

# HARD TIMES REAP REWARDS

*A man who can wholeheartedly adopt three children and raise them to be responsible young adults has to be pretty special, particularly when his own start in life was a shaky one, writes Lee Currie*

**B**allito restaurateur and businessman Anthony de Agrela often looks back to 1979 when, as a defiant 14-year-old from a struggling family, he was placed in Boys Town in Johannesburg via the children’s courts along with his brother Gavin. It was an experience that helped shape his future. “We were very naughty,” he admits. “We never stole anything but we used to sneak out of the house at night and get involved in gang fights.” His grandparents were elderly and not in a position to take him in, but he says they remained a constant in his life until they passed away.

Anthony left Boys Town four years later, just short of his 18th birthday, and in 2004 since the introduction of girls, Boys Town is now called Girls and Boys Town (GBT).

Now 54, he explained the fundamentals of the peer group system at GBT. “It’s a system in which you can become a prefect even in Grade seven, depending on your leadership qualities. There’s a privilege structure based on merits and demerits, and you can earn your way up through a kind of tiered system where you can elect peer youth councillors and mayors – all of whom are resident. I began to understand and embrace the system and progressed to mayor. I look upon it as the best thing that could have happened to me. Today, while I still have difficulty turning the other cheek, I’ve managed to channel my negativity to my more positive side.”

Anthony started to work for family who owned a supermarket in Johannesburg



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**BELOW:** From a tough start in life, Anthony learnt many valuable lessons in Boys Town (pictured below right) that have shaped his success in life. Picture: Tyron Mackenzie



## GIRLS AND BOYS TOWN

Pearl Msweli, GBT National Marketing Manager offered an insight to Girls and Boys Town: “Girls and Boys Town is a national non-profit organisation, established in 1958, committed to helping and empowering youth who are vulnerable and unsafe, helping them to reclaim their lives and then S.H.I.N.E.®.

“The story of the former Boys Town is one of the most heart-warming tales of human endeavour. Its journey is a reflection of everyday life in most societies of the world; namely the tragedy of fear, loss, despair, abuse, neglect and the triumph of faith, courage and hope that changes the way we care for children. Its legacy is about fulfilling dreams and improving lives. The organisation has continued to expand, including the introduction of young girls into our programme in 2004, which then evolved to Girls and Boys Town, offering service to between 20 000 to 50 000 beneficiaries a year.” [www.girlsandboystown.org.za](http://www.girlsandboystown.org.za)



shortly after he left Boys Town. “I’ve since found that there are workers and there are bosses. I admit that I have never liked to be ‘just a worker’ and sometimes my enthusiasm to be boss got the better of me! I gained a lot of work experience though and opened my first supermarket in Hillbrow in 1987. Later my store was bought out by Massmart who converted it into their own brand.”

Fast forward to 2012 and the Dolphin Coast where Anthony opened the first of his popular restaurants, MamaG’s in Ballito, followed by a branch at uMhlali Country Club. At the time of going to press he had just opened a third branch in Palm Lakes Estate. He still owns property in Gauteng, including a fully equipped gym, and in total currently employs around 80 people.

“I know I can be a tough boss, but I’ve always tried to bring the same core values from Boys Town into my business; treating one another with respect, listening before judging, and awarding bonuses on merit.”

It’s certainly not a new hypothesis that it takes more than DNA to be a good parent – and Anthony is a shining example. He married again in 2007 and soon adopted wife Jacqueline’s three daughters when the youngest was just four years old and the eldest a teenager of 13 – a challenging feat for any parents, biological or otherwise. »





**LEFT:** Anthony and Jacqueline sharing a laugh together. *Picture: Tyron Mackenzie*

children irrespective of what they've done. I will always listen. It may seem old fashioned today but I hold fast on issues like eating together – we don't allow trays in front of the TV. Church every Sunday is a given. As much as we have taught them to be self-reliant, I know I will always be their first port of call if they need help. Another life lesson, I've encouraged them not to dwell on what they think are their 'bad points' but rather think of their good points and combine them to get the best out of themselves. This is advice I would give to any parent."

Anthony's gym in Hillbrow is often open to street kids, who are taught physical skills such as the art of boxing. He also supports projects involving the elderly and drug rehabilitation programmes.

"None of us know what the future holds but I hope the values I've instilled in my children will never change." \*

"My perspective of this is based on what I learnt at Boys Town; how the teachers, nuns and priests would love and care for children who were not their own."

When he speaks of his "girls" his love and pride is clearly evident. His biological daughter Natasha, 31 and a well-known DJ, lives in Johannesburg with her partner. The three younger women live at home or

close by. Angelique 24, is doing CA articles. Rosalita 22, is mother of a six-month-old son Alexander, and Jennavive, the youngest at 17, is in Grade 11.

While he admits he is guilty of spoiling his children, Anthony has always been firm on boundaries and consequences. "At Boys Town I was always afforded the right to defend myself and I've passed this on to my



## Recruitment Agency Stands The Test Of Time

WESTVILLE'S PRO APPOINTMENTS AND PRO TALENT CELEBRATE 25 YEARS



CEO of the multiple award-winning recruitment agency, Cindy Norcott started off the business in a spare bedroom in 1994. Despite industry changes, recessions and legislative changes, the agency has grown from strength to strength over the past 25 years. Norcott believes that long-standing relationships built on a foundation of trust, mutual respect and customer care have been important ingredients of their success recipe. "The company's slogan is a heart for people, and we strive to provide a friendly, professional and responsive service to both candidates and clients."

The Pro Appointments division focuses on providing temporary and contract staff to many of Durban's finest companies, while the Pro Talent division has a team of specialist recruiters who focus on specific sectors – such as finance, technical, IT, insurance, sales and logistics.

The company also offers regular business breakfasts and seminars to help upskill and uplift clients and staff. These events are reasonably priced, motivational and offer great value for money.

■ To celebrate their 25th birthday and give back to the community, Pro Appointments and Pro Talent are hosting a free job seeker

workshop on Wednesday, 22 May in Westville, from 8am to 10.30am. Email Judy at [admin@proappoint.co.za](mailto:admin@proappoint.co.za) to book your seat.

■ To contact the friendly team at Pro Appointments and Pro Talent, call 031 265 2000 or visit [www.pro-talent.co.za](http://www.pro-talent.co.za)