

Church and health department partnership cares for the body as well as the soul

Annelise Patrick

A partnership between Northern Areas churches and the Eastern Cape Health Department resulted in a mobile clinic which the residents of Jacksonville had been requesting for some time.

The nearest clinics in Chatty and Booyesen Park were too far and could only be accessed by walking through open veld and bushes where criminals lurked.

Residents who wanted to go to the clinic had to leave home by six in the morning at the latest to have any hope of being helped.

In 2013, the Eastern Cape Department of Health sent a sister out to check the need in the area and from this a public partnership was started with our church, the Ebenezer North Community Church.

At that time, the church building was a tent, which also housed the community clinic.

There was also a Victory Ministries mobile clinic in a truck that would come to the area every second week for baby immunizations and family planning, which also used the tent site.

The total number of people helped was about 20-30 per day, which was a lot at that time.

St Luke's Anglican church would also come and provide health days from time to time, doing a great job teaching new and pregnant mummies about how to care for their babies.

They would also give them a small gift for their unborn babies.

The community clinic in the tent soon became a norm in Jacksonville for all the residents.

Unfortunately, in 2015, the tent was destroyed by a strong wind, and we had to make use of a shack that we erected in a neighbour's yard opposite the tent for the weekly mobile clinic. We had to use the shack for a whole year until October 2016.

We then moved to the new building of Ebenezer North Church at the end of Oct 2016 and the weekly numbers increased to about 50 to 60 people per day because patients started coming from Timothy Valley as well.

Today, three main volunteers from the church are responsible for registering the names for family planning and baby immunization.

They also weigh the babies before they see the nurse and make sure that everybody is helped quickly and efficiently and in an orderly manner.

The nursing sisters on site do pregnancy and HIV tests as well.

They also see a lot of children that are born underweight and refer them to the dietician at the local clinic.

Members of the church have also made this ministry easier by donating medical equipment such as a scale and sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol measuring machines.

There are some really great benefits to having the community clinic at a church.

Firstly, it provides a service to sick people who have transport or financial challenges to get to the local clinic or hospital.

Secondly, it takes pressure off the other clinics – we now see about 100-150 people per Friday.

Thirdly, the community benefits because it is much safer coming here and saves a lot of time that is usually wasted by waiting in long queues or walking long distances.

Some old and sickly people have to leave home by five in the morning to go to a government clinic.

With us, they come by about 8.30, sit inside a warm and safe church hall, and are done by one at the latest.

Everybody who arrives before 10.30 is assured of seeing a nurse and getting help.

Being in a church environment, our volunteers are taught to make sure that everybody is treated with dignity and respect.

Fourthly, the local government clinics now have faith in us and what we do that they are referring the new mummies to us.

We are really extremely grateful to the Eastern Cape Dept of Health for this brilliant partnership that brings medical and health services nearer to the community.

We are planning to expand the medical and health services that we offer so that there can be even better service delivery for the community.

Annelise Patrick (Main Clinic volunteer): Ebenezer North Community Church Community Clinic.