



Early morning at the Post Office. A homeless person's "camping" spot photographed by a resident.

# Issue of homeless people not ignored

Alida de Beer

**H**omeless people sleeping in public places are not being ignored. In fact, anti-land invasion officials from the George Municipality visit areas where challenges are experienced in this regard on a daily basis, says Protection Services director Steven Erasmus.

Responding to a complaint from a resident about people "camping out" in front of the Post Office in York Street, Erasmus said the matter was immediately investigated, but there was no sign of any vagrancy. "The individuals tend to live a nomadic lifestyle and move from area to area. Although it remains the responsibility of the Post Office to secure their premises, the municipality will gladly assist should officials on patrol receive a complaint about persons sleeping on the street."

When asked about a new shelter, senior manager of Social Development Shanold Marillac said the municipality never committed to building a shelter, but there is one that's being operated by a private institution. In addition, Social Development runs Project Hope to assist the homeless to become self-sufficient in

the long term. "During previous financial years, the Community Development section completed a number of surveys and research into complaints by the public. As a result, homeless individuals have been given the opportunity to work on the EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme), a number of women have become part of an entrepreneurial initiative where they make products with beading and other handwork, and some homeless have been reunited with their families. People with drug dependence are also assisted." Estelle Fredericks can be contacted on 044 802 2015 regarding Project Hope.

The George Post Office said security gates were put up where the homeless sleep. "There is not much else we can do. Our budget does not allow for security guards," said communications officer Martie Gilchrist.

Last year a local forum, People Living on the Street, was established to promote solutions. Its stakeholders are the municipality, the provincial departments of health, justice, and education, Sassa, the police, the social development department, and non-governmental organisations like Cremhog, Kidstop, George Night Shelter and Sanca.