

## PRESS RELEASE – LAUNCHING OF THE BENNIE VAN EEDEN FOUNDATION

Bennie van Eeden , matriculant at Brackenfell High School is going to officially launch his Bennie Foundation on the 24<sup>th</sup> September at the Choc Lodge on the Tygerberg Hospital grounds. The first project is the “Touch my Life” project where public awareness and ultimately involvement, in aid of the young cancer patients and other seriously ill patients with the idea of rehabilitating these young patients.

Bennie says the main idea behind the ‘Touch my Life’ project is to minimize the boredom and depression associated with these terrible illnesses is to give them access to computer games for their entertainment. Due to the fact that a clinically clean environment is required for these patients, normal board-games simply won’t do. That led him to the idea of providing them with computer driven games for their entertainment.

Due to the lack of donors, he bought 2 new computers out of own pocket. Games were then loaded (age appropriate), to facilitate this. Other games are being researched as we speak to form a wider network, with the aim of hospital-to-hospital gaming. His cousin, Rudi van Eeden has been tasked with creation of a website, which will be up and running soon. The web address for this will be <http://www.benniefoundation.org>, and Bennie created a Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/bennie.foundation>. The idea behind the computers are that the more people and hospitals get involved, we can have these young patients looking forward to play not just against another hospital, but hopefully, across the whole world. While some of the patients will be too ill to actually participate, the patients participating will communicate the feeling of playing, the competition and form a positive camaraderie amongst patients across the board. The competition element is something that must not be under-estimated.

The social interaction of church-groups, school-groups and any community-groups will be invaluable. The focus would be that groups act as “Foster-parents” for these young patients, as their own families mostly live in rural areas, too far away to actually visit them. These “foster-parents” will then care for the basics of these young patients while in hospital. This could be as simple as knitting “beanies”, providing toiletries, old unused cell-phones and soft toys. Bennie’s father still remembers how Bennie at the tender age of 5 years burst into tears when his “Hasie Kedassie’ soft toy fell to the floor, and Bennie told his father through the tears “For you it’s just a toy, but for me it’s a friend!”.

These young patients in state hospitals are mostly well-cared for medically, but for the most part these patients feel lost, forgotten, bored and depressed. Most of these patients come from disadvantaged rural communities, without proper cell-phone reception. The computers are connected to the internet, facilitating reconnection with their families through the use of Skype, e-mail and instant messaging. As some of these young patients are too young to read and type on applications such as *Whatsapp* or SMS’s, these patients will be assisted in sending and receiving photos en letters to loved ones.

The “Touch my Life” project is an initiative whereby Bennie hopes that thousands of people will get involved and take up the challenge of helping these young people with love and

empathy. The project is not limited to young cancer patients, but to all seriously ill children that require long-term treatment. Bennie's hope is that all South Africans can come together and start a community-group in every town that supports the "Touch my Life" project in their own town. He says he will remain available for anybody that wants to contact him to start a project in their own town. He encourages such communities to affiliate and register with the Bennie Foundation for the "Touch my Life" project.

More information will be available from time to time on the website at <http://www.benniefoundation.org> or on the Bennie Foundation Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/bennie.foundation>.

Bennie hopes all youth-leaders in general, especially high school learners, accept the responsibility to get involved with the disadvantaged young children in state run hospitals. Race or gender is of no concern for Bennie as we all die the same way, everybody experiences pain, rejection and fear.

The current awareness campaigns do a good job in making people aware of cancer, but the problem is that most people just don't know how to get involved. With the "Touch my Life" project is aimed at improving life for these young patients by the public, but also as a tool to teach the public to take positive action in community-group projects. Bennie hopes that involvement in these community-groups will teach character building values like integrity, selfless giving and being a shameless Christian.

Bennie foresees that the involvement of school and youth organisations for example "Interact", would be instrumental in the success and future success of the "Touch my Life" project. He specifically requests all "Interact" groups to register with his foundation and that they will be prepared to accommodate a computer games room at every hospital in their town. Bennie wants to actively encourage all schools and "Interact" to start computer-clubs to foster a workable knowledge base. That will enable these clubs to do all maintenance and repairs themselves.

A friend of Bennie, Manfred Klose, former president of the local Rotary Club, has agreed to help Bennie with the media and marketing. Both feel that the involvement of existing community groups as the Rotary Club, will be a precursor to success.

As Bennie doesn't get a regular allowance from his parents, he has learned from a young age to provide his own pocket-money. Vacations he works as a life-saver at "See-en-Sand" Life Saving Institute that is run by his uncle, Sparks Esterhuysen. He also gets the occasional boost when his Tegnology team wins a cash prize in provincial or national championships. Most his money is actually generated by breeding with poodles.

Bennie's interests are much like any other male matriculant, for instance rugby, girls, computer games and academy, with academy scoring very low on his priorities. His hobbies are national math and tegnology olympics. Every year he scores amongst the top 20 provincially in Math Olympics and has been under the top 100 Math learners in the country. This year his team won the provincial Bridge-building and Water Olympics. They also scored 4<sup>th</sup> place in the National Bridge-building Olympics. He has just turned 18 and has been accepted into Stellenbosch University, Goldfields dormitory, much to his father's disgust who is an old Helderberger. For Bennie's immediate future his studies are important as he

hopes to get a scholarship. He is looking forward to his Stellenbosch years, studying Electronic Engineering.

Bennie has stepped into adulthood in a big way by registering the foundation as a Non-Profit-Organisation in terms of the NPO act (Act 71 of 1997). He asks that all people wanting to donate money must stuff their piggy banks until the final registration is done (provisional registration is complete) as a bank account can then be opened for all donations. These donations will be used to finance computers for other hospitals.

Bennie implorers banks and big corporations to donate some of their computers and cell phone companies to sponsor air time and cell-phones to our young patients. On a more formal note, Bennie's mother, Joy van Eeden, will control the purse-strings of the foundation, very firmly. She has a wealth of knowledge and experience behind her, we have full confidence in her. The Foundation will be run strictly according to Section 30 of the Income-tax Act, and will be audited on an annual basis. Other members of the Foundation are Stiaan van Eeden (Chairperson), Benita van Eeden (Internal Auditor), Dr Vonli van Eeden (Medical Advisor), Annatjie de Villiers (Secretary) and Mafred Klose (Marketing).

Bennie invites all interested parties to the official launch of the Bennie Foundation and the "Touch my Life" project on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at the Choc-Lodge, Tygerberg Hospital grounds. Former Springbok captian Theuns Stofberg, will be the master of ceremonies. Bennie hopes that this will contribute to the September month Cancer-awareness in general and the good work being done by the Choc organisation in particular.