



Tue, 07 Aug, 2012

[Fuel prices - up once more](#)

By WINDHOEK - ELLANIE SMIT  
Mon, 06 Aug, 2012

### Namibian Weather

Clear sky  
Temperature: 1 °C, feels like  
-1.3 °C  
Wind: South-Southeast,  
2.1 meter/s

Recommend 3.9k

## Looking after the lost and unwanted

Posted on Wed, 30 May, 2012

### A care centre for psychiatric patients run by a former nurse

**Author:** WINDHOEK - SELMA IKELA

A private initiative in Wanaheda, later backed by a church, is the brainchild of a former psychiatric nurse who looks after mental patients that have been discharged from the State hospital and rejected by their families.

Sabina Meyer, 56, is schizophrenic. She has been living at the Hephata Centre that cares for mentally impaired patients for 25 years now.

Hendrina Kaumbi, 52, currently booked into at the psychiatric ward of the Windhoek Central Hospital due to the fact she had a relapse, and Meyer are the patients that have lived the longest at the centre. Meyer's family left her at the psychiatric hospital and when she was discharged, she wandered the Windhoek streets as she had nowhere else to go.

"I still want to stay with sister Kondombolo. She gives us delicious food," said Meyer as she affectionately hugs and kisses Regina Kondombolo the caretaker of the centre. Meyer said her biological mother is alive but is now in hospital and her father is deceased.

Regina (66) is fondly called mama, aunty or suster (nurse) by the patients.

"We are getting old together with Sabina," jokes Regina who is now in a wheelchair after her right leg was amputated early this year when a wound on one of her toes would not heal.

But she says not even losing half her leg will stop her taking care of the patients. She is deeply religious and God is with her.

Olga Operi Tjipura has been living at the centre for the past six years and is also a schizophrenic. She was a Grade 3 teacher at Epukiro in the Omaheke Region. When Namibian Sun visited the centre she was busy in the kitchen. Regina says Tjipura has a sense of responsibility. "She cooks and cleans the house." Tjipura said it feels great to be at the centre "because Aunty takes good care of us".

At the moment the centre has 15 patients.

Hephata is a biblical name that means 'open your hearts'. The centre was established in 1986 by Regina. She worked as a registered nurse in the psychiatric ward of the Windhoek Central Hospital before she suffered a back injury. She left her job because of the injury and looked for alternative work. At one point she did domestic work and later worked in a butchery.

"I was bored when I left my job and I knew from working at the psychiatric ward that patients are discharged from the hospital and then wander the streets despite having families that can look after them. I knew the vital needs of the patients but also that if patients are in the care of their family, they are often locked outside the house when the family goes to work and left with little food. So they end up on the streets and are picked up by the police and brought back to the hospital. Female patients on the streets are often molested or abused in some way."

She consulted various people from the health sector with the idea of starting a day-care centre for people with personality disorders that are neglected.

People thought it was an excellent idea and she started looking for financial support.

The Associations of the Handicapped provided a bus and house in Freedom Square from where she could operate. They used the bus to transport patients from the hospital to the day-care centre and to go out for picnics and visit recreational centres.

She also had two occupational therapists that offered their services.

"In the beginning, things were good - that was for the first two years.

Then, before Independence, organisations started to withdraw. The director of the Association of the Handicapped moved to South Africa and we lost the house because it belonged to the Association".

Regina was left in the lurch with patients who were used to being fed. Some families had also started dumping

patients at the day-care centre adding to her woes.

The German Lutheran Church came to their rescue in 1987 and it has been supporting the centre ever since. The church bought a house in Wanaheda and started paying her a salary, and the rest is history.

Regina told Namibian Sun that there are a lot of ups and downs taking care of mentally impaired patients. "Meyer, one of the patients who lived there longest, is a manic depressive and gave me a tough time.

She would run away from the centre for two days and I had to look for her with the assistance of the police. She would also disappear when she got her disability grant and that was always tough." She adds that all patients have different problems. Some are emotionally disturbed and they will wake up and cry, and when asked what is wrong will just say 'nothing'.

Despite these difficulties, Regina manage to take care of her patients.

"I try to keep them busy by using materials like old tyres to make mats.

Some patients have a sense of responsibility, like Meyer who would wake up and boil water for tea. If there is bread, she will prepare the bread if there is none, she will cook porridge. There were times I left Meyer in charge of the house and I will find everything in order when I return."

People wonder how she manages with the patients. She simply answers that she treats them like normal people.

"I don't make them feel like they are mentally ill. I listen to what each and every one of them tells me because if you chase them away they will not forget it. I don't shout at them. If they do something wrong, I tell them in a polite manner not to do it again. It requires 120% patience to be with them . Without patience you will not make it".

Hephata is the only care centre for mentally impaired people in Namibia. When social workers see patients are neglected they bring them to the centre which has patients from all over the country.

Regina has two children and was born to a South African Xhosa mother and an Oshiwambo father. She speaks Otjiherero, Oshiwambo, Damara-Nama, Xhosa and Afrikaans and being multi-lingual helps her communicate with the patients in their own language.

The International Women's Association Namibia (IWAN) awarded the Hephata Centre a plaque commemorating its 2012 Annual Achievement Award but she asked that IWAN instead give her the value of the plaque (N\$2 000) to repaint the house. A group of volunteers and IWAN members with their families repainted the interior and exterior of the centre.



[http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default\\_preview/images/untitled-18\\_335.jpg](http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default_preview/images/untitled-18_335.jpg)

click to enlarge

**FAITHFUL:** Despite Regina Kondombolo, the caretaker of the centre, having had her right leg amputated, business continues as usual.

© FEODORA VON FRANCOIS



[http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default\\_preview/images/untitled-19\\_336.jpg](http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default_preview/images/untitled-19_336.jpg)

click to enlarge

**HELPING HANDS:** Olga Operi Tjipura is schizophrenic. She has a sense of responsibility and helps with cooking and cleaning. Behind her is Mbashu, also a patient at the centre. He has been there for 12 years.

© FEODORA VON FRANCOIS



[http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default\\_preview/images/untitled-20\\_328.jpg](http://www.namibiansun.com/sites/default/files/imagecache/default_preview/images/untitled-20_328.jpg)

click to enlarge

**AGING TOGETHER:** Sabina Meyer (red beanie) has been living at the centre for 25 years.

© FEODORA VON FRANCOIS



Add a comment...

Comment using... ▼

