

# Goodies for



□ Recycle Swop Shops generally open once a week for a few hours.

IT'S WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON AND THE Hou Moed Centre in Hermanus's Zwelihle township is alive with the laughter of children. Some are in a large hall learning to dance the waltz, the foxtrot and the cha-cha-cha. Others are playing in the main centre, playing killer table tennis. The older boys joke around pool tables. The pre-teens are picking through a box full of toys, and the tots are rooting through a sand box outside.

But in one part of the yard, a long line of excited children – from tiny to teenage – is starting to form in front of a fenced area. Some carry one or two bags; others are pushing wheelbarrows and supermarket trolleys. Every container is brimming with glass bottles, crushed plastic bottles or cans.

At three o'clock a small team of volunteers supervised by retiree David Smith starts taking the first bags. The ones filled with bottles are slung up

on a portable scale and the weights are called out. Collections of plastic bottles and cans are quickly assessed for value. Another volunteer does a few swift calculations and hands each child a piece of paper with a number on it.

The child gallops off around the building and starts another line in front of the shop.

Now things get exciting, because inside is a place of treasures, presided over by volunteers Ruth Briggs and Nonopha Gama. The kids peer through the door, scanning the room for what they might take home today. On one side are clothes in various children's sizes, plus a rack of shoes. On the other side are toiletries – soap, toilet paper, toothbrushes, toothpaste, facecloths and towels. There are also pens, rubbers, crayons, colouring-in books and other mystical objects – torches, stuffed toys, balloons.

For some of them, it will be the very first item

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they've ever picked out for themselves.

The first wide-eyed child enters, holding out his piece of paper, on which is written the figure 5 – reflecting the weight and value of the goods he brought into the collection yard.

Nonopha and the child look through the offerings. Notebooks are 6 points (large ones 8), pens are 4, scissors 6, rulers 3, sharpeners 3, pencils 2, toothbrushes 7, facecloths 5, toilet rolls 5, and soap 6.

The clothes are very good value – a pair of shoes goes for 4, a towel for 10 and a jersey for 10.

Eventually five-year-old Ayaka Qothwana settles for a pencil and a sharpener.

Next is an eight-year-old, Siya Tofle, triumphantly bearing a piece of paper representing a veritable fortune – 25 points. It's a whole shopping experience for her. She tries on clothes and ruffles through nearly every item in the shop until triumphantly walking



Towns get cleaned up, recyclers benefit and children learn about the value of waste. What's not to love about the Recycle Swop Shop concept?

out with her loot: a pair of pants, a cap, two pencils, an eraser and a toothbrush.

Then it's Luxolo Gogwana's turn. The nine-year-old walks out with a dreamy look on his face. For three bags of recyclables, he's scored a paintbox, a facecloth and two pens.

A few mites who brought in only a few plastic bottles get consolation balloons or pencils.

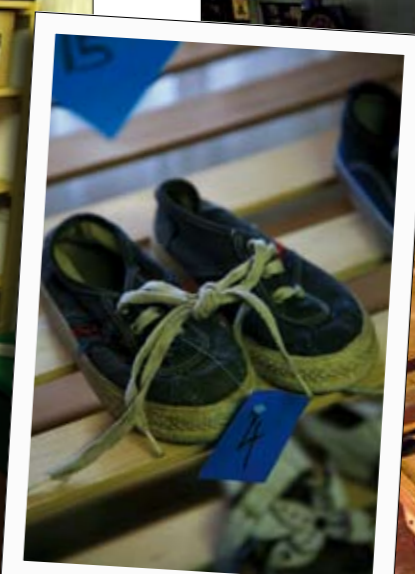
But that's not all ...

Every child is funnelled through another door, into Hou Moed's dining area, where the other volunteers – Thembilizwe Ngxiki, Ndyebo Gogo, Mpilo Mgoqi and Winile Mhlani – are waiting with day-old bread from Fruit and Veg City. Each child gets a modest doorstep covered in peanut butter and syrup.

Sixteen-year-old Winile knows the system well. Formerly a collector, now a volunteer, he was the poster child of the Recycle Swop Shop a few years ago. >>

□ Brothers Okuhle and Sihle Nongemani are regulars at the Masekhane Swop Shop in Gansbaai.

□ Zwelihle in Hermanus is a hardscrabble area with cheerful entrepreneurs.



