



■ The messages on the walls on the Central Primary School encourage residents to have compassion for the homeless.



■ The man who wrote the messages is a former prisoner who claims he has turned his life around

‘We have no where to go, we have nothing’

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Mr Hendricks said he had squatted in various places in Cape Town, sleeping outside a store on the main road in Wynberg and near the train station in Plumstead.

He said the homeless living on the property had become family, and protected the property from vagrants.

Mr Hendricks showed scars on his hand, which he claimed came from an incident where he was chasing a thief who was trying to steal from them.

“We are trying to keep this property safe. There are children and families who come and go here. We even changed the locks of the gates so they can’t come in. This happened when I was trying to chase this guy who broke in. The wire (barbed wire on the fencing) cut me while I was chasing him,” he said.

A man, who did not want to be named, who has been living on the property since last year, said none of the neighbouring residents had ever reached out to speak to them. He said the residents expressed no compassion for the homeless, and were not willing to work with them as a community.

He said the homeless were not intent on turning the school into an informal settlement, or to bring crime to the area, but needed a roof over their heads.

“Not just anyone can live here. There are families and children, about 13 of us in total, not lots of people. The messages say that we also have the right to this land just as much as you do. The messages ask these people to feel sorry for us, just have some compassion man,” he said.

The man explains that he is a former convict, who was imprisoned

for murder during apartheid.

“I am a 26. Let me tell you something, we did a lot of bad things but it was to protect our families and streets. I went to jail as a murderer, but I came out born-again, I could see things differently because I studied the bible a lot. I studied Tata Mandela a lot. The messages are inspired by that. I am living here now because I can’t go back to where I was, I have no choice,” he said.

The man says that he is currently writing a book on his life and beliefs. He said that he was disappointed in South Africa, because the lives of the poor were not prioritised.

“The police and law enforcement have come and tried to move us out but we come back. We have nowhere to go. We have nothing. Can’t they see that?” he said.

The two men allowed the Bulletin access to see the inside of their new “home”. There are beds, photographs and a kitchen area with an old braai stand that they use to make food in the school toilets and showers. They said they get water from the nearest garages to survive.

Mr Reed said there was a concern for the safety of the residents and also that their property prices would go down if the homeless continued to live in the building. He also said he was worried about sanitation because there is no running water in the building.

“We pay very high rates and taxes to live here, it’s not fair for people to just come start living here,” he said.

Mr Reed said they had had encounters with the homeless, who have exhibited bad behaviour, being drunk and swearing at the residents.

Another resident, who did not want to be named, also claimed that he had a video of one of the homeless selling drugs to schoolchildren.

Mr Reed, who has been living in the area since 1992, said the school had been empty for years, with a security guard being present around 2016, but then left again. He also spoke to the Bulletin two years ago, saying that thieves had cut holes in the fence of the building (“Vandals leave school in disrepair,” Bulletin, February 9, 2017).

In 2017, national Department of Public Works spokesman, Thami Mchunu, said the building had been handed over to the provincial government as from March 2017. However, the provincial Department of Public Works told the Bulletin that this has not happened because negotiations had failed.

Questions were sent to the

national Department of Public Works who did not respond by the time this edition went to print.

Diep River spokesperson, Constable Zak Marais, said residents could report suspicious activity at the building to 10111 or directly to the Diep River police at 021 710 7300.