bekekayo Farm School

Staying true to its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandate, Epiroc recently donated sanitary pads and 100 pairs of school shoes to learners at Bekekayo Farm School in Benoni on Johannesburg's East Rand.

"I decided to kick start the year with a school initiative because it perfectly aligns to our CSR focus areas namely; education, welfare and diversity," comments Judy Vilakazi, who was recently appointed as Regional CSR Manager at Epiroc South Africa to spearhead community projects such as these.

When Judy searched the National Department of Basic Education's database for a no-fee paying school, Bekekayo came up as a quintile 1 school. "We made a decision to support Bekekayo in response to a needs analysis which exposed the dire extent of the school's situation as well as the surrounding communities," shares Judy.

Education is extremely important which makes it even more heart-breaking when so many children don't have the basic necessities to enable them to attend or stay in school. Judy explains that the supply of reusable sanitary towels, in partnership with Palesa Pads, to young girls enables them to attend school even during their menstrual cycle. "Equally important is the donation of school shoes because it is not only about learners attending school, it is also about restoring their dignity," states Judy.

Bekekayo Farm School was built over 100 years ago by a family on their farm. Consisting of only four classrooms mainly for the farmer's children, the family decided to donate the school to the Education Department. "We currently have 140 learners between Gr1 and Gr7 but we have capacity to take in another 105 learners (fifteen learners per grade)," says Natasha Beharrie, Principal at Bekekayo, who recently had the privilege a few months ago of speaking to the farmer whose family were the original founders and builders of the school.

In terms of funding, Natasha explains that the school runs on Government grants and relies on monthly donations from sponsors. "We also do small fundraisers at the school to generate money but it is not enough for general maintenance and repairs like our broken water pump. We are paying weekly to receive fresh water and sometimes have to send the children home as there is no water. We have a serious snake problem so it is essential that we mow the grass regularly, a service that we unfortunately have to pay for as we do not own a tractor." Natasha also mentions that the ceiling in one of the classrooms has collapsed and that the classrooms are in desperate need of painting. "A fully stocked library is on our wish list; we have the room for it but we need shelves and books!"

In addition to a lack of funds, the school faces quite a few other challenges, one of the biggest being language as the learners come from different areas and cultures. Some children are orphans and there are currently 38 children with no birth certificates. “Undocumented learners do not qualify for a Social Grant from the Government so there is always shortfall funding from the government’s budget.” “So we are always extremely grateful for donations of any kind. The shoe donation from Epiroc makes such a big difference. Some schools don’t allow the children to come to school unless they are in uniform. Our undocumented children do not benefit from grants for uniforms and shoes so we made sure that they all received school shoes.”

Natasha extends a sincere thank you to Epiroc for selecting Bekakayo Farm School and recognising their needs, especially with so many other deserving schools out there. “You give me so much hope for the future of the school and of our children. Judy has been so wonderful to work with – an absolute angel.”

Judy was joined by Kovashni Govender, Epiroc Training Coordinator, in visiting the school on behalf of Epiroc. “While on a tour of the school, it was so encouraging to see that, despite the many challenges, so much effort is put into keeping the school spotless, creating a nurturing environment for all the learners. When we entered the classrooms, the spontaneous welcomes and warm hugs from the enthusiastic learners truly lifted our spirits. We hope that our donations, however small, have in some way helped to make life a little more comfortable for a few learners.”

“Epiroc is a company that is concerned about societal challenges and we want to make a difference. Going forward we will continue to identify and partner with other stakeholders within our neighbouring communities in an effort to touch lives by lending a hand where needed,” concludes Judy. Ends/



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