

# Changing Lives, *One Person at a Time* POPUP

Visit the heart of any metropolitan city and the feeling of hopelessness is overwhelming – hardly surprising considering the immense poverty and large-scale unemployment that is rife in South Africa. In Pretoria, however, one organisation is changing the city, one life at a time.

Text: Christo Valentyn  
Images: © POPUP

Established in 2000 as an extension of the Doxa Deo church's vision to change cities for the better, POPUP – an acronym for People Upliftment Program – has made a substantial difference in the lives of hundreds of people through their unique training programs that not only empower the disempowered, but restore hope.

Once learners have graduated, POPUP also assists with job placements and job creation through entrepreneurship. "The programs we present are practical and equip learners with skills in areas where there are opportunities for employment or entrepreneurship," says POPUP CEO, Marlene Freislich. "At present, about 22% of our students are employed fulltime, but we are hopeful that we can raise this to 50%," she adds.

## From Zero to Hero

Prospective learners at POPUP have the opportunity to enrol for a variety of hands-on skills programmes that aim to

empower them to be effective in the working environment.

Any unemployed person between the age of 18 and 45 can enrol and no post-school qualifications are necessary – in fact, not even a Grade 12 certificate is required. Learners must, however, be able to read, write, speak and understand English and must be available daily for fulltime studies. The training courses cost only R50 each, and include a cooked meal every day for the duration of the course. A free ten-day Life Skills Training Program is also mandatory prior to commencing a training course.

Skills programmes range from home management, home-based care, early child development and catering to garment and décor manufacturing, arts and crafts, computer and secretarial skills, business skills and forklift driving. "With such a wide scope of training, learners who successfully complete their training with us are perfectly qualified for employment within the hospitality, home décor and clothing industries, for example," says Freislich.



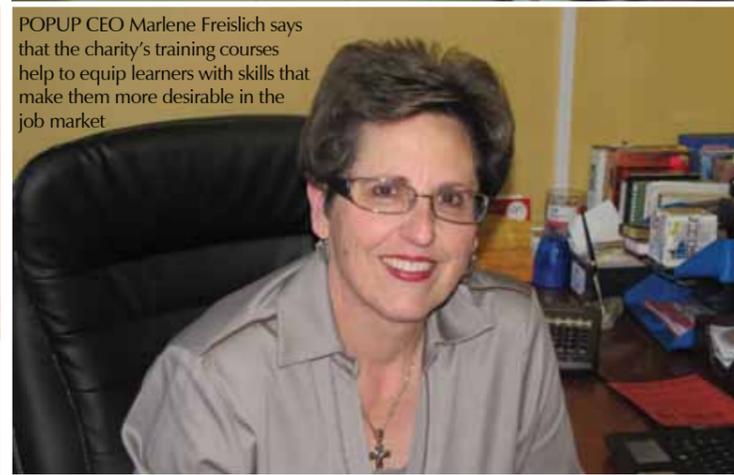
POPUP learners hard at work during one of the charity's training courses



The POPMed facility offers free medical care to between 200 and 300 people every month



Children at the POPKids crèche are also eligible for free clothing and medical care



POPUP CEO Marlene Freislich says that the charity's training courses help to equip learners with skills that make them more desirable in the job market

## Making Daily Life Easier

While POPUP does not guarantee a transformed life overnight, the organisation goes out of its way to make life's daily battles a bit more bearable by also providing medical and social support services. The organisation's medical services are threefold, operating under the POPMed, POPDent and POPEye banners, and provide effective, safe and accessible primary health care.

These services are also not limited to just learners and their children – individuals with no income or medical aid can also benefit from free medical assistance, as can residents of old age homes and shelters. Fees are only applicable once a household income exceeds R3,000 per month.

POPMed is run by a fulltime nurse, who is assisted by medical doctors who volunteer their time and expertise. They help between 200 and 300 people every month. POPEye offers eye testing and supplies frames and glasses at reasonable costs to those in need, while POPDent offers free dental care. Final year dentistry students from Medunsa provide these services under the guidance of their lecturer and a dental assistant.

POPUP also distributes clothing to destitute families and individuals; distributes approximately 50 food parcels to needy individuals over three-month periods and runs a daily soup kitchen for more than 300 people. At the organisation's headquarters in Salvokop, the POPKids crèche cares for 60 children on a daily basis with snacks and two healthy meals every day, weekly occupational therapy sessions, free clothing, free medical care and extra food parcels should the family be in need.

## You Can Make a Difference

While POPUP has a small fulltime staff and receives limited funding from Doxa Deo, it is heavily reliant on volunteers and corporate donations. Individual volunteering at POPKids, the clothing stores and soup kitchens is encouraged, while the voluntary contribution of specialised services (such as electrical and plumbing maintenance) brings major relief to tight budgets. Experts in the various training fields offered by POPUP are also encouraged to contribute their time and knowledge.

For corporations, POPUP provides a unique social investment opportunity, which is not necessarily limited to purely financial contributions. "Corporations can provide mentorship opportunities, for example, or employ POPUP learners as entry level staff members," says Freislich.

These contributions can be funded from the corporation's CSI funding and could secure two of the seven BEE scorecard points (Social Investment and Enterprise Development). As POPUP is a registered Public Benefit Organisation (PBO) with Section 18A status, there is also a tax benefit.

But regardless of whether you are contributing time, money or expertise, it is the direct change that is made in someone's life that makes investment or involvement with POPUP so worthwhile. The stories of changed lives are plentiful and testify to how easily a difference in the world can be made, one life at a time.

For more information on POPUP, or to apply as a volunteer, visit [www.popup.co.za](http://www.popup.co.za), contact +27 12 328 6107 or email [marlene@popup.co.za](mailto:marlene@popup.co.za). ■



The POPKids crèche cares for about 60 children every day. They also provide nutritious meals and snacks for the children