

# SOUTH AFRICA'S TRAIN OF HOPE

## The Transnet-Phelophepa Health Train



*In many South African rural communities, there is often only a single doctor for every 5 000 people. The Phelophepa Health Train – the world's first primary healthcare hospital on wheels – uses the existing rail network to make quality medical care an accessible reality for many of South Africa's most remote communities. The name 'Phelophepa' combines elements of Sotho and Tswana and, roughly translated, means 'good, clean health' – which is exactly what this travelling health clinic provides.*

### **PHELOPHEPA I – BRINGING HOPE AND GOOD HEALTH TO THOUSANDS**

The custom-built Phelophepa Health Train, fondly referred to as 'the miracle train' by many, began riding the rails in 1994. It travels for 35 weeks each year visiting a different rural community every week. This was a significant step forward in the Transnet Foundation's vision of providing quality healthcare where health services and infrastructure were not fully in place. The Phelophepa Health Train has shown incredible growth since its humble beginnings as a three-carriage eye clinic. Today – almost two decades later – it boasts 18 fully refurbished and equipped coaches that provide facilities for health, oral and vision screening programmes, basic health education awareness and community counselling workshops. Through on-board clinic services and community outreach programmes Phelophepa impacts over 180 000 patients a year.

### **PHELOPHEPA II – REACHING EVEN MORE COMMUNITIES**

The success of the Phelophepa Health Train, together with the increased demand for healthcare services set in motion plans for another train. That dream became a reality when the second train, Phelophepa II, began operation in March 2012 in the Eastern Cape.

With both trains operating simultaneously, the extended reach of the primary healthcare offering enables potentially 360 000 patients to receive healthcare they would not have had access to before.

### **WORKING FOR SUSTAINED COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT**

Although the Phelophepa Health Trains can only be in an area for a limited time, the goal is to supplement and support existing facilities to make sure the residents can continue benefitting from quality healthcare once the train has departed. Education and empowerment that leave better equipped and informed communities in its tracks is a core value of the Phelophepa programme.

- Before the train rolls into town, teams are sent out to alert the community of the days the train will be delivering services.
- Relationships are established with the existing healthcare providers so that patients can be referred and continue to receive the care they need.
- While the train is in the area, screening and healthcare education are the primary concerns. Nursing teams visit local schools to screen children for health-related problems and educate them about basic healthcare.

### **FACTS AND FIGURES**

- Each train is operated by about 20 resident staff and 40 student volunteers.
- The student volunteers share their healthcare knowledge and skills with at least four community members per week and more than 2 300 community members are employed to work in the on-board train clinics each year.
- The trains have supplied primary healthcare to over 14 million people since 1994.
- The train won the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award for excellence in public service delivery in 2008.
- Close to 600 volunteers, specially selected by their communities, are educated on general health each year.



### SERVICES ON BOARD PHELOPHEPA TRAINS

Each Phelophepa Health Train serves as a simple, one-stop clinic with several healthcare services under one roof:

**Health clinic:** Focuses on quality primary patient care and health education, offers treatment for common illnesses and ailments, diabetes and cancer screening.

**Dental clinic:** Equipped to perform teeth cleaning, extractions and restorations, also has a digital x-ray unit for intra-oral radiography of the mouth.

**Eye clinic:** Examination and treatment of patients' eyes and sight, prescription spectacles are produced in the laboratory on the train and a range of ready-made readers are also available.

**Educational clinic:** Trains 16 volunteers from each community in preventative healthcare at each of the stations on route.

**Psychology clinic:** Provides valuable link to local community psychologists, social workers and other professionals for follow-up assistance.

### SUCCESS FIRMLY ROOTED IN PARTNERSHIPS

The Transnet Foundation's Phelophepa Health Train doesn't travel the tracks alone. The success of the train can be attributed to several role players who each contribute their expertise and resources to the train's service offering to ensure it has the desired impact. These include:

- approximately 20 resident staff who live on the train for the nine months per year in which it travels through South Africa,

- approximately 40 final year students from 30 training institutions of higher learning that serve on Phelophepa,
- the Transnet Foundation Office that helps with the logistics, and
- Transnet's Operating Divisions that provide haulage, diesel and general maintenance of the train.

We are also supported by various committed companies, for example F. Hoffmann-La Roche, Colgate Palmolive Foundation, Air Liquide, CCT, American and Swiss friends of Phelophepa, Dentsply as well as many individuals who share our vision.

### PARTNERING WITH SOUTH AFRICA'S FUTURE HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Transnet Foundation has developed vital partnerships with healthcare training institutions throughout South Africa. Every two weeks students representing various faculties serve on the train. They empower the communities they visit by sharing their skills and knowledge and also gain hands-on experience and mentoring from the permanent staff:

- Students gain practical experience in their field of study.
- They learn to treat patients in a holistic manner.
- They work as part of a team in a multi-disciplinary healthcare environment and also learn to work independently under the guidance of qualified professionals.
- They get exposure to the living conditions of South Africa's underprivileged and rural communities, which prepares them for their future careers.



*Phelophepa I and II travel for 35 weeks of the year, using two different routes to reach various remote areas of South Africa.*

*"I greatly value the tremendous energy and inspired work that has driven this wonderful initiative to the success where it today features internationally as a shining example of healthcare delivery, empowerment and technology in a developing country." - Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu*

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