

## News from the community

Michelle is the mother of one of the smallest children in our school, Joel. Michelle applied for her child already when he was only two years old. The application form, filled out in 2006 said: *'Single mother, unemployed, no food, no help from father'*. Since Joel was still too young to go to school, he was put on the waiting list but we kept in contact with Michelle.

Michelle is 35 years old and has two children, a boy and a girl. Born from a mother who was an alcoholic and a father who abandoned her, Michelle's youth wasn't easy. Because of the alcohol problems with her mother, her grandmother kicked her and her 5 younger brothers and sisters out of the house. They slept outside, struggling to stay alive. Because there were so many problems, social welfare took the children and sent them to schools with hostels all over Namibia.

Michelle finished grade 12 and came back to Windhoek to take care of her mother. They struggled together and moved around different houses in Katutura. After being chased out of several houses for not paying the rent, Michelle's mother married and they settled here in Katutura. Michelle had a boyfriend but as soon as she fell pregnant, the boyfriend left, leaving her with a baby girl. Michelle: *'I started to give up hope. What would the future hold for me? I started drinking, had several boyfriends, slept with them and in the end became HIV+'*

When that happened, Michelle was angry - angry at the world, angry at that man, and most of all, angry at herself.

*'All I wanted to do was spread the virus. Someone gave it to me, so I'll do the same. I believed I was going to die anyway so what better thing to do than party during the last weeks or months I had.....'*

*This is what I did for a while, but I felt like a part of me was missing. I felt so empty, so alone. All the partying didn't bring satisfaction and I was neglecting my little girl. I wanted to find love, to feel accepted, but didn't know how to get it.*

*One day I met a lady who asked me to come to a support group at the Catholic Aids Action (CAA). This is an organization working with orphans, vulnerable children and people infected with HIV. I didn't really want to go, but at the same time I didn't know what else to do, so I went.*

*This support group changed my life. Finally I met other people with whom I could talk and share and who faced the same problems as me every day. I felt understood, I got advice and I learned that my life don't end when I am HIV+. Above all, I met God there. Finally I found the peace I was looking for. I gave my life to him and changed completely. I was rude and careless before but God changed my attitude.'*

Michelle started volunteering at CAA in 2000. Since then a lot has happened. Michelle stood up for herself, wanting a better future. She says: *"It's better to do something, even when it is voluntarily, than sitting at home, doing nothing. You can always be useful in some way. All I did was cleaning, but it kept me busy. It kept me off the street and I enjoyed working with my colleagues and seeing the children. Sometimes I woke up in the morning, wondering why I did this but I believed that if I would show what I am able to do, it would be rewarded one day. Wasting my time at home wouldn't do me any good."*

Michelle worked as a volunteer for over 3 years. Only then, thanks to her hard work, she got a paid cleaning job at the same organization. Her patience was rewarded. Blessings came to her. Her boss was willing to give most of the money she needed to build her own sink house at another place, away from the drinking at home. Furthermore, a position for a Damara-speaking counselor will become available at the centre. Her boss wants her to be trained and take over this position.

*'Although I see God in my life, I find it difficult to make choices for Him. My life changed radically but there are still things that aren't good. I met my current boyfriend in 2003 and a year later I gave birth to Joel. I want to live a godly life with him, but he doesn't want to know anything about God. I asked him to leave, but he doesn't want to and when he is drunk, he becomes violent. I know I need to leave him, but I don't know how. Somehow I don't have the courage to do it...'*

This is one of the biggest problems here in Katutura. People believe in God, they know they need to change but at the same time normal life and temptations are so strong. Trusting God to provide - instead of people - is hard for many. This is where we try to walk with them. It's so important that we as Christians are there to help, to give advice, to pray and to encourage. We all need to grow and we need people to help us, that's what God is calling us to do.

*'I thank and praise God for bringing Beautiful Kidz in my life - the school for Joel and the help I get personally and spiritually. It's very encouraging and it gives me hope - hope for a better future, a future where I live in close relationship with God, together with my children. I want to see them grow up, study and live a good life. They will do better than I did and I pray God will bless our family'*

Rom 5:2b-5 'And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out His love in to our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom He has given us.'