

Penduka a place of hope

Penduka empowers women to work and earn their own money. Elke Reinauer travelled to the outskirts of Windhoek to find this special and peaceful place, to meet the person driving this initiative, and the women whose lives have been altered by being there

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As we drive out of Windhoek into Katutura it feels like entering another world. A world that is louder, more vibrant and colourful: kids play on the streets with empty plastic containers, men sit outside barbershops, women hang laundry in their yard, and people sell goods and vegetables on the road.

A gravel road leads us to Penduka. Never would we have expected such beauty at the end of the dusty street: lush green grass grows at the shore of Gorengab Dam, buildings with colorful drawings on their walls and a peaceful atmosphere welcomes us.

“Penduka means wake up”, explains Kauna Simon, managing director of Penduka, while showing us the craft and gift shop. We admire handmade dolls, jewellery, handbags, pillows and blankets, all made by the women of Penduka. “We want to empower women to earn their own money and to wake up to their future, to take responsibility for their lives”, the 36-year old tells us. She has worked in Penduka since 2007. “I think, the knowledge that the women gain, is most important. I want them to have a sense of the working world. They get training here and some of them want to open their own business.”

The women who work in Penduka come from Katutura, and are single moms or disabled. Some have never had a job before. Now they do at Penduka, tells Simon, and guides us through the workshops.

In the first building, women are busy cutting, painting and sewing fabric. Colorful blankets and pillows are created. Simon shows us a storage room where painted pottery is waiting to be shipped to Germany. Over 100 women work here, 33 of them in the workshops. The salary a woman earns is about 1 700 N\$.

“We want to give women a change, to see the world in a different way and to experience their own power. There are not many opportunities for disabled or deaf women in Namibia”, says Simon as we walk over to the jewellery workshop. Three deaf women work on a beadwork behind a desk. Necklaces and bracelets in all colors of the rainbow are lying on

another table. A child is sleeping on a blanket in a corner.

Olivia Kanime, a young deaf woman, explains how she makes glass pearls. Simon translates the sign language for us. Kanime shows us an empty green glass bottle. The glass will be melted, formed into pearls and burned into pottery in the oven.

Kanime’s face lights up with pride as she shows us the finished pearls. We begin to understand what it means for the women to work here. They seem to be very happy and content.

“Some of the women live here, others have their own places in Katutura,” Simon tells us as she shows us the house where the women live. There is also a garden where they grow vegetables, a



fish tank and chickens. On the shore of the dam are red-painted guest houses built in the traditional way with grass roofs. “This is where tourists can stay”, Simon says. She is always happy about visitors from all over the world: “We offer workshops in beading and batik work. Visitors can also take a tour, or they can volunteer or just relax at the terrace of the restaurant with a view of the water.” They also have a dance group who perform traditional dances.

As we leave Penduka, we too feel like we have woken up, see things clearer and feel grateful for our work and lifestyle which we often take for granted.

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