

# Paying it forward

Corporate social investment turns up a notch as the property industry finds unique and invigorating ways to give back

By Candace King

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Ellen Joubert,  
Remote Metering Solutions’  
CSI Project Coordinator

It’s often said that it’s better to give than to receive – a phrase that rings true in the property industry, as more and more of the sector’s players are giving back to society through their innovative corporate social investment (CSI) projects and charitable initiatives.

“Corporate social investment is part of the corporate landscape, and the idea that a bit of the wealth generated by companies is used to improve the lives of fellow South Africans makes us feel warm and fuzzy – especially now, with the festive season in full swing,” says Ellen Joubert, one of the coordinators for Remote Metering Solutions’ (RMS) CSI projects.

Joubert says that in order for RMS to make a tangible difference, the company follows an innovative approach – by hand-picking deserving projects in Prince Albert in the Great Karoo, they ensure maximum benefits for the community as well as a high level of accountability.

“In the Karoo, there are people with skills and time to create quality, handmade goods,” she says. “However, they often do not, because it’s not only hard to find materials but it’s also difficult to translate skill and time into a product that sells.

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Within a year, the project had grown to six participants, and could match the initial funds from its own income. This was used to grow the project further, with sewing machines, chairs and materials purchased for a new range of products.

After four years, 30 women participate in the project, earning up to R2 200 per month with their handwork. RMS continues to support the project with an online store, and by providing advice on managing finances and marketing and showcasing the beautiful work at the recent SAPOA Convention.

“Financially, the project stands on its own feet, thanks to the initial financial support and ongoing non-financial help,” says Joubert. “The project found a niche in making special crochet blankets and knitted bunnies for the high-end market.”

Like many small towns, Prince Albert faces great social challenges. “Tourism is often seen as the panacea for the troubled platteland, but it is hard for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to enter this industry,” says Joubert.

To help bridge this gap in Prince Albert, an increasingly popular tourist destination, RMS invested in the training of four young people from the local community as tourist guides. These newly trained guides are now helped to develop and present innovative new activities.

“A tour of the historic and modern culture of the coloured community is popular with foreign tourists and does a lot to spread tourism benefits into the wider community,” says Joubert. “A ‘Red Bus Tour’, presumptuous for a small town, is a hit with new and repeat visitors who want to spend a light-hearted hour getting a feel for the town and what it offers.”

She also notes that RMS now helps the local municipality to develop a smart-grid pilot project that will turn the municipality’s electricity-management woes into a much brighter picture for the municipality and the community alike.



Remote Metering Solutions supports the Handmade-Karoo-Handgemaak CSI project, which assists women in Prince Albert in the Great Karoo