



# A SMART WAY TO GIVE

When former banker and IT specialist Melanie Burke moved to Cape Town, one of the first friendships she formed was with Margi Biggs, co-founder of StreetSmart. “We were chatting one day about doing something together,” Burke says. “[Biggs] whipped out the StreetSmart table card she had brought back with her from the UK and asked whether I would like to become involved with this in South Africa. That was 10 years ago. And I am still thrilled to have been invited to help start StreetSmart SA!”

Over the past decade, the public benefit and non-profit organisation has expanded across Gauteng and the Western Cape. It’s now active in nine centres, while similar StreetSmart organisations operate independently in the UK, Australia, New

Zealand, Canada, India, the United States and the Netherlands.

#### How does it work?

The organisation raises funds by adding R5 to each table’s bill at participating restaurants. The donation is voluntary and diners are able to contribute more if they so wish. Every cent of those donations goes towards social and educational projects that uplift street children and other vulnerable youth.

“StreetSmart resonated with my professional philosophy to enable real impact and sustainability,” says Burke. “Not to throw money at the problem but to ensure that real outcomes are achieved in the areas that matter most, such as education, skills development, family reunification and societal integration.”

For the past 10 years, StreetSmart SA has used good food to do good. **Eugene Yiga** speaks to founding member and new chairperson Melanie Burke.

For a project to benefit from StreetSmart SA funds, it must actively help at-risk children by running programmes that help normalise their lives. The project should have been around for at least three years, and must be properly constituted and registered with the Department of Social Development.

If the organisation can also provide audited financial statements and outline the impact of the project with a clear indication of outcomes and achievements, it will be considered as a StreetSmart SA beneficiary. Thereafter, it can provide a proposal in line with available funding.

“Our impact has been in... supporting and enabling our beneficiary organisations with financial [aid] to the value of over R5 million,” Burke says. “StreetSmart SA has financed some 19 programmes that directly

Photos: Ravi Gajjar, supplied



## THE SIMPLEST WAY FOR YOU TO GET INVOLVED IS TO HELP OUT BY EATING OUT

and positively impact the lives of children. Some of these funded programmes involve job creation, provisions for social workers and auxiliary social workers, in order to assist the youth with life skills training and statutory interventions.”

In 2014, StreetSmart SA raised over R1 million through participating restaurants. “We applaud our restaurant partners,” Burke says. “They go beyond the call of duty and put their heart and soul into their efforts to help us raise funds for our beneficiaries.”

One example of the organisation’s impact stands out for Burke. It’s the story of a young boy who attended Learn to Live Independent Skills School from January to December last year, after he couldn’t perform in a mainstream school environment.

“At first he was considered an introverted, withdrawn child,” Burke says. “[People] gave up on him... He then joined a panelbeating workshop where he was coached in life skills training, reading and writing. He soon came to be known as a hardworking, enthusiastic and intelligent young man who didn’t let life’s challenges deter him from becoming a better person.”

As he started to show leadership skills, the boy was nominated to be a prefect. He went on to fulfil his duties, gaining respect from teachers and pupils alike. Now he’s enrolled at the Best Centre in Woodstock and hopes to become a mechanical engineer.

#### Looking ahead

As StreetSmart SA celebrates a decade of making a difference, Burke is excited to be taking on the role of chairperson. In building a successful consulting business, she has worked across the private, public and civil society sectors as a practitioner of change.

“It is a real privilege to lead an incredible group of people into the next phase of our commitment to achieving the vision of StreetSmart SA,” she says. “I feel welcomed, supported and energised by the board members and by all the beneficiary organisations and members of the public... also our partner restaurants and sponsors, who contribute towards this shared vision.”

Burke describes the organisation’s future goals as multipronged: to be part of the process of social normalisation, to educate the public on responsible giving, and to partner with a variety of organisations who can support their goals and those of their beneficiaries. But their biggest goal is to take StreetSmart SA to every city throughout South Africa, so that local communities can help the vulnerable children on their streets in a responsible, sustainable way.

“The opportunity is always to sign up more restaurants,” Burke says. “Of course, securing a corporate sponsor and partner is another endeavour we are committed to,

Opposite page: StreetSmart SA chairperson Melanie Burke, with children from the TLC Outreach Project in Table View. This page: Archbishop Desmond Tutu poses with a group of children.

which will give StreetSmart SA operational security and enable us to increase our marketing efforts to restaurateurs.”

For this reason, they are actively seeking a headline sponsor. They predict that the need for the services of StreetSmart SA beneficiary organisations will increase as the societal challenges grow, especially as they relate to preventative work that ensures at-risk children don’t end up on the street.

“We’re always interested in partnerships such as corporate social investment opportunities, employee volunteering, fundraising initiatives, responsible giving campaigns and payroll giving,” Burke says. “Examples of meaningful sponsorships include pro bono services from organisations such as Grant Thornton, Formeset Print, CNT Graphics, Aaldering Wines, Out of this Planet Catering, GC Communications, SitePro and Zoom Advertising. These are all useful ways to support the work of StreetSmart SA and reduce our administration costs.”

#### Want to help?

There are many ways for the public to get involved and support StreetSmart, says Burke. The organisation encourages volunteer participation to raise funds, assist with events and projects, and to help convince local restaurants to become StreetSmart. But the simplest way for you to get involved is to help out by eating out.

“StreetSmart SA is a wonderful team effort by all our restaurants and their staff who have shown, over and over, that every R5 donation can have a real impact [on] the lives of vulnerable children,” she says. “We encourage the public not to give money into the hands of a child as this keeps them on the streets. In essence, eating and donating at a StreetSmart SA restaurant is a responsible way to help a child.” **TBI**

For more information, please visit [www.streetsmartsa.org.za](http://www.streetsmartsa.org.za).

