

The Archway Foundation

Private funding vital for education needs in SA State does not provide all essential facilities for schools



Chris Hani Arts and Culture High School Archway Foundation Hall in Khayelitsha

It's more urgent than ever for the private sector to help alleviate the enormous shortfall in essential education facilities. Government is not keeping up with the existing and increasing needs of schools. Millions of children are not getting what they need for a comprehensive education.

These are among the preoccupations of John Matthews, CEO of Garden Cities, the Western Cape's oldest and largest residential development company. Matthews resolved while he was still at school to do what he could to improve facilities for education in disadvantaged communities. And he has.

With his company's board and their Archway Foundation that was established for the purpose shortly after he took office, a big dent has been made in the hundreds of schools that do not have a hall. Since it started, the foundation has been responsible for the building of 67 school halls, alone or with the collaboration of the Western Cape Education Department (WCED). The foundation is endowed with funds from the company's profits to do its work.

More recently, the Archway has also been partnering the University of the Western Cape and the University of Cape Town to provide science laboratories for schools in need in the province and, so far, it has collaborated on 32 of these projects. The labs are provided complete with the entire infrastructure that includes hardware, equipment and chemicals, as well as the training of teachers in their use.

"I knew first-hand what it was like to go to a school that lacked all the things that teachers then, and particularly now, consider absolutely essential to a holistic education. The things we didn't have, like the halls – which nearly a million kids in the Western Cape still today don't have – are not add-ons or luxuries. Without them, it will be an ongoing struggle to achieve world-level education standards," says Matthews.

"And there's actually no reason whatsoever that our children shouldn't have the best education the world can offer. It's all in the will of the people who have the power to create the change. You can't sit and wait for good things to happen."

The Garden Cities' Archway has created change in a big way, but Matthews realises it's not enough. Each new hall or laboratory represents only one brick in the construction of a more equitable deal for all the children of the Western Cape.

The company provides funds from profits on its housing sales to finance the halls through the foundation, which has provided nearly R30m of the total R58.8m spent on the halls during 2015-16 alone. The WCED has this year provided the balance – excluding contributions from the schools.

Some halls in previous years have also been built with financial assistance from other corporate partners. Matthews emphasises that very many more need to join the initiative. Some R3bn at today's prices is needed to finish the job.

The 67 completed halls are to be found as far afield as Plettenberg Bay and Knysna, Touws River and De Doorns, as well as the West Coast and Boland and, in the ensuing financial year, another 10 will be built.

It remains an urgent challenge that nearly one million pupils are still going to schools which don't have all the facilities that kids at more fortunate Cape schools have been taking for granted for many decades. The history of deprivation has not been erased.

Matthews says that while funds are flowing from private enterprise into many projects in the name of corporate social investment, it is education that should be prioritised in the budgets of all responsible companies.

"And speaking from a personal perspective, we believe that seeing the results of ploughing the gains from one's business into community or social projects is reward enough. We make



John Matthews CEO of Garden Cities

our work known to encourage others to join us or take up their own initiative, but public recognition or marketing gains are not the objective. If a company believes its social responsibility programme should bring returns, it will find its rewards and satisfaction in the sustained increase in the level of education," he says.

Matthews asks the heads of other Western Cape and national businesses to collaborate with the Archway Foundation. The upside, he says, is the assurance that the halls are built to a very high standard and all the donated funds go into the hall. He can be reached on 021 558 7181, www.gardencities.co.za. ■



Sullivan Primary School Archway Foundation Hall in Steenberg



Kenmere Primary Archway Foundation Hall

