Africa Unite lends a helping hand

OLWETHU MPESHE

A group of pupils from Europe informal settlement in Gugulethu, whose homes were ravaged by an inferno more than two weeks ago, had something to cheer about on Friday November 14, when Africa Unite donated clothes and blankets to the community.

The fire destroyed more than 40 shacks and left more than 100 people homeless. Residents believed the fire was started by a jealous partner around midnight on Thursday October 30.

Africa Unite field worker, Isaac Mangwana told Vukani they were informed of the terrible news by community leadership while conducting their aftercare programme. He said because some of the children in their aftercare programme were affected by the fire they decided to help.

Africa Unite is a human rights and youth empowerment organisation which works with citizens, refugees and migrants to prevent conflicts, enhance social cohesion and promote socio-economic development.

"We started seeking donations from various organisations with the aim of buying uniforms. But people opened their hearts, they donated groceries, blankets, clothing and more.

"Today we are handing over the uniforms, including school shoes and back packs. We also gave grocery packs and blankets. We hope these will make the lives of those affected by the fire better," said Mr Mangwana.

Fire victim Patricia George, who has three children and depends mainly on a child grant, told Vukani she wasn't able to save anything in her house. She alleged the fire was started by man who had been dumped by his girlfriend.

"We first heard a commotion in a nearby shack. The couple were arguing, but I fell asleep only to be woken up by screams of 'kuyatsha' (there's a fire).

"The fire was already too strong. I only managed to get my children to safety, with just the clothes on our back. We lost everything in that fire. Luckily Disaster Management moved fast. They provided us with building material and we started rebuilding our homes and lives. We got food and clothes from neighbours and I managed to buy uniform for my youngest child. I was worried about the other two when this group (Africa Unite) called us here to get uniforms for our children.

"For me their contribution was a godsend because I had no way of buying new uniforms for two children because I am unemployed," said Ms George.

Another resident, Thabita Mdingi, said she escaped the fire by the skin of her teeth.

She said on the night of the fire she had been sick and was not aware of the fire until someone kicked the door of her shack.

"I could have burned in there because I was sick that day and just managed to walk out of the shack.

"We couldn't save anything. My oldest child ran into the burning shack and managed to get her school bag with her books, but her uniform and everything was burned along with the shack.

"I went to their school to inform teachers of what had happened as I knew I wasn't going to be able to afford to buy them uniforms as I'm unemployed. It was starting to worry me that my children will start school next year and still not have uniform but luckily my prayers were answered. I would like to thank all those involved, those who donated and those who raised our plight," said Ms Mdingi.

■ Africa Unite peer educator Zethu Sinxeke, intern Caspard Coomnas and field worker Isaac Mangwana sort out bags of donations before handing them over to beneficiaries.