



Media Release & Background Details

9 September 2009

### **Adonis Musati Project Review and Short Film Screening**

Teenage Zimbabwean refugee Tafadswa Mashagwa described last night how he slept under Cape Town bridges in sacks and boxes, foraged in dustbins for food and was eventually hospitalised for malnutrition, before non-profit organisation the Adonis Musati Project (AMP) found him.

He was speaking at the launch of AMP, last night on UCT campus, where the project leaders described how they are forging a response to the refugee crisis "that South Africa can be proud of". They also screened a short film about the project, by TV producer Anna Telford, called 'A Better Life'.

AMP has assisted thousands of refugees in the past two years. It was named after Adonis Musati, a young Zimbabwean who died of starvation in Cape Town while waiting for his asylum application to be processed. He had not eaten for more than two weeks.

Distressed that such a tragedy could occur unnoticed in the middle of one of the most vibrant and progressive cities in Africa, Gahlia Brogneri and Terry Hodson founded the AMP to provide support and assistance for Zimbabwean refugees seeking asylum.

"How we respond as a nation to the human suffering of the refugees entering South Africa in search of help, is often dependent upon our own situation. The recent xenophobic violence is a matter of grave concern, but the national culture of ubuntu is very heartening" said Brogneri. "Each person may display a different way of dealing with a problem that will not disappear and needs to be addressed in a manner that will benefit everyone striving to make a living and provide for their families."

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To date, AMP has assisted thousands of refugees with food, clothing, training and accommodation. It now has 300 refugees on its books, who are being helped and guided towards independence with many more approaching them each week.

Until now, refugees have been housed in any ad-hoc shelter available. However, a half-way house on a piece of agricultural land between Kommetjie and Fish Hoek was recently made available and is now the home for 12 young refugee boys whom the project is assisting to get back on their feet. They moved into the house only days ago with their houseparents, who are also Zimbabwean refugees.

"These boys, who travelled to South Africa alone, have no other place to stay. "Teenagers are the most vulnerable group and if left on the streets they get coerced into all kinds of criminal activity. Some of them have already been through this," says Gahlia.

Similar shelter is needed for other vulnerable groups – the disabled, single mothers and widows. The AMP would also like to start training projects to teach the refugees entrepreneurial skills and enable them to contribute to the local economy.

"The needs of these people are simple. Their immediate requirements are food, clothing – particularly footwear – blankets and shelter. For many of those who arrive penniless and starving after a harrowing journey, the only home is under a bridge on the Foreshore, where they gather."

Ten volunteers manage the AMP, although another 20 help whenever possible, and every cent received goes towards helping the refugees. Office space in Salt River has been given free of charge and only the much-needed office manager, Zimbabwean refugee Barbara Zhungu, receives remuneration from a three-month sponsorship.

"When a 15-year-old child travels 1000's of kilometres, is traumatised, robbed, beaten and alone and says that his wish is to be able to send money home to his siblings without which they will die, he really means it," says Brogneri. "This is a monumental load for anyone carry, let alone a child."

To find out more about the [Adonis Musati Project](#) or to assist- either as a volunteer, or to donate food, clothing, or make a financial contribution - contact Gayle on 082 902 8781 or [gayle@adonismusatiproject.org](mailto:gayle@adonismusatiproject.org) or look at [www.adonismusatiproject.org](http://www.adonismusatiproject.org).

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### **Reflections of AMP intern Emily Westerlund**

“Every day spent in the AMP office has revealed more and more reasons why I should be here helping. But just recently, as younger and younger refugee boys have been coming through the office, has the severity of the refugee crisis and the importance of helping really hit home. As the boys started recounting their life stories, my jaw dropped in disbelief and I immediately thought back to what I was doing at their age.

“At 16 I was giggling in the back of driver’s ed class with my friends, while Tafa was alone in Cape Town, having just been stabbed by gangsters and stripped of the money that would put a roof over his head. At 17 I was taking pricey dance classes, while Douglas was jumping the border and dodging the bullets of advancing soldiers. At 18 I was touring university with my parents, trying to choose one from the many options I had, while Christian was living on the streets outside Home Affairs, desperately trying to get asylum papers.

