



Empowering Communities

**“Education is the most powerful weapon
which you can use to change the world.”**

- Nelson Mandela



Enhancing the early years of education within the amaZizi communities
of the Northern Drakensberg in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa







The greater Cavern family have been involved in community projects for many years.

Foreword

“What’s missing in the current debate over economic inequality is enough serious discussion about investing in effective early childhood development from birth to age five. [There is] the critical gap in skills between advantaged and disadvantaged children that emerges long before they enter school.” - James J. Heckman, Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago and Nobel Laureate in Economics, 2013.

The Cavern Berg Resort has long been involved in helping schools, crèches and communities in the amaZizi area through two key initiatives: Khanyisela Projects and Royal Drakensberg Primary School. Our aim is to give local children a strong foundation on which they can build to help in the long-term development and prosperity of our region and country.

We hope you enjoy our story and the images of early years education in our community. You may even be inspired to help us... you'll see that you'll not be the first!

The Cavern family

“Our core values are integrity, kindness, respect and work.” - Megan Bedingham, founder of Khanyisela Projects and Royal Drakensberg Primary School.



Education: the wider impact

“A large, high quality body of evidence, derived from 111 studies conducted in 40 developing countries, shows that early childhood interventions can have a reliable and positive effect on cognitive development.” - *Early childhood development and cognitive development in developing countries*. University of Hong Kong, 2014, Rao et al, funded by the UK Department for International Development.

We believe that by focusing on early childhood development, we contribute to the wider impact: transforming not just the lives of children, but their communities, and ultimately their countries, making them healthier and more competitive in the global economy.

BabyBoost is all about singing, cuddling, talking, reading, responding and playing - all necessary to provide a lovely framework for brain development.

The Cavern was awarded the Best Community Impact Award by the Business Excellence Forum in November 2017.







Our aim is quality childcare

So how does a child's experience at two years old translate into being a fulfilled, productive adult? Research shows that the learning gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children can show up as early as nine months. And by age three, children of low income families had half the vocabulary of more advantaged families. What's more, disadvantaged children can begin primary school as much as 18 months behind their more advantaged classmates.

Fortunately research also shows early childhood programmes can have a profound positive impact. Fifty-six studies across 23 countries found impacts on health, education, cognitive ability and emotional development. A study found that participants in an early childhood programme in Jamaica had 25% higher wages, 20 years later. Heckman says the return on investment in early childhood is even higher than from the stock market.

Quality childcare also helps parents to work and be more productive. Access to quality childcare increases stability by limiting absences, employee turnover, and other issues that reduce productivity. And there's a pressing need for such access as many countries seek to increase their rate of female employment.

Khanyisela developed from a desire to provide real learning and opportunities for stimulation so that the children grew their brains, which would make formal schooling a little easier.

“Boost development with parent power”

- Team BabyBoost



Enhancing early childhood development

BabyBoost

In response to the growing international recognition that the first 1000 days is a critical window of opportunity in a child's development, we recently developed and implemented a parent/caregiver package called BabyBoost.

Devised and delivered by a previous Cavern guest, Dr Marysia Nash, and assisted by her colleague Gemma McDonald, BabyBoost represents an important development in the education of babies up to two years old. Supported by Khanyisela, Royal Drakensberg Primary School, Cavern hospitality and funds raised in the UK, caregivers and their babies have now learned the value and practice of key interactions through workshops and individual home visits. Two local women have been apprenticed to BabyBoost to ensure continuity and sustainability.

Given the initial success of this initiative, Marysia and Daphne Thurlwell with our local "boosters," extended this to another community in 2018. So far about 24 babies

As most people in the area live in poverty, our projects ensure that children who attend our centres receive a nutritionally enriched porridge to supplement their diet.

and the caregivers have participated. Plans are currently unfolding for wider implementation with more workshops and the establishment of toy and book libraries.

The Khanyisela Projects

We know pre-school is vital so we focus on:

- Training and equipping teachers with the expertise needed to develop the children's full potential;
- Building new or additional classrooms;
- Upgrading and ongoing maintenance of school facilities;
- Supplying sufficient educational toys and books to each school;
- Providing a nutritionally balanced meal to every pupil, every day;
- Promoting parent and community participation in the management and implementation of programs;
- Stimulating the local economy by contracting small businesses/individuals from the community for services.

In this way over 650 pre-schoolers in 16 pre-schools now have access to a standard of early years education and resources previously unavailable.

