

2020 – Puma Energy South Africa helping to raise awareness around autism

As the new year dawns with promises of sticking to arbitrary new years' resolutions – Puma Energy South Africa ("Puma Energy") is committed to uplifting the plight of those whom no-one talks about. Autism is a subject that remains mystical in the minds of many but is an issue that needs to be brought to the forefront of our social dialogue. Imagine yourself being in a world where communication skills are inhibited and the potential for learning is constrained. Autism knows no boundaries. It does not discriminate and is ruthless in its impact.

That's where an organisation such as Amazing K weaves its magic in the lives of those children who have been impacted by a debilitating condition that renders their integration into society difficult. With two centers based in Northwold and Sharonlea, founders Ilse and Noel Ross take care of the special educational needs of 76 autistic children. From ages 2 to 13, children are nurtured and supported to be that best that that they can be. Aply assisted by 27 full-time staff members, the ratio of children to teachers equates to 2.3 to 1 ensuring absolute attention to the needs of the children.

Ilse and Noel founded the school in 2014 after the needs of their autistic daughter Madison – now 13 – could not be accommodated in conventional society. They soon realized how autism is completely misunderstood and decided to do something about it, encouraging other parents of autistic children to join them on their journey. Today, you will find an organization that is a refuge for children diagnosed with autism and a who have become a support mechanism for the parents who enroll them. Some of the parents even have more than one child enrolled in the school.

As a sector of society that is largely neglected, Puma Energy has decided to partner with Amazing K to ensure that their good work with autistic children can be continued. Education is a core factor in all that Amazing K stands for, which resonated with the Puma team. Seggie Kistasamy, Managing Director for Puma Energy commented that, "Education is a basic human right and should be accessible to everyone – no matter their circumstances. Amazing K fulfils this ethos for those children with special needs who thrive on learning." A contribution of much needed specialist communication devices (imported), fridges, microwaves and educational toys were donated for the use of the two schools.

Boitumelo Sekete – Business Transformation Manager of Puma Energy said, "Socio-economic development is a primary objective for the Puma Energy team. How are you able to recruit differently-abled people in your organization if you are not providing the "grass roots" tools and mechanisms to enable all members of society to be the best that they can be? Puma Energy is committed to supporting projects that really matter and which create a sustainable, positive impact on the lives of our people.

Passionate founder and mom – Ilsa thanked the Puma Energy team for raising awareness around the stigma that surrounds those living with autism. "I am compulsive about learning! Children have a right to be children and to be able to play, to learn and to be themselves. Experiences such as shopping, eating out, travelling etc. are very difficult for families with autistic children. As people do not understand how autism manifests, they cannot comprehend when a child has a 'meltdown' in a shopping center and label children as merely 'naughty'. Even load-shedding affects our children when light switches don't work, or the microwave is not able to heat up food. The impact of the change in sensory stimuli has a significant effect on autistic children and their inability to cope with external factors out of their comfort zone." She added, "For non-verbal children, communication is exceptionally difficult. The specialized communication devices as provide by Puma Energy will provide much need assistance in ensuring the needs of our children are accommodated."

The Amazing K team invited all parents and stakeholders to witness the handover of the crucial communication devices and other items at an event at their Sharonlea premises on Friday, 17 January 2020. They beamed with absolute pride as their children were each awarded with a personalized educational toy and posed for 'celebrity' photos. Programme Director of the event – renowned

footballer - Siboniso Gaxa was in awe of the efforts of the center and spoke of his own humble beginnings and how community is the essence of ensuring our children are well cared for, no matter their circumstances.

Seggie further commented that this is not the end of the Puma Energy /Amazing K journey. He said "How do we take the good work that Amazing K has done and expand it into other areas? There are some people that have the perception that autism may be a form of witchcraft. We need to dispel this myth and broaden this knowledge base into the community. This initiative is one that we are really proud to be associated with. We wish Amazing K everything of the best into the future and look forward to being a partner in helping to raise awareness around autism."