



Lena Horn



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At five o'clock every morning Lena Horn wakes up, reads her bible, and prays for the day ahead before making herself a cup of tea. She then crawls back into bed and begins to sing. She sings at the top of her voice, and her husband accepts that this is a part of her daily routine. "I love my mornings. It is my time to prepare myself for the rest of the day," Lena explains. Besides being a wife and mother of three teenage children, this energetic 36-year-old is the principal of Spoortjies Crèche and a community development worker for Child Welfare in the rural area of Koekenaap. "We are a poor community about 30 kilometres outside of Vredendal," Lena explains. "I actually live in Lutzville, which is next to Koekenaap, but my heart is with the people of Koekenaap. To me, it is home."

For 15 years Lena has poured her heart, time and energy into Spoortjies, serving as principal, teacher, and counsellor for her staff and the many children who have walked through the school gates. "People are my passion, especially children. I love it when I can make a difference in a person's life."

Lena's dedication to the people of Koekenaap is one of the many reasons that Child Welfare approached her to assist their two social workers in the area. She divides her day between Spoortjies and Child Welfare's local office where she does both administrative and field work. "There are so many problems in our community, but God is giving me a chance to help the people in different ways."

Lena talks candidly about the immense poverty, disease and abuse in Koekenaap. "Most of the people are seasonal farm workers so they only have work from January to April each year. We have a high number of people suffering with TB and Aids, and there is a lot of violence, especially against children," she sighs. Lena believes that many of the communities' problems can be attributed to the lack of professionalism in the area. "We are an informal community. Our quality of education is low because most of the children drop out of high school, so no one studies further." It is for this reason that Lena is so grateful for the opportunity to complete her ECD Level



Four qualification. "I only finished Grade 10 so it was such a blessing to be able to study what I love. I enjoyed studying the different learning areas that children have, and being taught ways to help a child's personal development. I also loved the special needs section because I think it can be used to help our community."

Approximately 40 children attend Spoortjies each day. These children are registered with the provincial Department of Social Development, and Lena explains that if this wasn't the case there would be no money for anything because the parents don't pay fees. "The parents have no money, but they also aren't interested in their children's education. Most of them have a very bad attitude." Lena discusses her frustration as so much energy goes into building a child's self-esteem at school, only to have all that hard work destroyed when the child returns home in the evening to an abusive environment. "I don't think the parents understand how

important preschool education is for their child. If they did, they would be more interested"

Another sore point for Lena is her salary. When she first started working as a preschool teacher she earned R200 per month. Now, 15 years later, with her extensive experience and an ECD Level Four qualification behind her name, she only earns R696 per month. "My husband was an entrepreneur and a taxi driver but is now temporarily disabled so we would have really struggled if I didn't receive my R3,000 a month for my work at Child Welfare," Lena admits.

Despite these challenges, Lena says she cannot wait for the weekend to end and Monday morning to arrive so she can begin her week of work. "I really love what I do, I love every day, and I know that God will take care of me and my family."

When asked what she believes would



improve the early childhood development sector, Lena says teacher's salaries need to improve. "Many teachers I know are so frustrated by their poor salaries that they lose their passion for teaching which is so sad." Lena laughs when she suggests that Naledi Pandor, Minister of Education,

should implement a law forcing the parents to pay something towards school fees so that preschools are able to grow.

Lena serves as the chairperson of the local ECD Forum in the area, and says she would encourage all ECD teachers to complete a Learnership. "Experience is only half as good. Teachers need to enrich themselves so they can have the confidence to make a difference in the playroom."

*Spoortjies Crèche,
Koekenaap*

