

Barcelona, Friends of Martin de Porres

August 2025



The Friends of Martin de Porres project continues to operate out of containers at a site in Barcelona, an extension of the Daveyton township on Johannesburg's East Rand. People in the area struggle with access to electricity, water, refuse removal and municipal services in general, and must come up with their own solutions to problems.

The only clinic serving Barcelona, which itself covers a vast area, is situated at a far distance from where many of the beneficiaries of the project live. Transport costs are often beyond the reach of unemployed people. Many of the beneficiaries are undocumented migrants from neighbouring countries which adds to the challenges.

The project itself has faced some problems over the past year. There have been water cuts, and damage to electricity connections and the perimeter fence because of vandalism. There is a limited supply of water stored in several tanks on the property for emergencies. The municipality tank used by the people in the area when there are water cuts is also on the property. While the lack of refuse removal in the area is a huge problem, the staff and volunteers at the project have found ways to deal with refuse and to recycle whatever can be recycled.



More than a hundred people have weekly access to the soup kitchen. Whatever vegetables are available are added to one pot of nutritious soup. An interesting addition to the soup is the offcuts from Mass hosts made by the Carmelite Sisters, this instead of plain flour or some other thickening agent!

Some vegetables are grown in the garden, others are purchased. During the week the children attending the creche and pre-school get a couple of meals daily. Some bread is donated, but the project also purchases bread for about sixty children. Chickens are raised for the eggs and for the pot, and recently someone donated a few ducks which will in time become part of a meal.

People in particular need are given food parcels of whatever is available. One of the local parishes contributes items such as soap and toothpaste.

Donated clothing is passed on, and newborn babies and children are often among the beneficiaries.

On different days of the week, activities are offered for adults who are mothers and grandmothers of the children in the creche. Some of the women continue with sewing and crochet work. Making use of donated wool, a few women are currently crocheting skirts that will be used by the children at the end of year concert. On specific days vegetable gardening is the order of the day. Older women are offered manicures and pedicures from time to time by younger volunteers, with nail polish provided by a few donors.

Once a week there is an exercise group, and volunteers also provide support groups for people who face multiple problems. The volunteers are not professionally trained in counselling, but people benefit simply by sharing their problems with others. Whenever possible the Friends of Martin de Porres can help with additional interventions.



In the pre-school the children use workbooks from the Gauteng Department of Education even though the school is not registered with the Department. Each year some of them are readied to enter one of the local primary schools, having learned to count, to write, to identify and colour in shapes, and to play with

other children.

The teachers at the schools at which these children begin first grade have noted in the past that they have been well prepared. One of the volunteer teachers acknowledged that she has no formal qualifications, and that her qualifications are her love of and care for children and her wanting to assist with basic education and skills building. She finds it easy to work with them.



Donor funds were used to purchase school uniforms and shoes at the beginning of the year for needy children from the local schools, and blankets and warm tracksuits for the creche children in time for the cold Highveld winter.

One of the volunteers, a foreigner from a neighbouring country whose parents are deceased, was chased away from home by an uncle. She arrived in South Africa with her boyfriend. Neither has papers to live legally in South Africa. He makes a little money mending shoes, and in summer she sells ice-blocks and popcorn.

Another volunteer is from KwaZulu Natal, first coming to Gauteng in search of a job. She and her family live in a house, paying rent to the owner in the form of looking after the house. In her own garden she grows onions, leeks, peppers for her own use. She sees a value in helping people and passing on some skills.

Another volunteer from a neighbouring country also does not have papers to live legally in South Africa. She helps with the children at the creche, and is raising two grandchildren who are at school. Her own children do not live with her and are also unemployed. She comes to Friends of Martin de Porres four days a week. She is a widow and lives in her own house. Another volunteer lives with her boyfriend, who does various “piece jobs”, and three children. She grows peanuts, maize, sugar beans, some of them for selling.

Problems that are encountered in the area include unemployment, poverty, high rates of crime, drug use among young people, alcohol abuse by girls in particular, and sickness.

Women experience abuse by boyfriends, people default on medical treatment. Both the clinic and the police station are far from the project. So-called “patrollers” collect R 100 a month from different houses to protect them from robbery, etc. It isn’t always clear whether the patrollers themselves aren’t the thieves given that when money isn’t paid houses are broken into.

Everyone at the project loves Mam Ligia da Silva, the founder whom they see as a mother who has given so much to them over many years.

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