

### **Case-study: The Princess Project**

“Please take my child!” Mama Takawira pleaded. “You have taken other children into your school, I know. Mama Edith’s girl is there. The late Baba Kumalo’s girl is now with you too!”

“Mama Takawira please be reasonable. We only take children into the programme who are orphaned or destitute. We know you are working in the market. You can afford to pay school fees for your children.

“So I will stop selling, and then you will take her! Is it only the children of lazy people who get help? You don’t know what you are doing. Some of these girls you have taken, are from families much better off than me. You are favoring. This is not good, you are in trouble Miss Nicky!”

Things were starting to unravel. Over the past two days there had been at least ten other families come to the project and argue that they should have places in the Princess Project, on top of the many others who came to enquire. And, the centre had been broken into again over the weekend. This time they had lost the computer and printer, which was better than last time when the new roofing sheets and both external doors were stolen. She needed to talk to the local Councilman.

The project had begun so well. After some initial research with organizations working amongst street children in the city, it was obvious that there was a gap in programs that worked with older street girls, or prevented girls from ending up on the streets. Nicky had decided to focus on prevention in a slum, which other organizations had identified as being a key source of street girls. It was hoped that through the work with the girls the whole community would be developed. Her organization, Freedom, had agreed with this direction.

The slum was muddy and a maze of ramshackle dwellings made from all types of material. People collected water from broken pipes. The toilets were shared and there were too few. She noticed many girls working around the slum houses or in the market.

She and the young volunteers from the UK began to build relationships with the girls. She then rented a property and renovated it, and started to invite girls to come to the centre after school. They tried to screen the girls by asking the local school Head Teacher and a Pastor to identify which girls most needed support. It wasn’t long before they were running a daily after-school programme, and had set up a sponsorship programme linking friends at home to one of the girls, that was to be administered by Freedom... Now this.

Nicky walked across the slum to the Councilman’s office. There was a queue but after the Councilman learned that a white person was there, she was soon shown in. After the necessary greetings and pleasantries, Nicky explained what she and her friends were doing and the problems they were facing.

Instead of sympathy and concern the Councilman began to laugh. Nicky squirmed. Then he spoke. “Miss Phillips I have known of your activities for some time, and I know your intentions are good. But, here in the community your centre is called ‘the spaceship’.”

Nicky sadly realized the implication of this.

The Councilman continued, “Did you know that the Head Teacher and Pastor are taking bribes to refer children to your programme? Were you aware that some children have lost places at other schools, because their parents pulled them out thinking you were going to pay for their education in the local school?”

Nicky was stunned.

The Councilman cautioned, “Before you judge, we have a saying in our culture ‘the fish that is caught is the one who looks for easy food.’ I ask you, can you blame anyone for taking advantage of you when life is so tough?” “But,” he went on, “you are also the fish. I have one piece of advice for you...”