

Otjiwarongo and Heusden, a strong start

Otjiwarongo and Heusden form the most recent town twinning that started functioning mid-2004. Otjiwarongo (Herero for 'the Pleasant Place') lies north of the central part of Namibia. Various national roads converge in this agricultural and ranching centre. The town has about 28 000 inhabitants. Heusden, a rural municipality with some 43 000 citizens in the southern province of *Noord Brabant* consists of the villages Heusden (originally a fortress town dating from the 8th century), Vlijmen and Drunen.

Responding to a request from Heusden's city council to become active in development co-operation, the municipality consulted with the VNG on options concerning international municipal aid. Learning that programme subsidies were available, and after an exploratory visit of Otjiwarongo municipal staff to the Netherlands, Heusden decided to support this Namibian town. The partnership¹ concentrates mainly on two areas.

Otjiwarongo's municipal Multi Purpose Help Centre (OMPHC), built with support of a Dutch NGO called STOP AIDS NOW! and Rotary Amsterdam South, is assisted in management and implementation of activities focussed on HIV/AIDS. HIV prevalence among Otjiwarongo's adult population is estimated to be 17%. The Centre provides day care support for some 40 orphans and vulnerable children, ranging from very young to secondary school age. They receive food, while the Centre provides space for making homework, play or sport. The Centre also runs a home based care project, involving fifteen trained volunteers, providing simple medication and aid materials to home based HIV/AIDS infected. There are prevention activities as well, involving and focusing on young people. To sustain the activities of the OMPHC in future, the two

co-operating partners put much effort in strengthening the (financial) management and administration capacity as well, including exploring opportunities for income generation. Former President Sam Nujoma is patron of the OMPHC.

A committed group of volunteers, civil servants from Heusden's municipality, undertakes to inform their community about Otjiwarongo stimulating to support the OMPHC in cash and kind. Substantial financial contributions have been received for the Centre already, amongst others from one of the Schools (D' Oultremont College), which has linkage with the Otjiwarongo Paresis Secondary School.

Additionally to the Centre many efforts are made to also strengthen Otjiwarongo local government's capacity, concentrating on HIV/AIDS related youth, care and construction activities, and addressing unemployment. While equipped with a generous amount of staff for operational tasks, the town expressed a need for support to its organisation and management processes. By sharing know-how and experiences with its Namibian colleagues Heusden attempts to cater for this request. During mutual visits of professionals concrete administrative and practical issues involved in running a town are compared and reviewed. Professionals from Heusden are voluntarily stationed in Otjiwarongo to share hands on experience.

Heusden cherishes the positive and enthusiastic way in which the bond with its Otjiwarongo colleague has evolved. Together with the lessons learned, this forms a solid foundation for future co-operation.

¹ The partnership received national attention in the Netherlands when a Dutch celebrity hosted a television documentary of her visit to Otjiwarongo.