

# Jenny's call to help Zim answered

News report on hunger turns birthday party into aid campaign

BY KANINA FOSS

When Jenny Des-Fountain turned 50, she asked for food – lots of food. The birthday gifts she most desired were rice, tinned protein and cooking oil.

It wasn't that Jenny was hungry, but she knew some neighbours who were. It was while drinking wine and planning the guest list for her birthday party that the Joburg resident watched a news report on Zimbabwe.

Suddenly, a party didn't seem so important. What Jenny wanted was mealie meal.

When she asked her friends to give her food for her birthday, she imagined she would collect enough to fill her boot.

But the thing with good ideas is that they have a way of getting bigger. What started as a boot of food might grow to a 4-ton truck-load.

Since featuring on radio, Jenny has been getting calls from South Africans and Zimbabweans from all walks of life.

"It has been amazing to realise how much people want to give, but they just don't know how," she said.

One Zimbabwean woman phoned from a callbox and took a taxi to Jenny's house to hand over a plastic bag containing two small packets of mealie meal and a can of tinned beans. Her son had died of cholera.

People deposited money into her account and offered to help with everything from crossing the border to packing the truck.



**PUTTING THEIR MONEY WHERE THE MOUTHS ARE:** Jenny Des-Fountain, with the help of Thulani, a Zimbabwean working in Joburg, gather donated food that will be leaving for a Zimbabwean village on Tuesday. **PICTURE: MUJAHID SAFODIEN**

Still, Jenny didn't know what to do with the food. Then she was introduced to Thulani, a waiter in Rosebank, Joburg, and a Zimbabwean citizen.

Thulani (31) told Jenny about conditions in his village, south of Bulawayo. The area has been one of the hardest hit.

"There is no food," he said. "I don't have to talk about water, because that has been a problem for a long time. Right now, the main problem is food.

There is absolutely nothing, nothing, nothing."

Next week, Jenny will be taking the food she has amassed to Thulani's village in a truck provided by Isuzu. The 4-ton truck is half-full at the moment, and she is appealing for another 2 tons of food.

In particular, she needs sugar – to add to salt and water to make a rehydration solution for cholera victims – bottles of bleach or chlorine tablets for

water purification; tin openers; water containers; and plenty of non-perishable food items, such as tins of fish and beans, as well as cooking oil.

The village has a lot of children, and their schools have closed down. Toys and books will help to spread some hope.

Jenny is also appealing for a nurse or doctor to join the trip, and needs a second vehicle to transport about eight people.

Thulani is arranging for a

pastor to be present to distribute the aid, so that it can't be construed as an attempt to gain favour.

Jenny and her friends intend to give ongoing assistance to the village.

It's only one small village, but the hope is that this seemingly insignificant drop in the pond will have ripple effects.

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