

# Students give a helping hand



By **NOMPUMELELO ZUMA**

In Mahatma Gandhi's words, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others". Involving yourself in volunteer work creates an ability to affect people's lives positively, including your own whilst creating an improved quality of life for those in need.

In the spirit of helping the less fortunate, a group of Durban University of Technology (DUT) international students from various African countries dedicated their Saturday at the St Martin's Diocesan Home for Children recently.

As part of their on going community initiatives, the group of about 20 young students visited the children's home to volunteer much needed relief to the vulnerable children. The students cleaned the surrounding area, provided a hot meal from donated food and socialised meaningfully with the children.

International student, Bambanani Ngwenya from Swaziland said that by embarking on such programmes, they hoped that the extended help would assist positively.

In addition, Ngwenya said that such initiatives would eventually help break the negative stereotypes attached to African foreign nationals. "Foreign nationals are seen to be drug dealers or people who do illegal activities. This is untrue and people need to move away from that stereotype," he said.

Today's youth are often referred to as the 'lost generation'. With a label like that, many would think that volunteering is furthest from their minds. Neo Tshephe, another student volunteer from Lesotho, said that it was important for young people to volunteer. "Many of our peers are going to clubs



***The group of Durban University of Technology students that volunteered at St. Martin's Diocesan Home for Children***

or doing unproductive activities that don't enrich their lives."

Tshephe and Ngwenya are part of 400 international students from DUT who have gone beyond their quest of achieving an education. Other activities that they will be involved in is an annual sports day, a cultural festival and other community engagement programmes.

Volunteering is an integral part of the Gandhi Development Trust (GDT). Apart from mobilising learners to answer the call to volunteer 67 minutes on Mandela Day every year, GDT's internship programme with the Leeds Metropolitan University involves placements at various under-resourced community centres and schools.

This year, three students trained learners in schools in Inanda in social skills that included awareness on HIV/AIDS, domestic violence and

drug abuse and in iXopo on reading and literacy skills. They also worked with the Chatsworth Anti-drug forum, the New Beginnings Early Childhood Development Centre, the Child and Youth Development Centre at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) and Ethekwini's International Governance and Relations.

St. Martin's Diocesan Home for Children was founded over 100 years ago by sisters from the Society of St. Johns the Divine.

As the oldest children's home in the country, St. Martin's Diocesan Home for Children currently provides refuge, schooling and support for over 75 children.

The children living in the home may have suffered neglect, abuse, abandonment or have been orphaned.

If you would like to assist in any way, the St Martin's Diocesan Home can be contacted at 031 201 1261.