

# Wilderness Therapy

## Namibia

### Newsletter



**Volume 4:** December 2011

Dear Friends,

The year 2011 will be well remembered by the Namibians as the best rainy year ever. This year we were not worried about finding water while we were conducting the Wilderness Therapy Hikes in the wilderness. We were more worried about how we were going to stay dry and warm! However, it was a wonderful privilege to be in nature, to see all the beautiful waterfalls, to hear the water rushing at the rapids, to experience the ice-rain and just to stand in awe looking at God's creation!

For this year's Newsletter there are contributions from the Facilitators as well as from the Participants of the 5 projects:

In March the **GRAVITY BOYS** from **ELLA DU PLESSIS SECONDARY SCHOOL, WINDHOEK**, hiked the Naukluft Mountains, and they want to give the following messages to future participants:

*"It is enjoyable. The first days will be tough for you, but it is fun to do it because you exercise. Don't be afraid of anything. Face your fears; it will contribute to your life's tasks. It will tell you who you are. It helps you to build relationships, be open and work as a team. You will become more independent, cope without your parents. You will learn to be strong on your own. You become more self confident. You learn to solve problems and to face challenges. Your attitude towards other people will change; you will have more respect for other people."*

And to those who sponsored the Programme they want to say: *"We want to say thanks to the people who sponsored our Wilderness Therapy. We appreciate it!"*



**Gravity Boys**

Edward D'Alton, completed Grade 12 in 2010, is an experienced Troop Leader Scout, and joined us on this hike with the Gravity Boys. He wrote:

*"When we first met the Ella Du Plessis kids, I had my doubts whether these guys would make 8 days and 120km in the Naukluft. When told that they can choose a name for their group they came up with Gravity Boys... I thought "ya well no fine...we'll see what gravity does to you in the mountains!"*

*When we arrived at Hiker's Haven and Hardus showed them how to pack their backpacks, I was convinced that at least half would have to be left halfway. I mean, the backpacks seemed bigger than most of them! Well, they all made the 1st day -*

*and the second - and the third - and then we had to leave two facilitators behind at Tsams Ost - and all the Gravity Boys made it!*



**Edward Dalton**

*This trip taught me a couple of things that I will remember for the rest of my life.*

- *I learned that a human being is adaptable and that our bodies can endure much more than what our minds tell us we can.*
- *I realized just how privileged I am to have grown up in a family with both a mother and a father. Most of these guys came from single parent families or are growing up with family or foster parents.*
- *I also learned that everyone, regardless of their circumstances, have dreams of a brighter, better future.*
- *Hiking the Naukluft with the Gravity Boys as an assistant facilitator gave me the opportunity to get to know myself a lot better and also the chance to share some of my skills and values with the Boys!*

*Thank you, it was a great experience!"*

What a great young guy to have with you on the facilitator's team!

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During the May school holidays **THE OMEYA'S** from **JG VD WATH SECONDARY SCHOOL, OKAHANDJA**, hiked the Gaub River. The previous years we had to dig gorras for water, but this year we could not even walk in the river as it was in flood! What a privilege.



Omeya's

We are proud to mention that one of our earlier participants joined us on this project as a facilitator-in-training. He was able to share his experience and knowledge with them and they could identify with him.

Barney's help was invaluable. He taught them how to pack their backpacks and he was the one who taught them fire making and cooking.

On the first day when I looked into the eyes of these young men I saw distrust, fear and pain in it, I felt tightness in my heart. However, when I looked into the same eyes on the last day and I saw pride, victory and joy, then I knew the truth in what someone once said: *"Nobody comes to the wilderness and is not changed by its impact, even in a small way."*

It is my prayer that they will build on the strengths they found in themselves.

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In June the **COUSINS OF ADVENTURE** from **REHOBOTH HIGH SCHOOL**, outfaced the icy cold weather and ice rain during their hike in the Naukluft Mountains .....and they survived to tell their story:

*"Although it was difficult for us, we never gave up. We believed in ourselves and were strong. The Wilderness is the most enjoyable place to be. What we learned have changed our mindsets and our lives. We became more responsible men, we see life from another point of view and we are more prepared for the adult world."*



Cousins of Adventures

*Our message for the youth of today is to never give up in spite of difficulties. Remember, practice makes perfect. The youth should stop alcohol and drug abuse, they should stand together and build up the community.*

*Always remember our Heavenly Father and thank Him because nothing is stronger than Him."*

And to all of you involved with the Programme they want to say: *"Thank you that you care for us without wanting anything back."*

Ockert Oosthuizen, pastor of the Reformed Church in Windhoek was one of the facilitators and he wrote about his first Wilderness Therapy Namibia experience:

*"Except for the great personal experience in the Naukluft Mountains – the enjoyment of God's*

