

Brownies & Downies upskills intellectually disabled youth

 By [Sandy Peters](#)

15 Apr 2016


Brownies & Downies, an offshoot of non-profit organisation Our Second Home, aims to upskill intellectually disabled young adults with training in the hospitality sector. The concept, a coffee shop-cum-training ground for special needs adults, was initiated in The Netherlands in 2010 and has since resulted in almost 30 such lunch rooms in that country.



Wendy Vermeulen, an expat from The Netherlands now living in Cape Town, was inspired by the initiative and what it has accomplished, so she decided to bring the concept to South Africa.

Along with enhancing the lives of those with intellectual disabilities, Brownies & Downies aims to dispel any misguided preconceptions held by the general public.

We interviewed Vermeulen to find out what some of their challenges are, how businesses can get involved, and what the reception from the Cape Town public has been like so far.

 ***What has the reception from the public been like since you first opened Brownies & Downies in Cape Town?***

The response from the public has been phenomenal. 99% of the people are very enthusiastic. They love the concept and they really hope that we succeed and that we expand all over the country.



■ ***What has been the biggest challenge for you thus far?***

Getting companies on board that, after our training, want to hire some of our young adults. We are, unfortunately, not big enough to full-time hire all of our trainees, and because we want to train as many special needs young adults as possible, we have to find other work places for some of them so that we can train new young adults. This, so far, is a struggle, but companies are opening up towards hiring special needs adults so hopefully this will change soon.

■ ***How can business get involved in making Brownies & Downies more sustainable?***

They can first of all come and support us by coming for lunch or getting a takeaway coffee with a delicious brownie. There is always the option to sponsor us. Because we are a non-profit organisation we are always looking for people and companies who can help us. They can sponsor a child to come and do the training with us, they can help us by sponsoring transport, or they can help us by donating goods or their services. And, of course, they can spread the word on social media or by word-of-mouth.



Tell us about some of the accomplishments of Brownies & Downies in creating awareness and employment for special needs young adults.

We have only been open for eight weeks so it is hard to pin down real accomplishments yet, but a lot of people are aware of our cause. Because of our Facebook profile, the website, and the booklet that we give them in the shop, they leave with a better understanding.

These young adults already have better self-esteem than when they came in the first time. Some of them are going to the tables themselves now. They don't need us to walk with them anymore. They are starting to get the routine and they know what they must do. But the biggest thing for me is that they look very happy and they feel like they matter and that they are part of the working environment.

Are there any expansion plans on the cards to take the concept further?

Yes, we do want to expand all over the country, but we first want to make sure that Cape Town is doing well and that everyone is settled. So we won't expand for at least another six months to one year.

Brownies & Downies is located at Shop 7, 2 Long Street, Cape Town. For more info, go to www.browniesdownies.co.za.

ABOUT SINDY PETERS

Sindy Peters (@sindy_hullaba_lou) is a group editor at Bizcommunity.com on the Construction & Engineering, Energy & Mining, and Property portals. She can be reached at sindy@bizcommunity.com

- 2022 Lesedi Award winner Faeza Marshman on what drives her giving spirit - 9 Dec 2022
- #ESGAfricaConference: Why integrating the environmental and social components of ESG is key - 3 Nov 2022
- #ESGAfricaConference: ESG an opportunity for purposeful shareholder engagement - 1 Nov 2022
- #ESGAfricaConference: Success in ESG starts with leadership, partnerships and good governance - 31 Oct 2022
- #ESGAfricaConference: What should ESG reporting look like in Africa? - 26 Oct 2022

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>