



IN NEED: Heinz Park children receive food from pensioner Rosie Claasen who runs a feeding scheme in the area. Welfare organisations and soup kitchens are feeling the strain as the economic recession leads to greater unemployment. *Picture: JEFFREY ABRAHAMS*

SUPPLIES EXHAUSTED SOONER

Soup kitchens feel the impact as job losses bite

AZIZ HARTLEY

WELFARE organisations running community soup kitchens are feeling the impact of the economic downturn as more unemployed people join queues for food.

"Last year this time we served about 450 people, but this year the figure is over 700. The increase has been mainly because breadwinners lost their jobs," Neamatula Isaacs, organiser of a Delft soup kitchen, said yesterday.

He said soup kitchens performed a crucial function in disadvantaged communities where unemployment and poverty were on the rise. Feeding children, the elderly and the disabled were his priority, but nobody was turned away.

"We buy about 300 loaves and cut each loaf in four. Fortunately a local butcher gives soup bones and a Parow businessman gives some funding. But the queue is growing as more people lose their jobs and in desperation come for a meal.

"Many are putting their pride aside. We serve until all the food is finished and when this happens it is heartbreaking to see there are still people queuing," Isaacs said.

Rosie Claasen, head of soup kitchen in Heinz Park, said: "We have 300 people on our register, but help more than 500. This figure is growing all the time. We do get help from Social Development, but the appeal is to business people to also assist. It will be useful if companies can make a contri-

bution which does not have to be money."

Catholic Welfare and Development spokeswoman Jane Gallagher said a soup kitchen in Tafelsig in Mitchells Plain had to reduce its operating hours due to a marked increase in the number of hungry people.

She did not have figures, but said there had been a sharp increase in the past 10 months.

"Many people are jobless and there is a degree of desperation. It is sad to have to close the soup kitchen earlier every day due to an increased number of people and our rising food costs," she said, adding that the organisation received limited funding from the Social Development Department.

Non-profit organisation Ikamvalabantu's Bridgette

Bruckman said: "The need in African and coloured communities is huge. This year in particular the increase in the number of people being assisted, has been evident."

Social Development spokesperson Pumzile Simelela said it funded 48 feeding schemes and kept a register of people they assisted. Government funding required a business plan, an audited financial statement and registration with the department.

"Proposals are solicited and submitted by the organisation to the respective district office. A panel adjudicates the proposals and successful ones are granted funding. Once funding is granted, the department monitors and evaluates."

aziz.hartley@inl.co.za