

# Tag-A-Ride provides Sindi with a taste of freedom

Sindi Hlatshwayo has been wheelchair-bound since her early teens.

Despite the challenges she faces from spina bifida (a birth defect which occurs when the spinal cord does not form correctly), she has inspired a community by picking up litter from the confines of her wheelchair.

Sadly, this wheelchair began to quite literally fall apart.

Sindi has been described as truly positive, in spite of having to continuously borrow a tattered wheelchair from the clinic and her three-month contract with the Expanded Public Works Programme coming to an end.

“Sindi’s positive demeanour while picking up litter from her wheelchair has inspired the community,” said Wakkerstroom resident, Carol Preston.

Thanks to the Tag-A-Ride initiative, founded by Newcastle resident, Martin Ashton, many kilograms of bread tags and bottle caps have helped restore Sindi’s mobility.

“We were able to replace Sindi’s borrowed wheelchair with a wheelchair of her own, thanks to the set of tops and tags and the work of Martin,” explained Preston.

Ashton met with Preston and fellow resident, Sue Hall, who explained they learned of Tag-A-Ride through articles in a local newspaper.

They were pleased to learn tops and tags benefit local beneficiaries.

“... The most critical aspect of Ashton’s approach is that he does not encourage a drop-off for tops and tags, and then have them sent somewhere else for someone else to profit from the set.”

Preston and Hall explained they could swap a bakkie-load of tops and tags for a

wheelchair ‘right there and then’ and have a wheelchair sent to a recipient in their area.

“The grandmother of a group of children I was working with in eSizameleni (an area of Wakkerstroom) at the time was the beneficiary in this case. I had no idea there was that link.” In addition, continued Preston and Hall, the children were able to see the direct results of their efforts and were motivated to collect even more tops and tags.

“We’ve now been able to broaden our horizons. This ensures a larger number of people contribute to our

cause. Thanks to the Wakkerstroom and eSizameleni groups, and the people who quietly contribute to this program through Lewensvreugde Boekwinkel in Volksrust, we were able to collect enough tops and tags for another wheelchair,” added Preston.

In presenting their story, Preston and Hall paid tribute to Ashton as ‘a wonderful man’ whose main objective was doing good work with items otherwise sitting on a landfill site. To Ashton, the initiative remains close to his heart. “I started Tag-A-Ride in 2013, to raise disability awareness, assist with recycling, and prevent refuse from ending up on shorelines. The program also enabled the community to collaborate on a single

project. The plus side is: you can offer a wheelchair to someone who is in need and who cannot afford one.”

In the eight or so years since, Ashton has collected, recycled and sold tons of bread tags, bottle tops, and juice and milk caps, and encourages residents to donate these type of items instead of simply throwing them away.

## How you can get involved:

Ashton explained it takes 270 kilograms of bread tags or 550 kilograms of bottle tops to purchase a single wheelchair, which makes his efforts more suitable as a community project.

The added benefit is promoting recycling and limiting dumping.

Tops and tags can be dropped off with Rika Ashton at the Amajuba School tuckshop (20 Louis Trichardt Avenue, Barry Hertzog Park) from Monday to Friday between 7am and 1pm, or residents can contact Ashton directly to arrange collection.

**For more information, call Rika (084 264 3775) or Martin (084 600 8321).**

Sue Hall and Carol Preston collect the new wheelchair for Sindi from Martin Ashton.