□ Theo De Meyer of Hermanus says his heart was touched when he realised the children of Zwelihle had no place to play.

□ Recyclers start young. "I'm four years old."

□ Walker Bay Recycling come to pick up.

□ They come with bags, with wheelbarrows, with trolleys full of plastic, cans and bottles.

□ Even the smallest tots come with their recyclables (if adults collect, they're encouraged to give to the children).

>> It was a time when, as he puts it 'things were going up and down' in his young life. There was no money for school uniforms. But Winile, despite suffering severe epilepsy and crippling migraines, collected glass bottles from Verona Tavern in Zwelihle and over the school holidays, when the Swop Shop was closed, amassed an incredible 120kg of plastic bottles.

Marilyn van der Velden, the founder of the Recycle Swop Shop, says Winile was the first learner to earn enough points to 'buy' an entire new school uniform. Her husband Jan, a medical doctor, helped Winile and his father through the medical system to source the right medication to control his epilepsy.

Recycle Swop Shop is a well-loved project in Hermanus. Marilyn and Jan's own business, Zoete Inval Traveller's Lodge, has supported the Recycle Swop Shop, and, she says, so have scores of other businesses in the community.

The idea for the project was born in 2002. "At the end of that year I found myself in a local squatter camp on Christmas Day, handing out sweets,

distributing gifts and tying balloon animals with an elderly visitor from the US.

"I was stunned. Prior to this I had seen the children in schools and in institutional settings, but this time I saw the reality of their home life.

"I was not prepared for the shock of the poverty and destitution of children surrounded by nothing but sand and garbage. I left the township that day and cried out to the Lord, 'What can anyone do in this sea of need?'"

"It was then that the idea came: let them use what they have around them and recycle. Of course! A couple of phone calls, the support of a teacher at the nearest crèche, plus the agreement of the manager of Hou Moed Centre, Theo De Meyer, and we were on our way."

It hardly seems a coincidence that Hermanus's Overstrand Municipality won R1 million in the Cleanest Town competition in 2003 and again in 2005. Some of this money was channelled into the Recycle Swop Shop to provide a collections yard, an undercover waiting area for the children, storage

cupboards and garbage bins for Hou Moed.

And the idea is spreading. In nearby Gansbaai, a Recycle Swop Shop was started in Masekhane township in 2006. Housed in a colourful container decorated with handprints, it's run by staff members of the Great White Shark Project as part of a social responsibility initiative. Dyer Island Cruises also helps support the project.

"The township has definitely become a cleaner place since we started," says Abraham Newman, manager of the project. They have between 80 and 100 children coming in as regulars.

Similar Recycle Swop Shops have sprung up in Stellenbosch, Hout Bay, Botrivier and Villiersdorp.

Says Marilyn, "The great thing is that there is no one way to do this. The concept can be adapted to meet the unique needs of every community. The most important thing is just to start. I believe when our motives are right, we succeed." □

Map reference G2

For more information visit [www.swop-shop.za.net](http://www.swop-shop.za.net)

## Start a Swop Shop

A number of towns around the country have contacted Marilyn van der Velden, founder of the original Recycle Swop Shop, to find out how to set up their own swop shops. Marilyn says the key ingredients are passion, patience, persistence, a place, the people and prayer.

"In Hermanus, we work together with the hospice shop and other charities. We pass on any donated adults' clothing to them, and they pass on children's clothing and shoes to us.

"Obviously the received products must be sold or passed on to a recycling company. Just throwing them away would be pointless. But even though Walker Bay Recycling buys our bottles, plastics and cans, the money we get for them will never make us financially viable. Only donations and goodwill make the system work.

"We also recommend that the Recycle Swop Shop be used to serve only children. They learn about recycling, barter and arithmetic, and they pass on an ethic of keeping the community clean to their parents."

It's only children who are allowed to shop, but parents are welcome to help their children collect, says Marilyn.

"The Swop Shop vision is to empower children, encouraging them to use what they have around them to improve their conditions. The future of this country lies in the hands of today's children. And without hope or dreams, there is no future."

□ Siya Tofile, who'd brought in plenty of recyclables, enjoys a whole 'shopping' experience.

□ Clothes and shoes generally offer good value. All are donated.

□ Zwelihle township in Hermanus has almost no space for children's recreation, which makes the Hou Moed Centre so important to them.

□ Off the streets and playing at Hou Moed Centre.