“These are children we are talking about. They have gone through traumatising experiences that even an adult could not imagine going through. They’ve jumped from one devastating experience to the next, and yet they still persevere. With the motivation, intelligence and determination I’ve seen in them, they would have had opportunities long ago had they been living in the US.

“Having experienced a world with so much inequality, this is why I came to Cape Town – to take my own experiences, from a privileged life in the US, and try to provide even a piece of them to a suffering refugee child.”

### **Stories of some of the youngsters whom the AMP is helping:**

**Tapiwe** - I left Kadoma on May 5 this year, with R700. I am 15, both my parents are dead, and I was looking for work to look after my younger sister. When I got to Beitbridge I met up with two guys who asked for R150 to help me cross the border. We crossed on to the South African side, where there were two different guys who were supposed to get me to the N1. They asked for all the money I had, or they would beat me up. I had nothing left after this. They left me on the N1. I walked from 9pm to about 4am the next day, to Messina. I then walked another 41km around the farms, looking for work. I didn’t have any luck. A white man came looking for plasterers and although I didn’t know how, I said I did. He paid me R150, and I boarded a train to Petersburg. There another white man took me to a big farm where we were paid R500 per month. I was then told I was too young and had to leave. I walked 71km back to Petersburg. Eventually I boarded a train to Cape Town Station, where I was told that people stayed under the Culemborg Bridge. This is how I was found by Gahlia.

**Douglas Abel** - I left Gokwe in Zimbabwe with my cousin. We had R600. When we got to the South African side of the border we saw soldiers, and hid from them for some time. When we continued, we found ourselves in a game park. Animals that looked like cows started running towards us. I was very scared – we found a hole in the fence not knowing there were soldiers on the other side. They started firing at us, so we went back into the park where we encountered the animals again. We slept in the park. The next day, we continued walking through the park. I was very afraid and very angry and started arguing with my cousin because we were lost. We ended up along the railway line and were caught by police, who took us to the Refugee Reception Centre in Messina. We got our papers the following day and got a job in Louise Trichardt. My cousin turned on me and found some gangsters to attack me and some others. They took our pay and our belongings, so we ran away – my cousin who I had left home with actually planned this. Some people told us we could find work in Cape Town. Another cousin said he could find a place to stay in Cape Town. When we got to Cape Town he left to go to Khayelitsha to find a room for us, but that was the last we saw of him until today. We were then told of the Culemborg Bridge, and this is how we were found by Gahlia and Terry.

**Antony** - I left my rural home of Chiredzi with my friend and between us we had R600. We hitchhiked twice. When the second car broke down we saw a signpost saying there were 81km to Messina. We then started walking the 81km on foot, 13 of us. Along the way, my friend fainted. I went to a nearby village where I asked for water to resuscitate him. They also sold us some food and then my friend was fine and we continued on our journey. We caught a taxi but at a roadblock I was picked out, because I looked all dirty and rugged. My friend had been hiding in the taxi. The police asked me to make a plan. I offered them R30 but they refused, so I had to give them the R100 I had left. They put me on a bus from Zimbabwe to Joburg, where I stayed at the Methodist Church for five months. One time, I got a piece job and managed to get money for a train ticket to Cape Town, because everyone at the church was saying there are jobs in Cape Town. That is how I found myself at the Cape Town Station, where I was told to go to the Culemborg Bridge, where I was found by Gahlia and Terry.

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Issued and prepared by [Paula Wilson Media Consulting](#) on behalf of the Delta Trust and the Adonis Musati Project. For AMP call Gayle 082 902 8781 or [gayle@mcwalter.co.za](mailto:gayle@mcwalter.co.za) or [www.adonismusatiproject.org](http://www.adonismusatiproject.org). For media queries contact Paula Wilson on 021 789 1904 or 082 659 9187 or [paula@pwmc.co.za](mailto:paula@pwmc.co.za) or [www.pwmc.co.za](http://www.pwmc.co.za).