Royal Drakensberg Primary School

Our aim is to create opportunities for every child to grow aware of their potential and to equip them to act on it. In the classroom, outdoors and in themselves, children are nurtured and encouraged to be their best. A solid academic programme, our situation in one of South Africa's most beautiful regions, and a dedicated team of staff ensure that children leaving Royal Drakensberg Primary School have a strong foundation on which to flourish.

Our objectives are:

- Children need to learn to read so that they can read to learn;
- To create a positive work ethic;
- Instill the qualities of self-discipline and self-reliance complemented by an awareness of interdependence;
- Achieve academic endeavour and excellence in an environment in which enquiry and scholarship flourish and are prized as ongoing and valuable;
- Nurture critical and creative thinking, the ability to exercise choice and to engage in self-evaluation and reflection;
- Uphold family values and foster a strong relationship between home and school;
- An acceptance of responsibilities, respect for others and a concern for the social and physical environment.

How we work together

Through the Khanyisela Projects, BabyBoost and Royal Drakensberg Primary School, we have created a net to ensure that children from the amaZizi area receive the best start available.

BabyBoost works with the vital stage of development when the child's neurological pathways are developing and extends mothers' and caregivers' understanding of rearing infants and toddlers. The early stimulation, advanced by having toy and book libraries, helps children to develop successfully.

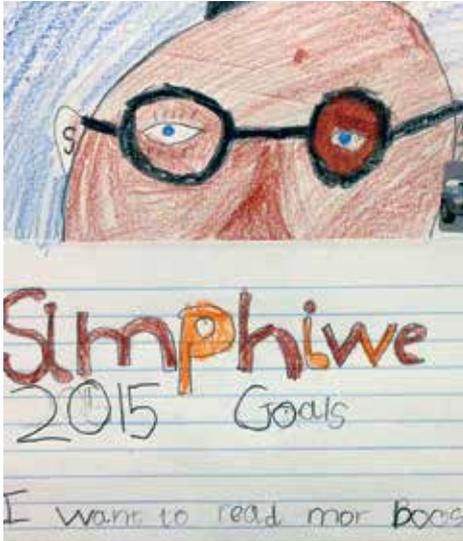
The Khanyisela Projects supports a network of pre-schools and crèches in the amaZizi village. Schools are equipped with infrastructure, resources and play equipment. Children are fed daily and come into an environment that is stimulating when the opportunity for development is colossal. Teachers are supported through training programmes and assisted with the upkeep of their buildings and facilities.

Royal Drakensberg Primary School provides a stimulating space with modern technology and a dedicated team of well-qualified teachers. This centre of excellence provides the opportunity for teachers to be mentored and developed, transferring skills and knowledge into the more rural Khanyisela pre-schools.



Donations received go towards purchasing books, educational toys, games, art and writing materials.





What we've done so far

We've built nine school buildings, installed ceilings and painted the buildings using volunteers and local labour. Schools have had gutters and water storage tanks installed. Some schools have been fenced and toilet facilities have been upgraded. Smaller work includes the installation of kitchen shelving and storage cupboards.

Jungle gyms, swings and educational toys, story books and equipment have been provided. We've also acquired sleeping mats, storage containers and cooking equipment. Fire extinguishers and first aid supplies have been organized for all the community schools.

We've identified teacher development as a core area in our work. More than 20 teachers have completed their Level 1 in ECD training, and another 20 have graduated from Level 4.

We believe that much of becoming an established and effective teacher comes from mentorship. We've identified two ladies from our amaZizi community who visit the other schools and provide guidance to help improve development. In addition to this, teachers are able to spend time at Royal Drakensberg Primary School, under the guidance of well-trained and experienced staff, to gather ideas and expand their knowledge.

We work with 16 pre-schools in the greater amaZizi community through the Khanyisela Projects and we've established Royal Drakensberg Primary School. Our reach extends to over 650 children.



Royal Drakensberg Primary School also helps to provide workshops for teachers from the community. These focus on different themes and help towards building better teachers and mentors for the children. The idea that we're all on a road of continual learning helps us all remain open-hearted and willing to try and do things for growth.

Greater support of our community is harnessed through the holding of regular jumble sales, providing knitted beanies, mits and jerseys to the small children. Excess clothing is donated to the clinics and surplus stationery to the primary schools in the area.

