

Dead refugee's memory gives hope to many others

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 south, 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 the Zimbabwean who died of starvation in Cape Town while waiting for his asylum applica-

tion 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.

"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 the volunteers of the Adonis Musati Project who are the "saviours", she says it is often them that land up being inspired by the extraordinary stories of courage they hear every day. The halfway house, which is on an acre of agricultural land, 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 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 to receive remuneration is office manager and Zimbabwean refugee Barbara Zhungu.

Brogneri, a former high

school teacher who now volunteers full-time, said that besides providing food to refugees under the bridge and those queuing outside Home Affairs in Nyanga, they sent people on training courses in waiting tables, security and fisheries. They also helped teachers get registered.

"We have teachers, accountants, nurses and tradespeople 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, and students at UCT help provide 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 find

accommodation in shelters where it can.

Brogneri estimates there are six or seven young newcomers arriving in Cape Town every week. She said one young man who stood out for her was from the DRC. His name was Christian and he was 18 when he arrived in the country, not speaking 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.

The Adonis Musati Project's website is www.adonis-musatiproject.org