

Good morning, my name is Katie du Toit. I am honored to address you at this very first Karoo Parliament. What an exciting event! I want to share with you some details about the Karoo Eisteddfod, a matter which I am passionate about and after you have heard my presentation, I believe you'll share the same passion.

An eisteddfod is a festival or “kunswedstryd” of literature, art, music, and dramatic performances; an annual event where learners can showcase visual and performing arts.

In September 2012 the Karoo Eisteddfod Trust was properly founded through appropriate legal procedures and three trustees, Frankie Sequeira, Marie Visser and myself were appointed. Applications were filed to register the trust as an article 21 company and NGO.

The Karoo Eisteddfod is an independent entity, not linked in any manner to any specific organisation, political party or school. Why? We need to keep our hearts and focus clear – on our children, supporting their teachers, the arts and opportunities. But we are gladly taking hands with all role players; we are working closely with the Department of Education and specifically Mr Lovu Manona who share our passion for children and the arts and the Karoo Development Foundation, UNISA Press and all other interested parties.

Research was done and after the analysis of gathered information the following emerged as the main shortcomings:

1. none or very few opportunities exist in the greater Karoo area for learners from pre-school to Grade 12 to develop, learn or achieve artistic expression;
2. there is currently very little awareness and knowledge of the historical value and rich heritage of the area;
3. at art centres where art disciplines are being practiced there is no existing platform to showcase the end product;

It took a period of 12 months to establish the Karoo Eisteddfod as platform.

Our goals were formulated as follows:

1. To offer every learner opportunities for personal artistic expression.
2. To create awareness amongst learners of the treasure trove of art forms in the areas of music, dance, creative writing, drama and visual arts.
3. To develop a sense of self-esteem in every child.
4. To provide and facilitate mentorship opportunities to artists and businesses who wish to become involved in their own communities in the Karoo.
5. To recognise, nurture and encourage exceptional talent – face it, we have outstanding talent in our midst.
6. To promote nation building - if we can sing and dance together, we are sharing joy and laughter and together we face a much brighter future.

Although the annual event will be open to all learners who wish to participate, irrelevant of where they come from,, the funds and efforts of the trust are to be focused, for the foreseeable future, on the Pixley ka Seme district. Once all 99 schools in this area are involved, we will extend the boundaries into the Eastern Cape and Western Cape Karoo. The Pixley ka Seme district, stretches from Postmasburg to Norvalspont and Murraysburg to Hopetown and resources are very limited.

It was decided to present workshops during the first week of May 2013 as a means of introducing the event to teachers and learners and to equip everyone for the pending eisteddfod. These workshops were presented by the Arts and Culture Advisor of the Western Cape, Louis du Preez, and myself. Five workshops for 73 teachers were presented from 5 to 10 May in De Aar, at the Hantam Educational Trust, Noupoot, Richmond and Victoria West. A variety of lectures were given including practical dance choreography, visual art, and speech and drama presentations. The feedback was very positive. After the workshops, teachers received manuals, art materials and music recordings. To improve communication a website was set up which was sponsored by *doenit.net* and a social page on facebook. Please visit www.karooeisteddfod.com or www.facebook.com/karooeisteddfod

For this year's event De Aar Laerskool and Noupoot Combined School were used as venues, they have generously invited us back for next year.

The first Karoo Eisteddfod that took place in August 2013 received 503 entries (306 visual art works and 203 entries for performing arts). Each participating learner received a graded certificate and comments, aimed at promoting further development and growth. Our motto is "the cup is half full", and the positive feedback to every child aims to ensure growth and development is part of our policy to fill the cup. All the artworks were exhibited and covered the walls of De Aar Primary for a period of 21 days until after the prize-winners' concert.

And after many months of excitement and preparation the day of our price winner's concert on 30 th of August, dawned. This event was opened by young Marli van der Bijl with a one woman show, "*As Somer kom kuier*". Having grown up locally, this very promising, upcoming actress, who has just been nominated actress of the year with Sandra Prinsloo, Anamart van der Merwe and Amanda Strydom, motivated her young audience, knowing that the children from the Karoo possess exceptional talent and can make it to the top. I heard a little girl in the front row saying: "*You won't believe it, I have touched her.*" I am sure Marli felt the same 20 years ago participating in her first eisteddfod.

Our aim was to acknowledge learners for their outstanding contributions and achievements during the eisteddfod, and 200 people attended the prize-winners' concert where 70 learners received their awards. The learners each received a beautiful book prize and certificate, with some kids also receiving trophies for outstanding or merit performances. During this event winners also had the opportunity to perform their items.

21 teachers who guided and invested time in the achievers were honored with art books sponsored by UNISA PRESS.

Now, after the Eisteddfod has taken place for the first time, can we review the success of the actual event and strive to improve it. A financial reconciliation of expenses will also result in realistic application for funding for the next year.

Planning for next year is underway and very excited opportunities are coming forward.

Where do we get our funding from?

From you. Yes. People like you who want to join us, whether by contributing financially or otherwise. People who believe in the value of what we are doing and that we are making a difference. The Karoo Development foundation gave us a donation enabling us to donate art materials to 10 different schools and art centres. They felt it was a very small donation, but suddenly the opportunity existed for 5000 kids to become part of an art group, to practice art for the very first time.

Are we as trustees being paid? No, this is our passion and calling. Receiving any kind of remuneration will corrupt our goals and aims.

The experience up to now has been fascinating. We started off with very angry teachers attending workshops only to leave 2 hours later, breathless and full of smiles after they had danced their hearts out during demonstrations. At the concert we saw the same angry teachers, suddenly happy, tapping away their feet while their learners were performing on stage, like the stars they are meant to be with sheer joy showing on their faces.

I only realised later: **that** is what art does – art brings hope and joy to the children, the teachers and all who are involved. We have all experienced the lack of pure joy in our sad society and it is now time to open up the windows, switch on the music on and let the laughter of children fill our ears. If you have any contribution to make; materials; time; experience; don't postpone or hold back, please come and talk to me, call me or mail me. We appreciate all help and from our side we will help and support your community art initiatives.

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Art Greetings from the Karoo
Katie du Toit