



## **MSR: Bringing hope to the unemployed**

By Belinda Beukes



The sun is setting over the trees surrounding the Pionierspark cemetery. Tomas sits on the pavement - tired and hungry - and disheartened. Today no one has offered him work. Today he has no money to take home to his family. He will have to try again tomorrow.

This scenario plays off all over Windhoek where men in the same situation gather on the side of the road looking for casual job opportunities so they can take money home to provide for their families.

Tomas was one of them. He grew up in Oshakati and completed Grade 12 at Opumbu Senior Secondary School, after which he came to Windhoek. "My first employment was at Ramatex where I worked in the cutting department for a year", Tomas recalls. "When Ramatex closed in 2005, I was forced to join the men on the side of the road, as I had very little work experience and could not find a job. This was very emotional, as traditionally the man brings in the money to provide for his family." During these very difficult times, Tomas heard of the Men on the Side of the Road (MSR) project. He registered with the project when it was launched in 2007. "MSR really is a lifeline for those men along the side of the road. We are offered training opportunities to better our lives" he explains. Today he is a Field Worker at the MSR offices in Katutura, where he assists General Manager, Janet Aston in running the office and interacting with the members at the various sites around town.

Launched in October 2007, the MSR Project is a charity organisation that connects the unemployed with working and training opportunities. The initiative was adopted from a similar organisation, which was running in South Africa at the time. This will be achieved by placing its members in suitable jobs. MSR works in partnerships with local government, local corporates, individuals, and overseas funders to help put the unemployed off the streets and on the road to success. Currently the project has about 400 registered members, who benefit from the various opportunities the project has to offer. The job sites are situated in Pionierspark at Hochland Road (outside Old Location Cemetery), in Eros at the corner of Nelson Mandela and Kuiseb Streets (Nampost parking area), in Khomasdal at the corner of Hans Dietrich Genscher and Angeller Streets and in Olympia at the corner of Softball and Hella Kuppe Streets.

For Tomas, getting up at 05:00 each morning, to walk for an hour and a half to reach one of the job sites with the hope that someone will pick you up for a day's work, has been a very frightening experience. And after a day in the sun, wind and rain, the long walk back to his home in Greenwell, Katutura was humiliating. Getting home with little money, or no money at all, looking into the eyes of your loved ones, and not being able to provide for them – the young worker knows how it feels to be unemployed. He has been there.

But he has been lucky: later in 2008, Tomas heard of a vacant position as a Field Worker at the MSR office. He applied and soon was appointed in the position and has since mastered his computer skills and has become a trainer to train the MSR members on money saving skills. "I am grateful for the opportunities to improve my living situation. I now have a steady job where I can help others. My future aspirations include improving my Grade 12 marks, getting a driver's license and enrolling for an administration course", he explains excitedly and shares a very important tip with the unemployed still out there: "Build good relationships with the people who offer you work, as they will then come back and ask for you again".

Tomas recognises the people who support this worthy course: "I would like to thank everyone who has helped the unemployed in one way or the other. These men have little or no education, and those with education do not have the money to further their studies. I trust that your help will continue".

Today, Tomas can paint a very different picture from the worker who took on nature's elements very early each morning a couple of years ago to get to the MSR site, hoping to get a job for the day. Now he has a bright future full of possibilities to look forward to. He wakes up at 06:00 in the morning to get ready and can take a taxi to work and back. The office is also situated within walking distance from where he now lives, as he can afford better accommodation. Without having to walk long distances each day, Tomas has won precious time to spend with his family.

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General Manager, Janet Wicks who is heading MSR since March 2008, lists the current project proposals that need funding and expertise from people who would like to make a difference:

- Upgraded computer equipment (new server, desktop and laptop).

- A telephone to replace one that blew in a recent storm.
- The vegetable project: An innovative project that will enable families to grow a variety of vegetables in a small space, using an infrastructure of low cost or found materials. Implementing this project will also create self sustainable opportunities in the North.
- Marketing & awareness raising campaign: A drive to market MSR and raise awareness of our aims, while at the same time enabling some of our members to develop their leadership skills.
- Drop in and job centre: To develop the existing service to include training, counseling and available job opportunities.
- The bottle recycling project: Using empty water bottles collected from restaurants and to clean, re-label and refill these with commonly used household products such as soap, washing up liquid, etc. which can then be sold by our members as an income generating activity, both for themselves and for MSR.
- MSR seven-a-side football team: A football team comprising of MSR members which will develop team work, confidence and self esteem and channel their energy into constructive activity.
- Employment scheme: Continuation of our activities of registering and maintaining contact with our members, and finding available job opportunities.
- Training scheme: Implementation of our Six step approach to develop 'job readiness' and vocational skills among our members.

Some of the people and organisations who support the work MSR do by providing financial help, advice, places, courses, etc.:

- Capricorn Investment Holdings Ltd.
- Bank Windhoek
- Sanlam Namibia
- Santam Namibia
- NG Kerk Eros
- Schoemans Office Systems
- PWC
- Herman Mans
- The Ministry of Labour
- Khomas Regional Council
- The Pinnacle Metropolitan Empowerment Trust
- Avril Payment Solutions
- Skills for Africa
- The Kayec Trust
- The DED
- EMS Driving Academy
- Jowells Transport Services
- The Ministry of Education
- Janton Consulting cc
- Habitat Research & Development Centre

To get involved in this project, or assist in providing job opportunities, please visit the website for more information: [www.msr.org.au](http://www.msr.org.au)

**Contact details:**

Tel: 061 - 305892

Fax 061 - 307205

Cell Janet: 081 321 7752

Cell Tomas: 081 443 8136

email: [office@msr.org.au](mailto:office@msr.org.au)