

● **Staff do their best to help public with minimum resources, little security or money for maintenance**

Facilities lacking, but haven for many

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Nestled between two shebeens along one of KwaNobuhle's busiest roads is a refuge for bookworms, pupils and young children who simply want to escape their realities and bury their heads in a book.

Others who visit Elukhanyisweni Library in KwaNobuhle also want to take advantage of the silence and study, while some simply want to read the day's newspaper.

Elukhanyisweni Library is also the only library that accommodates blind patrons in Uitenhage.

A team of reporters spent three days visiting various libraries in the Bay, with Elukhanyisweni rating among the worst in the metro – despite the cheerful staff who try

against the odds to provide visitors with good service.

Although equipped with four flat-screen computers supplied by Bhisho, the library does not have a working Wi-Fi connection.

This was also the case at the North End and Uitenhage libraries.

The North End Library had four outdated computers that did not work.

But this has not deterred jobseekers who use the machines at Elukhanyisweni and Uitenhage on a daily basis to type out their CVs.

But the absence of security staff at the Elukhanyisweni library means the staff there need to be vigilant and prepare themselves for the worst possibility during the day.

A staff member at the library, who asked not to be named, said: "We have chal-

lenges around security during the day – I am the security, I am a librarian."

Opening hours at Elukhanyisweni, North End and Uitenhage libraries are Monday to Friday from 8am until 5pm.

Former mayor Athol Trolip's decision to have the library open on Saturdays fell flat at Elukhanyisweni, as staff who had to be alone on a Saturday morning simply felt unsafe.

"I can't even remember the last time we had security staff on site.

"We tried to get one for the holiday period but we were told there was no money," the staff member said.

She said one of their biggest problems was maintenance.

Their faulty gate was evidence of this.

Despite these challenges, the staff at the library are kind and willing to assist the minute



THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE: The library in KwaNobuhle is situated between a tavern and a liquor outlet

Picture: WERNER HILLS

you walk through the door.

The library is also clearly popular among younger children as the kiddies' section is stocked with books for all ages.

When a Herald team visited the library, the juvenile section appeared well used, with staff still trying to pack away more books.

About 1km away is a satel-

lite library at the Babs Madlakane Hall, one of the smallest in the metro.

The library, which is open from Tuesdays to Fridays, is the workplace of about five librari-

ans and two general workers employed through the extended public works programme.

One of the staff members said he felt safe because he grew up in the area, but others had been left traumatised by an attempted break-in in 2018.

"We have had some incidents of people trying to break in but they couldn't get through."

He said he felt that the library was understaffed.

"This library is very small but in the afternoons it gets packed and we run around like headless chickens trying to help the [pupils] who need help and we have to carry the workload," he said.

Maintenance of the building is also an issue at the library.

This is evident when looking at the fence which the staff member claimed had been damaged during a protest.

The fence has never been repaired. Other issues at other libraries ranged from:

New Brighton Library

- Closes for lunchtime;
- Has issues with book returns;
- In need of more books for research purposes, especially for high school and tertiary students;
- No Wi-Fi.

Kwazakhele Satellite

Library:

- A lack of books for research purposes;
- A lack of fiction and non-fiction reading material;
- Very poor foot traffic;
- Closes for lunchtime;
- No toilets.

Zwide Public Library:

- No Wi-Fi;
- No working computers;
- A lack of books for research purposes for high school and tertiary learners;
- No water in the toilets.