



NELSPOORT

ADVICE OFFICE AND DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Nelspoort is a small rural town about 50km from Beaufort West in the semi-arid desert of the Central Karoo.¹ It lies in an abandoned section of the old N1 highway between Beaufort West and Three Sisters on the road from Cape Town to Johannesburg.² The town was established in the 1800s on the original Nelspoort Estates farm owned by John Molteno, who successfully started a merino sheep farming estate in the area. Molteno subsequently became the first prime minister of the Cape colony.³ The town was also renowned for its TB sanatorium which was located here to take advantage of the dry, clean, fresh air of the Karoo mountains, and provided employment for many local villagers. The closure of the sanatorium in 1970 and the change in the route of the N1 has led to the drastic shrinking of the town's economy and unemployment soaring. Census 2011 recorded 1 699 inhabitants in Nelspoort, 80,93 % who identified as Coloured and 16% as Black African. The most spoken language is Afrikaans (90.44%) followed by isiXhosa (2%), Sesotho (2%) and English (2%).⁴

The Nelspoort Advice and Development Office (NADO) was established in 1998 to offer access to justice to the poor communities of Nelspoort and surrounding areas. NADO was part of the Advice Offices of the Central Karoo, Southern Cape and other partner organisations who marched to Constitutional Hill to hand over a petition in solidarity with farm workers who still suffer under illegal evictions and unfair labour practice in spite of the Extension of Security of Tenure Act (ESTA). The Advice Office with the assistance of SCAT has started a YouthBank to stimulate economic opportunities for young people in the town.

1. Nelspoort Travel Information. (2019.). Retrieved October 12, 2019, from <https://www.karoo-information.co.za/routes/town/175/nelspoort>
2. Nelspoort Travel Information. (2019.). Retrieved October 12, 2019, from <https://www.karoo-information.co.za/routes/town/175/nelspoort>
3. C. Schoeman: The Historical Karoo: Traces of the Past in South Africa's Arid Interior. Penguin Random House South Africa. ISBN 1770225684 p.49.
4. Frith, A. (2019). Census 2011: Main Place: Nelspoort. Retrieved October 12, 2019, from census2011.adrianfrith.com website: <https://census2011.adrianfrith.com/place/183003>

FAST FACTS

NAME: Nelspoort Advice and Development centre

LED BY: Arie Jonkers/Claudia van Staden

MAIN CHALLENGES FACED BY THE COMMUNITY: Unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, orphaned and vulnerable children

MAIN ACTIVITIES: Paralegal services to members of their community and surrounding areas; home based care support programme; orphaned and vulnerable children's support programmes; feeding scheme for destitute children; job creation projects

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HOW I BECAME A MASTER CHEF OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S DREAMS



Felix Robertson (SASSA), Vivian Lund, Me Ghom (SASSA), Anista Swartz and Getruida Pienaar at farmworker rights workshop in Nelspoort.



Nelspoort Advice Office.



Claudia van Staden facilitating a workshop on farmworker rights.

CLAUDIA VAN STADEN TRAINED TO BE A CHEF AND HAD SECURED A JOB IN A RESTAURANT IN PLETTENBERG BAY. HER MOTHER'S SUDDEN DEATH MEANT SHE HAD TO RETURN TO HER SMALL KAROO HOMETOWN OF NELSPORT. BACK HOME, HER LIFE TOOK ON A NEW DIRECTION WORKING FOR THE ADVICE OFFICE, COOKING UP RECIPES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE TO ATTAIN THEIR DREAMS.

"Pregnant! Who would want to be a mother now, my life has only now begun?" That was my reaction when I found that I was pregnant with my first child. I was 18 years old, still a child myself. Defeat, however, was not an option, as I had another human being dependent on me. My precious child expected me to take the world head on. Shame and scandal were to be part of who I am, I thought. I returned to college and completed my Diploma in Professional Cookery, although I wished to become a teacher.

I had to provide for my child, so staying at home with no prospects of employment was not an option. My working life thus started on a game reserve in the Eastern Cape. My employers on the game reserve made sure only the best and most beautiful was on display to guests. The workers on the game reserve, on the other hand, had no value and were treated as such. Witnessing the treatment of my colleagues broke my heart. As always, I could not stand by and continue to witness this mistreatment. How is it that in this day and age workers still face discrimination and abuse? My soul rebelled against the injustices of the working conditions. Workers had to hitchhike back to the main town, when there were a number of vacant cars on the premises. It did not take long for me to realise that I had to leave the game reserve, as I would not be able to sustain my silence any longer.



CLAUDIA VAN STADEN



After deciding to leave the game reserve, I came across an opportunity to work at a restaurant in Plettenberg Bay. Young and full of energy, with the world at my feet, I packed my bags and headed to the coast. This was the best professional move I made, in terms of my trade as a chef. Little did I know that this would only last a short while. Soon after I started work at the restaurant, my mother passed away. She passed away during a time in my life when I had the leisure to decide the direction my life would take. The death of my mother, however, soon made me realise that my options were very limited. With my dreams shattered, I persevered. I started working in the bakery at the local Advice Office.

And so, the next chapter of my life began. Working in and with the community has many ups and downs. Initially I faced many challenges. My community did not want to accept me, although it was my place of birth, here in the heart of the Karoo. How do you give your all to a community that does not accept you? Maybe this was their way of dealing with their collective pain, visible on their faces. Tears, determination and the prayers of a grandparent was the order of the day. Thus, my new journey started as an activist and social development worker.

The wellbeing of the people of Nelspoort lie close to my heart, although the prevailing conditions may be overwhelming. Still, the fire of development, change, hope and dreams always win in the face of adversity. It brings back a memory of a young man, who today had graduated with an LLB degree. Although he had achieved great academic success during high school, he had not secured placement at university and was at risk of forming part of the unemployment statistics. In our attempt to assist this young man in achieving his dreams, we started enquiring on his behalf. We were informed by the university that he was on a waiting list and would be considered in due course. Not happy to wait for an answer when this young man's future was at stake, I decided to drive to Cape Town and pay the university a visit. We had an audience with an official and explained the context of the young man, with his outstanding matric results as evidence of his brilliance. Four years later, this young man graduated with an LLB degree. Today, we have a lawyer in the community. *Tannie Claudia* (Aunty Claudia), as my community refers to me now, became the go-to person for assistance in achieving your dreams. Over the years, many people have benefitted and achieved their dreams, a process in which the Advice Office plays a vital role.

Despite our ongoing success, it is not always sunshine and roses in Nelspoort. Despite our challenges, however, the Nelspoort Advice Office continue to advocate and work to better the conditions of farmworkers, women and the youth of our community. All this success, however, would not be possible without the assistance of SCAT, who have been walking the road to improving people's lives with the Nelspoort Advice Office for the past 15 years.