Team BabyBoost

"I don't think you can bundle love and energy more intensely. These ladies just exude fun. For me, the most remarkable skill was the very subtle and safe environment they created for our rural teachers; No judgement, no sharp words, not a harsh tone, just love and sharing and role playing, which created a space where knowledge and ideas could flow." - Megan Bedingham, from The Cavern website blog 2017: www.cavern.co.za/cavern-blog/



Children need to learn to read so that they can read to learn.



We keep a close eye on quality and consistency

Our team includes Megan Bedingham of The Cavern. A qualified teacher, she's on the board of Khanyisela and is intimately involved in ensuring effective delivery. Megan has lived most of her life in the area and knows the people and the challenges.

David and Daphne Thurlwell are our administrators and volunteer project managers. They come to the Drakensberg every four months and spend between three to five weeks in the area. During their visits they:

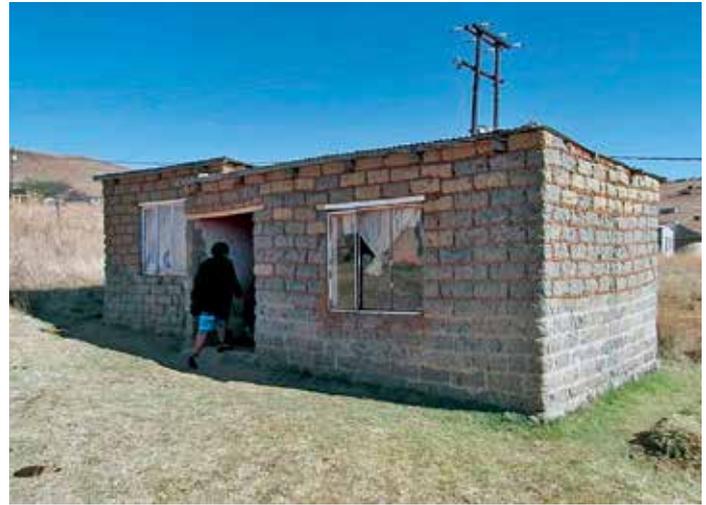
- Check on each of the pre-schools, ensuring that the teaching spaces are well organized and that the daily programme is followed;
- Meet with the local mentors and help them deal with any challenges they are facing;
- Assess any maintenance or building issues and plan future improvements;
- Monitor the delivery of the nutritionally rich porridge and check it is being used correctly.

We have a large support network of family and friends, so we keep administration costs down by doing the ground work ourselves.

These regular visits help establish the needs of the schools and open communication allows for further growth and development.

Our local mentors run exemplar pre-schools. They ensure that training is implemented and quality is maintained, and assist staff with general administration.

We also have our overseas volunteer consultants. These are UK professionals, who review and support development in the pre-schools by hands-on modelling and training. They have reported the positive impact of teacher training and mentor involvement on the children's learning experiences.



Sbusisiwe Pre-school before and after. Just over two years ago, this school consisted of two teachers and 12 children working in a small room with little space. (pictured above). In 2018, they had a brand new classroom, complete with gutters and a water tank, three qualified teachers and 35 children (right).





Meet our inspired tourists

Over the years, we've been touched not only by the generosity of guests in helping our funding initiatives but also by the time and expertise freely given by some local and overseas visitors. Here are some of their stories.

Daphne and David Thurlwell, South Africa

Daphne and Dave came to The Cavern as guests. They spent about 20 years holidaying here and then took early retirement and moved from Johannesburg to Port Elizabeth.

Terry Dunmore and his group of UK Rotarians had helped The Cavern apply for funding from the UK Lottery (2008-2009) and Daphne and David were concerned that if we did receive the funding we would need help. We were unsuccessful, but they offered to spend two years at The Cavern to help us get the Khanyisela pre-schools to a level in keeping with national and international standards. After a wonderful two-year stint from them we had schools operating efficiently and now they are committed to coming back every four months to check on things and conduct maintenance, etc.



Georg and Gertrud Rotter, Austria

Georg and Gertrud were holidaying and visiting projects in South Africa with another couple, Christina and Uli Strohm of German NGO, Share-for-Life. Christina and Uli, who've always helped the Khanyisela Project, introduced us to the Rotters in 2016 when they visited Royal Drakensberg Primary School with Dennis Goldberg. They were very keen to be hands-on and their contribution has ranged from painting Hlelokuhle pre-school to funding the Sbusisiwe Pre-school.



