

Survey endorses **essential role of school halls** in education

Promising results of Archway Foundation research study

School halls play an essential role in successful holistic education. Used to full advantage, they have also proved to help integrate the school and surrounding inhabitants into a positive unified force that has a capacity to transform both social and economic circumstances in disadvantaged communities.

These were primary among the findings of a six-month survey of schools in the Western Cape that have over the past eight years received multi-purpose halls from the Archway Foundation, established by residential housing developer Garden Cities.

So far, in eight years, 38 schools have received halls, some of which are still under construction, from the Archway Foundation. Collectively, the Foundation has provided halls for approximately 35 000 schoolchildren, averaging 1 200 per hall. So far, funding has amounted to around R69 million from the Archway Foundation, R32 million from the Western Cape Education Department (WCED), and R3.3 million from schools, as well as just over R9 million contributed by strategic partners, which include the Mellon Housing Initiative, Vodacom, and the Garden Route Casino.

To ensure that the purpose of the halls was being served as accurately as possible, the foundation commissioned consultant researcher Brenda Matthews and journalist Neill Hurford to conduct a survey of those schools that had been using the halls for long enough to make an accurate assessment of their value.

Altogether 30 schools were surveyed – two recent recipients were used in a pilot study to refine the poll. The findings were delivered to the Garden Cities' Board in August.

One of the most powerful messages to come from the survey was the unsolicited declaration by a number of principals that they could not do their job effectively without the presence of a school hall. Another said he would refuse a transfer or promotion to a school that did not have one.

ENORMOUS BOOST IN PRESTIGE

Close to 100% of respondents reported that their schools had experienced an enormous boost in prestige after having received the halls. This had been endorsed both by the community and the pupils, who expressed a special new pride in their school. In the most successful cases, the halls have promoted community involvement that has included job opportunities, fundraising, and greater harmony between the school and the surrounding population.

Underlining the belief that a hall's effectiveness lay in its use, as opposed to its mere availability, was the significant discovery is that the schools most successfully using their Archway Hall are led by a principal who is motivated, enthusiastic and supported by a team of teachers who generally felt the same.

Nearly done! John Matthews, CEO of Garden Cities reassures Filia School Principal Doreen Herbert that the wait is nearly over, as the school's new Archway Foundation school hall takes shape fast on the school grounds in Goodwood.



ARCHWAY TO REFINE CRITERIA

As a result, the Archway is refining its criteria for the provision of school halls in its programme, to include an assessment of the likely full exploitation of the hall in the hands of the principal and staff.

In most of the successful cases examined, the schools were keen to include the community in their good fortune and, where relations were good, neighbours took a proprietary interest in the hall.

The survey acknowledged that the majority of the sample population had grown up influenced by a vast array of adverse circumstances, including violence, substance abuse, conflict, and poverty. It was also accepted that positive environmental circumstances promoted growth.

Recommendations made as a result of the survey results included that schools be encouraged to develop stronger links with local communities, and that the communities be involved and informed of all important school projects so that they can work with the schools to achieve success. It was stressed that for collaborative efforts to be successful there needed to be a culture of partnership in the school.

A conclusion of the study seen as pivotal to the success of social transformation in communities was that powerful school-community associations are crucial in poor communities, where schools often assume a major role in the public domain and may be the single exemplary employer.



BECOME AN ARCHWAY FOUNDATION PARTNER

The Archway Foundation calls on other CSI bodies to become partners in the striving to provide the required 700 school halls for the children of the Western Cape.

For more information please go to the Garden Cities website <http://www.gardencities.co.za/> or call

John Matthews on 021 558 7181

