

## **AN INSPIRATION TO THE CHILDREN OF SOWETO**

During December 2011, a very special equestrian rider honoured us with visits and her time: Philippa Johnson.

Born on 9 December 1974 in Johannesburg, Philippa grew up dreaming of someday becoming one of the country's best dressage riders. At the tender age of 24 years, she was a professional dressage rider and was planning to go to Germany to be trained on top dressage level. Her dream was shattered when she became disabled in a car crash in which both her brother and fiancé were killed. As a consequence of the accident, Philippa lost all her strength in her right arm and 60% of the strength in her right leg. After a long mental and physical journey, nobody could stop Philippa from riding again even though this meant starting at the beginning. Within a year and notwithstanding her severe handicap, she was back in the competition ring.

They say that lightning never strikes twice in the same place, but a year later, Philippa broke her back falling off a horse. Again she decided that nothing will stop her from doing what she loved most.

It took a lot of dedication and long hours of hard work to become a successful international para-equestrian rider. In 2002, she competed in Belgium and found her soul mate and beloved horse, Benedict. From 2003, Philippa and Benedict prepared for the Paralympics in Athens where she won silver twice. Philippa then decided to stay in Europe to prepare for the Hong Kong 2008 Paralympics. Her childhood dream was realised when she won the first equestrian gold medal ever for South Africa at the 2008 Paralympics. Philippa is now preparing for the upcoming 2012 Olympics in London where we know she will make South Africa proud.

Notwithstanding that Philippa is in the midst of training, Philippa spent some time with our children giving them sage advice in respect of riding.

Philippa's view of what is happening in Soweto? She was so impressed on her first visit, she just had to come back a second time and share her experiences and passion for horses with our equally passionate children.

Thank you, Philippa, for being such an inspiration to us all.

Below are some photos from Philippa's website – [www.philippajohnson.com](http://www.philippajohnson.com).

