

“Khayelitsha Cookies- Turning adversary into sweet success”

Creating opportunity one bite at a time is their motto and that’s exactly what *The Khayelitsha Cookies* project does. It began as a small-scale project in 2004, teaching a group of unskilled and unemployed ladies in the Khayelitsha community in Cape Town to bake in order to sustain a livelihood. The organisation has faced some tough times since its establishment and imminent closure in 2013 due to increased losses. That’s when current Managing Director, Adri Williams stepped in, oblivious however to the fact that she would be inheriting an establishment with a debt totalling R2.5 million. With a resolute mission to turn things around and a determination that she describes as “God’s calling”, Adri with Eunice Nyobole right by her side and a dedicated team of ladies working diligently, rolled up their sleeves and got to work.

Eunice joined *Khayelitsha Cookies* in 2008 and worked her way up from baker to Bakery Manager in just five years, and as Adri’s business partner she owns a 21% shareholding stake. Adri describes her as an astute, stern and phenomenal lady. “We make a good team, her strengths are my weaknesses and my strengths are her weaknesses, so we are truly a very good team.” Today, 13 years later, the organisation is a Level 2 BB EEE contributor and one of the most successful female managed cooperatives in the country.

These delicious cookies come in a variety of flavours ranging from the traditional classic butter, peppermint crisp tart, apple crumble and ginger; finding their way across the country, in large retail stores, restaurants, coffee shops, hotels and at various **aha** properties. This collaboration with *Khayelitsha Cookies* began a few years back, when **aha** Executive Chef, Renzo Bico discovered this delightful treat and as the saying goes, “just one bite and he was hooked!” It was however also bolstered by the quality of cookies they produce, reasonable pricing and superior service delivery to the hospitality industry; and so the journey to sweet success began.

Last year **aha Hotels & Lodges** acquired a state of the art oven for the organisation valued at over R200 000, ensuring that the ladies continue creating an opportunity, “one bite at a time” by employing more women. The labour and success of these cookies has profound merits. These ladies gain a sense of pride, knowing they can provide for their families. The skills and knowledge they receive here empowers them to break the cycle of poverty in their families by affording their children the education they never had. This organisation has created opportunities that have resulted in life changing events for many of these ladies their families and extended families.

Many have completed their schooling, afforded their kids a tertiary education and built homes for their parents back home in the Eastern Cape. Some have moved out of informal settlements and into formal housing, realising a lifelong dream.

aha is currently assisting and supporting the organisations fundraising initiative, contributing towards their long term vision of replicating their business module in various sectors in order to create more employment opportunities. This will be achieved through the *R36 campaign*, initiated to purchase a farm in order to cultivate fresh organic produce

which will be supplied to hotels and retail stores across the country in various forms. They will also farm Tilapia Fish, which they hope to supply to hotels, creating another 50-75 jobs on the farm for the communities of De Noon and Atlantis. One of the most important aspects of this development says Adri is to fight hunger and starvation in their surrounding communities, specifying that 25 % of the farms produce will be given to their staff at no cost at all. The intention is for them to share the fresh fruit and vegetables they receive with their neighbours. "This is a passion of mine, as I believe that no child is asked to be born or go hungry. It will truly put us in a position where we can help feed South Africa" says Adri.

Adri says being innovative is an important factor in sustaining the organisation and adds that delicious flavours will be created in the near future, using the very fruit and vegetables produced on their farm. A range of these cookies will be available at Pick n Pay outlets nationally in the near future under the brand 'Pick Local'. A big part of this project is for the organisation to own its own factory; the current factory in Maitland is rented. Owning their own custom built factory will help reduce the current 30 % daily productivity loss due to the current setup. It will also position the organisation to start exploring exporting their cookie range. Adri says "Our goal, in the next 10 years is to literally be the best cookie supplier internationally.

Khayelitsha Cookies has without a doubt restored hope for these ladies and with hard work and determination, their path ahead is lined with sweet success!

For more information on how you can make a difference and contribute to the R36 campaign, view their website on <http://khayelitshacookies.co.za/k2/> and donate today.