Terry Dunmore, United Kingdom

Terry, who first visited The Cavern as a guest many years ago, started the "Bread Fund" in the UK through the Retford Rotary Club. Initially the fund provided bread to each pre-school to make peanut butter sandwiches, but this soon changed to providing nutritionally enriched porridge. Terry completed the first UK Lottery application for us, he held car-boot sales, hosted breakfasts in his garden and completed other applications for us. A special couple, Terry and his wife Margaret (now sadly passed) were also very involved in organising knitwear from the UK, and together they've done countless good deeds to help us along the way.



Dr Marysia Nash, United Kingdom

A language and literacy consultant, Marysia first visited The Cavern in 2012 and asked to see Royal Drakensberg Primary School. On that visit she heard about how The Cavern was working with the local community to improve education. Two years later, planning a trip to The Cavern and having been inspired by the link to community involvement on The Cavern website, she asked to meet Megan to discuss what she could offer as a volunteer. The rest of the story is in the Cavernite blog at: www.cavern.co.za/cavern-blog/. Suffice to say that being involved with the work at The Cavern via Khanyisela Projects is one of the most fulfilling roles in her current work portfolio.



A Scots lady, Dr Marysia Nash (with the most beautiful accent) embraces language specialist Gemma MacDonald (also from Scotland). Marysia Nash spent time on the Khanyisela Projects imparting skills to caregivers, many of whom are grandparents who take care of the little children, while the parents go to work.

“The Khanyisela Projects have helped us so much and changed my life and the lives of a lot of children. I’m now running a pre-school with children in two buildings built by the Khanyisela Projects and employ four teachers, a cook and a gardener. The Khanyisela Projects have provided us with water tanks at the school and has paid for us to go to teacher training. The children have porridge every day. They’ve provided us with indoor and outdoor play equipment... with toys, stationery, tables and chairs. The community is also very happy as they can see the improvement in the children and how happy they are. I also now have the job of mentoring other schools in the area and each month I receive money from the Khanyisela Projects for my work. I am very happy.” - Gabusile Maduna (right) of Samekelokuhle Pre-school





Royal Drakensberg
PRIMARY SCHOOL





Royal Drakensberg Primary School's main fundraiser, Big5Hike for Education, is held over a weekend in May and is always a fully subscribed fundraising event.

At the turn-off to Sungubala, there once stood a roofless sandstone barn. Built with blocks from the surrounding hills, this lovely old building had stood empty for many years. It has emerged as our beautiful independent primary school – just 500m from The Cavern.

Royal Drakensberg Primary School

The Royal Drakensberg Education Trust aims to change lives through a focus on early childhood development

Royal Drakensberg Primary School is a happy school with high standards. The teachers are skilled and the classrooms are well equipped. The children are encouraged and supported in reaching their potential within a nurturing environment. Royal Drakensberg's mission is to teach children to read so that they can read to learn. It's essentially a step-up. A step into a brighter future.

Support by participating in the annual Royal Drakensberg MTB & Trail Run or the Big5Hike.

For more information visit:

- www.royaldrakmtb.co.za
- www.big5hike.co.za





We believe that the only way to make a real contribution to our community is through education.

Together with donations and assistance from other resorts, guests, friends and businesses, The Cavern hopes to give the local children a sound foundation for future learning.

Growing a school

by Megan Bedingham

Our Royal Drakensberg Primary has been going for just over ten years. It started because we needed to educate our own children and driving to town daily just wasn't an option. It grew from 16 little people in 2007 to almost 80 in 2018. Most of the little people come from our local amaZizi Village and many require support to attend our school.

It was interesting that people commented that we'd close the doors once our own children graduated. Honestly, there are days when it does feel totally overwhelming and we do wonder, but inevitably someone stronger in the family reminds us about how fabulous it really is and what a difference we can make.



One of the greatest challenges is to raise funds. We need about R2 million each year to cover salaries, transport and running costs of this precious place. The big problem is that it all looks so good that people wonder why it would need anything more... and so we have been wondering about HOW we share this story and gather more interest and greater support.

Well, isn't it fascinating that people come into our lives and suddenly an opportunity is sparked? We'd been so fortunate to host the Top Billing team and meet their talented Director of Photography, Mfundo. After a night of sleeplessness and wondering, I emailed and asked if maybe there'd be a little free time to try and tell the RDP (Royal Drakensberg Primary) child's story. And, yes... he'd make a plan. He'd travel in the deep of night to help us. This is an exceptional man and we're so grateful to him.