*beautiful creation – the whole expedition, the hiking and interpersonal relationships built with 8 great young guys from Rehoboth, was fantastic!*

*One such peak moment was the day when one of the young men said: "I am a new man!" Everyone had to pick up a stone, write down the one issue in his life that held him back on the stone, and throw it backwards, down the mountain – never to look back on it again!*



Ockert Oosthuizen

*Surely, as Paul said in Phil 3:13-14 "Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Thus, make the most of every opportunity in life, because we live in evil times! (Eph 5:16)."*

*Carpe Diem!*

Theresa Olivier, social worker from the CBB, Swakopmund also made her debut as a facilitator and she shared the following:

*"As a facilitator I experienced how young people could be reached therapeutically, in a totally different environment than the traditional clinical-therapeutic office situation..... and with excellent*

results! Nature (wilderness) has a unique way to open a person's soul.



Theresa Olivier

*I was amazed by the energy of these young men. I was excited when I saw the potential of this young generation, although paralysed by emotional pain and disillusionment, and I dream of future balanced leaders, and a physically and emotionally healthy new generation.*

*It is my prayer that each one of the participants will benefit from the whole process and that one day they will make a valuable contribution to the community in which they will be adults"*

It was a privilege to have my colleague with me on the hike.

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In July the second group from **JG. VD WATH SECONDARY SCHOOL, OKAHANDJA**, the **GAMSBERG'S** hiked the Gaub River

Japie van Vuuren wrote about their experience:

*"What a way to start a Wilderness Therapy hike! The first night one of the participants set the veld on fire while going to the toilet. As you know a veld fire can spread at a terrific*

*speed, particularly if it is fanned by the wind, and most of the time there is wind on that part of the farm. For the next four hours we were fighting the fire and fortunately the wind turned and the fire died. It was already past twelve o'clock before we had finished eating and could go to sleep.*



The Gamsberg's

*During the debriefing session the following were noticed about the event:*

- *Initially there was no leadership as everyone was doing his own thing.*
- *Gradually two teams were formed in order to extinguish the fire.*
- *Some of the group members lost heart and quit. Only after encouragement they again joined the fire fighters.*
- *At the end they worked together as one team.*
- *It was learning out of experience!*

We are glad that they were all safe and that the damages were minimal but this incident only stresses the fact that we should be very cautious for veldfires especially in the dry season.

The rest of their time was blessed and as a bonus they made a new discovery of a beautiful Bushman painting!



Bushman painting

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The **GUTSY GIRLS** from **AUGUSTINEUM SECONDARY SCHOOL, WINDHOEK**, hiked the Fish River during the August/September school holidays and they were accompanied by their Principal, Mrs Beatrice Losper.



Gutsy Girls

All of the ladies wrote beautiful essays about their experience and I wish I could have published every one. However, I decided to publish one essay without shortening it:

## HOW THE WILDERNESS THERAPY CHANGED ME

*"This therapy was a success for me as it changed me so much so that it converted me into a totally new person.*

*My experience from the wilderness therapy got me more closer to people and gave me a totally new outlook on life. I knew myself as a stubborn person but that is no longer the case. I did not know myself having a warm and friendly disposition especially when talking to people.*

*I became more outspoken and extroverted and express my feelings more liberally. The therapy made me realize my purpose towards others, especially the destitute and vulnerable. It taught me that in life there are many challenges that we normally think we cannot overcome, but with Jesus Christ by our side, no hill and no mountain is too steep to climb and no river too deep to cross. We often lose hope and give-up on ourselves not knowing that we can find solace in Jesus, by casting all our worries and tribulations upon Him.*

*I take pleasure in having Jesus as my personal companion and do not want to imagine life without Him. I seldom went to church but after the event I became very keen on attending church and regard it as my harbour of refuge.*

*Before the adventure into the wilderness I lacked confidence and felt insecure and thought that I would cope with life only with the support of particularly my family. I became more mature than in the past and tackle life more boldly and vigorously. All these can only materialize through faith and perseverance. But on the contrary, I learned to live with the unchangeable.*

*I have to admit that the therapy made me fit and ready to take part in any sport code.*

*Finally, the therapy really taught me an invaluable lesson that in life we are all not complete and that there is a gap that only God can fill."*

For Mrs Beatrice Losper it was the most incredible experience of her life (and she is an adventurous woman!)

*"It was without doubt the most difficult, hardest, 'lekker' thing I've ever did. The untouched beauty of God's creation, the camaraderie between the 12 members of the group made it an unforgettable experience.*

*I was touched by the therapy sessions at the end of each day where the girls have the opportunity to do introspection and discover themselves. I also learned about myself.*



**Beatrice Losper**

*I am thankful that the 8 girls realized how privileged they are to participate in this experience and that it made an impact in their lives. As principal I can see the difference in these girls and some of the other teachers also noticed it.*

And to all of you involved with Wilderness Therapy Namibia she says: "God bless you and your work, and all the future projects."

