

UMTHA

Beaded jewellery makers have benefited from the training course run by the Foundation and COFTA in South Africa 2007

Umtha means 'ray of light' in the Xhosa language, and this fair trade jewellery business has definitely brightened the lives of disadvantaged women in Cape Town.

The enterprise was started by Dave Milligan in 1992 when he began making bead necklaces at home while unemployed. Soon he was selling all he could make at craft fairs and tourist outlets. After a year his wife Cheryl and two local Xhosa women were working with him in his converted garage.

Today Umtha operates from a dedicated workshop and employs over 40 staff. It supplies stylish contemporary African jewellery to several of the main fair trade buyers in Europe and Australia.

But making jewellery is just the means to achieving a more important objective: the empowerment of disadvantaged women through training and employment. Almost all Umtha's employees are women, and many are single mothers and some are HIV positive.

The opportunities offered by Umtha have transformed the lives of women such as Tabisa who began learning beadwork at Umtha in 1999. She is

"What a splendid time you gave us, motivating and challenging, thank you very much. I am looking forward to working with you as we progress and publicise fair trade more in South Africa and Africa."

Dave Milligan, Managing Director



now a skilled necklace maker and an efficient receptionist. As well as providing her with a regular income the team at Umtha has supported her through the death of her baby and the baby's father and serious health problems of her own. "If Umtha wasn't there, I don't know what I would do," says Tabisa. "There is one thing that I know: there is a future ahead of me and I'm working today."

In August 2007 Dave Milligan took part in a four-day training course organised by the Foundation and COFTA. The course covered fair trade awareness, product development,

marketing and the benefits of having a fair trade network. As a result of the course a group called FACSA (Fair trade Crafts South Africa) was reformed and revitalised with Dave becoming the secretary of the steering committee.

In January 2008 Umtha employed for the first time a human resources manager, Beth Durham. She wrote the following specifically for this newsletter.

"Umtha desires to achieve excellence in business, design, production and the management and development of its people. As the business grows so Umtha will continue to achieve its vision of making a difference in South Africa.

"The business is committed to the principles of fair trade and sustainable development. In addition to learning the art of jewellery making, employees receive training in general business

"Umtha certainly does live up to the meaning of its name: 'Ray of Light'. The business provides its employees with the stability to grow and develop as individuals, provide support for families and break the cycle of poverty in the next generation."

Beth Durham, HR Manager

and life skills including conflict resolution, health care, parenting, goal setting, English and the management of personal finances. At Umtha, employees are supported in their personal and developmental concerns. A large number of Umtha employees are single-breadwinners with the responsibility of supporting sometimes numerous dependants. In addition employees contend with health issues such as TB, high blood pressure, diabetes and HIV/AIDS."