So we met at 5am on the Front Lawn and trekked across to amaZizi. The sun was coming up, the Amphitheatre mountain was a subtle pink and the early morning sounds were delightful. Chickens clucked, people stirred and there was the gentle hum of engines as the early morning commute began.

We hope to give learners a solid foundation for life-long learning, ultimately creating a community with a sense of self-respect and empowerment.

We were welcomed into Idah's home. The children were snuggled in their beds waiting for the filming to begin. They rose, brushed teeth, dressed proudly in their uniforms and ate their porridge before finding their taxi ride to school. Life in these communities is challenging. Water is still collected, homes need heating and supplies are far away but it's a space where one always feels welcomed and it is such an enormous privilege to help the children.

We hung out at the taxi rank, a very rudimentary space with a small tuckshop, but plenty of comings and goings. My folks had just arrived back from Australia and said how organised and efficient it all is there. As Loretta, my cousin, and I waited and watched we marvelled at how life happens and does work in this place too. Children get to school, parents get to work and everyone makes a plan.

The morning activity and filming captured the community. The comments were great, everyone played along and we hope to have portrayed the essence and spirit of life in the mountains.

*Royal Drakensberg Primary School
- standing proud and glowing in the
sun, this double-storey thatched
building looks out over the valley
it now serves.*





We hope that our morning will tell a story of a community and its children and the desperate need for a quality start. These children come from their small homes into bright and beautiful classrooms, properly resourced with a dedicated team of teachers. They receive a bowl of porridge, they are showered with love, they are encouraged to be the best they can be as they learn and grow.

Essentially we all hope for the same things – our children to be happy, to have the best start and to be what their hearts desire... It's just a chance at a significant life. What we do know and have learnt, is that this starts well before formal schooling and so children turning four come to us to be stimulated, loved, supported and encouraged. Their brains grow and they are open to learning and when the real formal stuff happens in Grade 1, they are far better prepared.



Everything that is good requires work and we will continue to tell our story and to bring others on board to make a proper difference. The thing is when you do good it comes back. It comes back a hundred fold and is the source of what we all desire – happiness. Maybe even more than that. Joy, the deep-in-your-bones kind of joy.

- Watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-TiCGxm72GQ> or search on YouTube for: "Royal Drakensberg Primary School 2018" for a short video which tells the story.

We've always been involved in growing our community - it's just something our parents and grandparents instilled in us as individuals.

It is very important to know that collective energy makes great swirls. It creates waves of positive change.





My time at Royal Drakensberg Primary School

A reflection from those leaving us...

Simphiwe Hadebe

I have been a member of Royal Drakensberg for 7 years. I started in 2011 and will be leaving at the end of 2018. I am sad to be leaving as RDP has been such a big part of my life. I am sad to be leaving as I have had great teachers and learnt so much. In grade 4 and 5 year we learnt how to use computers and have been using them to research, type and look up words we do not know.

Mr Mackenzie makes us use computers even for maths. I love RDP because everyone there is kind and respectful. I am going to Bergville Primary next year where the classes are much bigger and it is in town.

I will miss the mountains outside my door and the fields I play on. I think I will miss the sport and especially the swimming. We go up to The Cavern and are taught how to swim, even those of us who are very scared.

