

A haven for refugees to restart lives

The Adonis Musati Project gives them a bit of dignity while awaiting their papers, writes **HELEN BAMFORD**

I HEARD you rescue young boys. Would you rescue me?" This was the desperate plea of a young Zimbabwean refugee named Tafadzwa to Gahlia Brogneri when he found her dishing out food under the Culemborg Bridge.

An orphan, like so many of the refugees who make their way to South Africa, the 17-year-old boy had been to hell and back and was ready to give it all up.

"He told us he wanted to commit suicide and would have if we hadn't found him," Brogneri says.

She and Terry Hodson are the founders of the Adonis Musati Project, named after a Zimbabwean who died of starvation in Cape Town while waiting for his asylum application to be processed in 2007.

Horrified that such a tragedy could happen unnoticed in a city like Cape Town, Brogneri and Hodson founded the Adonis Musati Project to provide support and assistance to refugees and asylum seekers.

Tafadzwa is one of thousands who have since been "rescued" and assisted with food, clothing, training and accommodation.

He is also one of 12 boys who recently moved into the project's new halfway house in Kommetjie, which is being sponsored for a year by a local businessman.

It is the first time in years that he has a roof over his head and a place to call home.

"He told me he has started dreaming of his future again.

"He wants to be a journalist," Brogneri said.

And although it is Brogneri and volunteers at the Adonis Musati Project who are the "saviours", she says it is often they who end up being inspired by the extraordinary stories of courage they hear almost every day.

"People often call afterwards, even a year later, just to say 'thank you'."

They are very excited about the halfway house, which lies on an acre of agricultural land, and has vegetable tunnels which they are planning to cultivate.

"The boys moved in on Monday with their house-parents who are also Zimbabwean refugees. There is



HELPING HAND: Gahlia Brogneri, co-founder of the Adonis Musati Project, with some of the refugees they support at the Culemborg Bridge.

PICTURE: MXOLISI MADELA

no furniture yet, but it is already spotless," she said.

The project, which has an office in Salt River, is run by a committee of 10 volunteers.

The only member who receives remuneration is officer manager and Zimbabwean refugee Barbara Zhungu.

Brogneri, a former high school teacher who now volunteers full

time, said besides providing food to refugees under the bridge and those queuing outside Home Affairs in Nyanga, they sent people on training courses that include security and fisheries.

They also help teachers get registered.

"We have teachers, accountants, nurses and trades people, so we try to find them jobs wherever we can."

They also keep lists of what people need, like clothes, blankets and shoes.

They collect from friends and family while students at the University of Cape Town chip in with sandwiches.

"It's about keeping people alive and giving them a bit of dignity while they are waiting for their papers."

The project also tries to secure accommodation in shelters where they can.

Brogneri estimates there are six or seven young newcomers arriving in Cape Town every week.

"And they seem to be getting younger and younger."

She said one young man who stood out for her was from the DRC.

His name is Christian and he was

18 when he arrived in the country, unable to speak a word of English.

"He found a place where he could learn to speak English and then he got odd jobs using the money he earned to buy bread for his Zimbabwean refugee friends."

The project placed him on a panel-beating course at the Salesians Institute which he has attended for more than a year.

"He's now got his own business plan and wants to employ others,"

Adonis Musati's work has been featured in a short film by former BBC producer Anna Telford titled *A Better Life*, which is attracting interest from abroad.

The project's helpful website can be visited on

www.adonismusatiproject.org