One of the male facilitators of the Gutsy Girls, Marius Verwey sums his first Wilderness Therapy experience up in the following words:

*"So many memories to treasure – anticipation on the faces of eight young women.. A committed principal among them, urging them on, joining their ranks, making them believe they can do it.. Fresh air and clear night skies, the sound of a river flowing, meandering its way through this truly magnificent landscape. Facing yourself, your thoughts, your fears – alone in the dark.. Pressing on through yet another day of hiking – feeling the sun, the sweat, the heat.. Reaching the end with so much to be grateful for.. Coming to know eight young women – each with such wonderful potential.. And behind it all – the knowing, sense, experience that it is out here that lives can be changed, transformed, altered.... in truth, really, for now and all eternity....."*



**Marius Verwey**

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## THE MENTOR PROGRAMME

The Mentor programme is a very important part of the Wilderness Therapy Namibia Programme. The participants need the guidance and support of a trusted adult to encourage them to keep to the new commitments they made during the therapy process.

Fenny Shanjengange, the life-skills teacher from Ella du Plessis Secondary School was the mentor of the Gravity Boys. She wrote:

*"It was with mixed feelings that I chose the 8 participants. They had a lot of questions regarding their fears and the unknown they were about to enter. However they were very excited the nearer the time for the wilderness event came. I was disappointed that I could not accompany them on their trip and share their experience.*

*The experience resulted in many internal changes. When they came back, and after the feedback session, they admitted that they did not know that they had so much perseverance. They gained self-confidence and much more compassion and understanding! One of the participants decided to leave school, and I believe that this experience helped him to take responsibility for his own life.*



**Fenny Shanjengange**

*Unfortunately I could not keep to regular group sessions with the boys, due to my programme, but I am glad that they had the opportunity to discover their strengths and I believe that this experience will be a lifelong remembrance.*

*Thank you for all who contributed to the life of these young men. "*

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In Rehoboth, the /Annes Boys from 2010's mentor group ended at the end of the first term of 2011. One of the things they did during the mentoring period this year, was a course in Community Cricket, conducted by the Cricket Namibia Development Programme.

We started the mentor group with the Cousins of Adventure from Rehoboth High School, after their hike in June 2011. They invited the /Annes Boys to join their group.

For the Cousins the weekly mentor group sessions were encouraging and helped them to "never give up" and "it helps to go and see my friends every time and to share my problems with them".



**The /Annes Boys and Cousins of Adventures with paddle ski's on Lake Oanob.**

For our year-end function we spent the afternoon at the Lake Oanob Resort, Rehoboth with a braai and the opportunity for them to learn a new skill – paddling.

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Japie van Vuuren was the mentor for the Omeya's and Gamsberg's, both groups from JG vd Wath Secondary School in Okahandja. "We mainly focused on how they could use lessons learned from the hike in their daily

*lives, and discussing problems which they experienced and what they could do about it. We also discussed the merging of the two groups as one."*

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There is a close bond between Mrs Losper and her Gutsy Girls. Their mentoring process started in October 2011 and they are fortunate to have Tjatindi Ndjavera, one of their teachers to be their mentor. Hanli Roostee started a Bible Study group with the girls and they also participated at the Dutch Reformed Church Windhoek's Christmas Celebration with a beautiful dance of praise and worship.

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**A NEW EVENT!**

**REUNION 2011**

On 5 November 2011, 66 participants, facilitators, mentors and guests gathered for our first reunion since 2008 at Augustineum Secondary School. This was a wonderful and very happy event for all of us, to see each other again. The participants were very excited to meet the other groups who had gone through the same experiences as they had.



### One of the activities presented by Ben D'Alton

We listened with fascination to the gripping and inspiring stories some of the participants shared with the group, about the life changing effect their wilderness experience had on their lives and what changes they made.

The whole programme of the day, the motivational messages of Wilma Bruwer, the Regional School Counselor from the Khomas Region, Yvonne Stramiss, Psychological Counselor and Theresa Olivier, Social Worker, were very encouraging for the participants and especially those who still struggle with issues.

The participants expressed their wish for the reunion to become an annual event!

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### EMED RESCUE

We joined forces with EMed Rescue. Under the leadership of Eddie Bezuidenhout, the Managing Director of EMed we compiled a Rescue and Evacuation plan for the hikes in the wilderness.

We will keep them informed with the details of our hiking events and will contact them immediately in case of an emergency after which they will give us advice or implement the Emergency Rescue plan.

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### P.A.Y.

#### Physically Active Youth Programme

P.A.Y. is a Youth Led Organisation, a community based after-school programme, which provides a safe and constructive platform for a supervised after-school environment for the youth.

