

## Sibongile Home Case Study

A few people in the disability support network of the Western Cape had hinted at the fact that the project leader of [Sibongile Home](#) has been busy in Khayelitsha for years, taking the project to an excellent level of service. Consequently I had expected to meet a much older woman than the dynamic Nomasanga. We met on Spine road in Khayelitsha and then drove to Sibongile Home 2. On the way to Harare we drove along Mew Way with the shacks of Indlovini on our one side and the more formal housing of Ilitha park on the other. As usual we had to dodge the goats, children, dogs and various washing exercises along the road. As we entered upper Ilitha Park, Nomasanga showed me Sibongile Home 1, the building the project had occupied first. Upper Ilitha Park is an area where subsidy and private housing is the norm. In terms of neighbourhoods in Khayelitsha, Ilitha Park is regarded as a higher end neighbourhood where people with middle income to high income live. A therapist I met earlier had told me how Nomasanga had started the project in a container, then moved the facility into a building and more recently expanded to a second building. I estimated this to take about ten or twenty years. She had in fact achieved this, with the support of the Sibongile Home management team, in less than five years!

### *A balanced space*

Another surprise awaits the visitor to Sibongile Home. A regular visitor to therapeutic childcare centres would expect either a clinical space with no warmth, or a disorganized space with too many boxes, children and toys everywhere. What I did find was a space that was well balanced in both ways: being well organized and neat, but yet feeling homely.

We walked from room to room and greeted the children. Each room had three cots, each containing a child. The children were just waking up and getting ready for breakfast. Sibongile Home serves children who are severely disabled, most of them with cerebral palsy. They are aged 2 to 11 and about are still in touch with their parents. Sibongile Home provides them with a quality of life that they would never have had if the facility did not exist. Down the hall we walked into the common room where the volunteers were getting ready to gather the children for breakfast. I immediately spotted the row of [Madiba buggies](#) each with different support cushions. Each of the buggies seemed to almost have their own personality, and looked eager to carry the children into their day. Some volunteers were busy with the food behind the kitchen counter and greeted us warmly. We sat on the couch in the common room and Nomasanga told me her story.

Nomasanga's own child was her first client. She began Sibongile Home to be able to support the needs of her daughter, who suffered from cerebral palsy. She was inspired to care for other children in Khayelitsha who have the same plight as her daughter, after caring for her, and eventually having to deal with her passing away.

### *Shonaquip and Sibongile Home*

In the service that Sibongile Home currently offers Shonaquip plays a vital role. We firstly provide the mobility devices, wheelchairs and buggies that enable the children to engage with their world. Secondly, and perhaps more important than the devices, we also ensure the individual tailoring and positioning of each chair to their owner's particular needs. True to the Shonaquip brand and philosophy, this is non-negotiable. Children whose buggy is a Shonaquip buggy are ensured of a perfect support for their daily life.

Shonaquip supports both clients who can afford their chairs, through medical aid or private funds, and clients who are dependent on government support. In a partnership with the department of health and the Red Cross Children's Hospital in Cape Town, Shonaquip is able to provide support to the children in Sibongile Home. When Nomasanga has space available in her facility, the Red Cross Children's Hospital refers children into her care. Shonaquip provides the buggy, Red Cross Children's Hospital will ensure the child attends a [Shonaquip seating clinic](#), and then the child is placed in Sibongile Home. The [Western Cape Rehabilitation Centre](#) (WCRC) then provides support in terms of physiotherapy and seating. In this way the continuum of care for the disabled child is activated. From Nomasanga's perspective, the collaboration between Red Cross Children's Hospital, Sibongile Home, Shonaquip and WCRC is virtually seamless and children are placed in her care.

#### *Part of the daily routine*

It was a remarkable privilege to watch the daily ritual of children being carried out from their rooms and placed in their chairs. A row of volunteers emerged from the hallway, each carrying a child, and placing the child in their chair. It seemed complicated to me and I was amazed at how well the volunteers knew how to position each child. I realized with a new level of understanding, how important the individual fitting and unique relationship between each child and their chair is. When I looked at the row of buggies, I could not spot differences in them, yet the volunteers did not hesitate in placing the children. I realised that there is a whole world that I do not understand, where the differences between the chairs are as obvious to the child and the person seating the child, as the differences between cubs would be to a lioness.

To a layperson such as myself, just on the verge of understanding this world, it seemed amazing and wondrous. The significance of Shonaquip, as a foundation in this enablement became much clearer. It reminded me of the saying that you don't miss that which is most valuable until it is not there. Ironically, one of the most significant and profound qualities of Shonaquip is that our role becomes easy to miss. The structure which Shonaquip devices offer to people becomes such a familiar part of life, and it so well tailored by their staff, that it is easy to miss how much the chair actually means, and how essential Shonaquip is towards the enabled life of that person.

#### *A growing waiting list*

I asked Nomasanga about the need that still exists in Khayelitsha. Her eyes filled with tears as she told me that she has a long waiting list, which is still growing. Her dilemma is that the children she cares for are probably going to be there until they get transferred to an adult facility in a decade or so. In the short term, they are not going anywhere. Sibongile Home faces an age-old choice: should we provide excellent care to the few, or poor care to the many. A painful fact is that for every child who receives excellent care in Sibongile home, there are others who are just as needy, and who do not have access to such care. It is due to this need, and the support of caring benefactors, and competent management that she has managed to grow towards the two facilities that are currently being run. This steady growth path offers the best bet to be able to care for those they cannot support yet.

When possible, Nomasanga views the glass as half full, and focuses on the amazing care Sibongile Home is able to provide for these twenty four children, with the wider support of Red Cross Children's Hospital, Shonaquip and WCRC.