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home for the homeless questions in sport

## Cape Town homeless relocated during World Cup

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Their eyes are deep brown, wide and imploring. Their clothes are ragged and dirty. Their bodies are thin and bony and their feet are bare. On Long Street, the busiest strip in Cape Town, while locals catch a bite to eat during their lunch break or tourists cruise the clubs on a night out, they follow like strays, begging for "50 cents" or "money for food ma'am".

To see street children with absolutely nothing left to lose, not even their dignity, is absolutely heart breaking; yet it is a reality that many South Africans have come to live with every day. They also have to live with the fear of street crime, including pick pocketing, mugging, smash-and-grabs at traffic lights, and other crimes of desperation that are committed by these people on a regular basis.

These lost children are a result of a number of social factors: parental neglect; losing family to HIV/AIDS; drug addiction; gang membership; abject poverty; and more often a combination of these factors. It will take much investment by the government into housing, healthcare, education and skills generation for street-people and the homeless to see the quality of life they deserve.

### **Voluntary relocation programme or World Cup 'clean-up operation'?**

The City of Cape Town's latest housing initiative is to relocate street children and homeless people from the city centre to the Symphony Way Temporary Relocation Area, better known as Blikkiesdorp ('block town'), 30km from the central business district.

Critics are calling the plan a 'clean-up operation' for the World Cup, while the municipal government defends it as a voluntary and humane relocation programme that happens to coincide with the tournament.

The "2010 Street People Readiness Plan" is set to run from May-July 2010, but the details will only be made public in the coming weeks. City officials claim street children and homeless people will be 'treated with respect and dignity' during the relocation. Speaking to the Cape Times, city councilor J.P. Smith explained that the City of Cape Town had set aside housing in the temporary relocation area for 160 people, and that all those who will be moved there have volunteered to do so after 'three years of counseling'.

Blikkiesdorp, one of 223 informal settlements in the wider Cape Town area, consists of 1,300 3m x 6m corrugated zinc block-shaped structures, fenced in by barbed wire. According to the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign's website, 'Police and Apartheid era riot vehicles are stationed (permanently) at the only entrance...'

In an article for the Mail & Guardian, city spokesperson Kylie Hatton claims that Blikkiesdorp is an 'emergency area in terms of a national housing programme for people in emergency living conditions'. She also claims that is favourably comparable to other settlements in terms of access to services and nearby clinics, as well as 'shelter, environment and density'.

However, previous residents have described it as a 'dumping ground' and complained that it is unsafe, dirty and drug-ridden. Incidents of xenophobic tension have plagued the settlement in the past, and healthcare volunteers and food resources are reported to be lacking.

Many South Africans, homeless and homeowners alike, are waiting to see whether the "2010 Street People Readiness Plan" will offer street people more than a temporary solution to their problems - at least one that will last longer than the duration of the 2010 World Cup.

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