We made contact with them with the idea of possible future co-operation between us. We invited them and two of their leaders who were interested join us on our training hike in December 2011.

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### CHURCHES

Ben D'Alton gave a feedback talk to the three Dutch Reformed Churches in Windhoek that supported our Programme during the past 4 years.

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### FACEBOOK

We are also now on facebook. If you want to join us as a friend, please contact us so that we can add you.

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### SHAUN

Shaun-David Hendricks was one of the participants in July 2010. He died on 15 July 2011 after a short illness. There was a very special bond between Shaun and Ben, and Shaun gave Ben a gift made from a stone, a piece of wood and rope with the message: "Uncle Ben, jy is vir my soos 'n pa".

Ben wrote this poem in remembrance of Shaun:

#### *'n Hart van klip vir my Hart van vleis*

*(Ode aan SDH)*

*Ongewensde, onwelkome,  
Enkeling, verstoteling, vreemdelling  
Geen lêplek vir jou lyf  
Om van jou siel nie eers te skryf...*

*Enigste verweer*

*Enigste keer*

*Die verlate, verstotenheid te hanteer*

*Soos skilpad in jou dop gekeer*

*'n trek van die zol*

*'n teug van die wyn*

*Dit laat die leegheid stondelik verdwyn*

*Nuttelose nikswerd...*

*Nee!, Onesimus se kind*

*Die Gees, jou Gees,*

*Nuttig sal jy wees!*

*Die skilpad se dop word sag*

*Jy klim daaruit met gesag*

*Onreg wil jy nie verdra*

*In die waarheid is jy vry!*

*Nooit weer verlate*

*Nooit weer alleen*

*'n Prins in die paleis*

*Saam met die Vader op reis!*

*Jou hart van klip is altyd by my!*



*Ben and Shaun*

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### TRAINING

There were 3 training sessions during this year:

In April we did Reviewing training. The reviewing of activities during the wilderness

experience is very important to stimulate and develop the participants' ability to learn from experiences. Reviewing helps to transform a powerful experience into an empowering learning process and enhance personal and social development.

Yvonne Stramiss, a psychological counselor, presented the mentor training in June 2011. We still need committed mentors who will join us on this challenging but wonderful journey of mentoring our youth and helping them to improve their lives.

In December 2011 we did a 3 day hike with potential facilitators and gave them a basic training in the "why" and "how" of Wilderness Therapy. They also had the opportunity to personally experience part of the therapy process, which the participants go through. Three earlier participants, who completed school, joined us as they were identified as potential facilitators and leaders for the programme.

Lottie Vermaak also joined us on this training hike. She wrote:

*"I was one of the trainees that went on the Gaub Hike from 2 to 5 December 2011. What an experience it was!!!! God's hand and greatness was visible everywhere. I thought I was fit enough, but soon found out that I was totally unprepared for what lied ahead. I struggled through the river sand, the boulders and the mountain. The only place I was really in my comfort zone was in the water. There were times that I felt that I could just give up, but everybody stuck with me and encouraged me to go ahead. I also felt at times that I had disappointed my fellow hikers - which by the way are the most awesome people in the world - but they assured me that they were not disappointed or frustrated with me at all. I have learned so much on this journey and am very grateful for the opportunity. For the next hike I will definitely be 100% prepared."*



Lottie Vermaak

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### PLANS FOR 2012

#### For 2012 we plan:

- 5 Wilderness Therapy Projects with schools recommended to us by the Ministry of Education.
- Continue with the mentor groups of 2011 and start with the mentor groups of 2012.
- Start with an evaluation research. One of the reasons for such a research is that through continuous monitoring of the Programme, it could be improved and developed and adds to the impact and effectiveness thereof.
- Annual reunion: Wilderness Therapy Namibia Youth Conference.
- Taking part in the NGO expo in February 2012.
- Fundraising, marketing, training, recruiting of facilitators, group leaders and mentors.

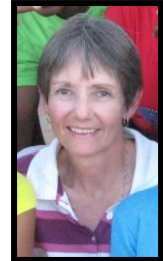
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During the year I often felt so overwhelmingly privileged and thankful towards God for the opportunity to spend time with these young people in the wilderness (and with some of them in the mentoring process.) To listen to their stories and to see how their self confidence grew as the days went by. And at the end of the journey to see the bright shining light in their eyes as they realized that they are special and have a purpose in life!

Thank you for your interest, co-operation and support of Wilderness Therapy Namibia during 2011. Please contact us when you need more information or want to become more involved.

And a special thanks to the Management Team, Hardus, Ben, Yvonne and John for your encouragement and enthusiasm during the year!

Kind regards!  
Pikkie Hoffman  
**PROGRAMME LEADER**



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