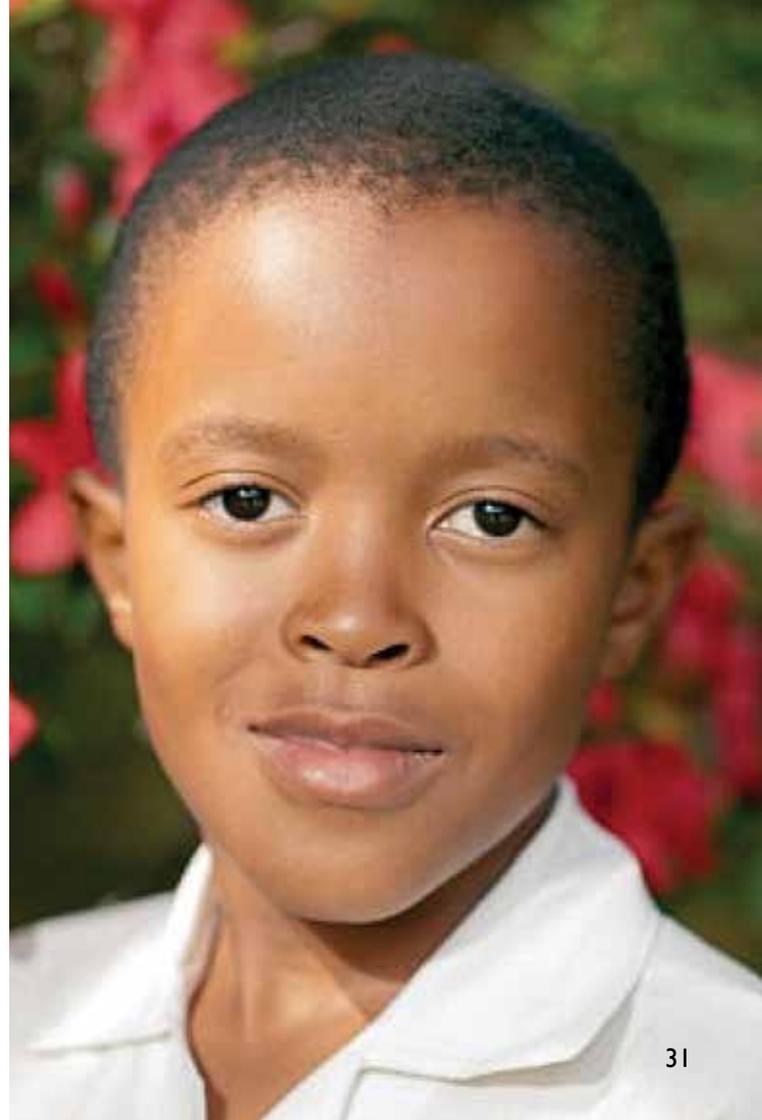
Ayanda Dlamini

I will miss RDP because the teachers are so nice and helpful. I started here when my brother was in grade 1. When I got to grade 1 he helped me with my homework a lot. The hardest grade for me was grade 3, suddenly we had real maths like multiplication and division and it was very hard.

I have loved my outings in grade 4 and 5. In grade 4 we went to sleep in a cave, the walk up was so far but we could still see the school in the distance. We had to collect wood and cook over a fire. It was very scary in the darkness and when we went to sleep some of my friends snored so loud.

In grade 5 we went near Winterton to a place called Tugela Trails, it was so much fun and we learnt lots about how to pack a hiking bag and how to choose a place to camp. I did not like bathing there as the river water was so cold.

I am going to Bergville Primary next year, it will be a big change as the school is very big and I think I will get lost.







The Cavern valley, with the resort amongst the trees and Royal Drakensberg Primary School in the foreground on the right hand side of the road.

Making a difference every day

“Quality education is the key to helping us address many problems. Life is about continual learning. I think we make great teachers if we are always open to this... And watch out folk - in one way or another, we all teach!

Contact us if you are keen to join the great walk for education. There are hundreds of little folk who are in desperate need of a quality education.

You can help make this happen - just one foot in front of the other, breathing in the amazing landscape of the Drakensberg, and getting your friends and family involved.”

Megan Bedingham - *40 Day Hike Journal*, 2014

“Do your little bit of good where you are. It’s those little bits of good put together that can overwhelm the world.”

- Desmond Tutu

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Mailing List:

Join us on this journey to provide aid to schools, crèches and communities in the amaZizi area. Sign up to receive updates on the projects.

Tel: (+27) 36 438 6270

E-mail: projects@cavern.co.za

How you can help

All donations go straight to where they are most needed.

Donations can be made to:

Account Name: The Northern Drakensberg Khanyisela Projects
Bank: First National Bank
Swift Code: FIRNZAJJ
Branch Code: 25 06 55
Account No: 627 0025 6565
Reference: Your name & mobile number

Account Name: Royal Drakensberg Primary School Society
Bank: First National Bank
Swift Code: FIRNZAJJ
Branch Code: 25 06 55
Account Number: 621 2535 5893
Reference: Your name & mobile number

Both Royal Drakensberg Primary School and Khanyisela Projects are registered 18A organizations with independent auditors



“Our work is to create beauty, to make the land more fertile, to make our living, to leave the world better than when we came into it.”

- Bill Carte, 1941, The Cavern, Founding Grandfather

