



# FOUNDATION

## MCC FOUNDATION TRIP REPORT SOUTH AFRICA, FEBRUARY 2023

At Boland Park Cricket Stadium on 10 February 2023, the opening day of the Women's World Cup in South Africa, England Women were out practicing in the 40-degree sultry afternoon. Mountains topped by a stark blue sky formed a dramatic backdrop to a special moment in the history of Women's cricket.



*Heather Knight at the wicket with young cricketers from the MCCF programme*

As part of a launch weekend for a women and girls' cricket empowerment programme run by MCC Foundation, (MCCF) and the CATCH Trust (formerly Gary Kirsten Foundation), girls from Khayelitsha township were coming to meet the England Women. We heard the girls before we saw them, their traditional songs filling the air with exuberance and rhythm as they lapped the boundary.





## FOUNDATION

Three of the England women - Captain, Heather Knight, Sophia Dunkley and Maia Bouchier - all MCC Foundation Playing Ambassadors, were there to meet our beneficiaries and play cricket with them. For those young girls, who rarely get the opportunity to step foot outside their townships, a dream began to unfold at Boland Park that day. All the hardship and challenges of their daily lives were forgotten as they walked out on to the pitch and played a mini match with the England Women.



*Maia Bouchier, Sophia Dunkley and Heather Knight clap to the exuberant singing*

It is moments like these which plant seeds of hope and trigger the nascence of self-value and future opportunities - small moments which can lead to so much. Whatever the outcome, I am sure those girls from Khayelitsha will never forget the day they stepped out on the turf of a South African cricket ground on the first day of the Women's World Cup with players from one of the top teams in the world.

MCC Foundation has long been a supporter of cricket in Cape Town through its partnership with Vince Van de Bijl's MasiSports charity. MCC kicked off support six years ago, providing nets in a primary school in the township of Masiphumelele. Thanks to a generous donor, the Foundation has provided an annual grant to the programme ever since, which enables children from the challenging township environment to pick up bats, develop their cricket skills and experience the joys of the game.



*Vince Van de Bijl and MCCF's Sarah Fane and Angus Berry with children from Masiphumelele*





## FOUNDATION

The women and girls' cricket empowerment programme has been designed to build on our support for MasiSports and develop new partnerships with other impactful cricket charities working on the ground in the townships of South Africa. The CATCH Trust is MCCF's lead partner in this programme. They work in the township of Khayelitsha, running a Centre of Cricket Excellence with an impressive artificial cricket field and adjoining indoor nets.

The year-long programme launched with a weekend of cricket tournaments in Khayelitsha - the Township Trophy- which brought together 60 girls and their coaches from four townships across the Western Cape, Khayelitsha, Masiphumelele, Langar and Mitchells Plain and we were there to see the excitement unfold.



As we approached Khayelitsha on the broad, well-maintained highways, we left the beautiful landscape of Paarl and entered a totally different world. The cosmopolitan streets of Cape Town, fringed by beaches of white sand seemed a thousand miles away from the appalling conditions of the township and their recent memory only served to accentuate the hardship we found. In the searing heat of the day, corrugated iron shacks stretched out as far as the eye could see. Bare-footed boys picked litter in the piles of detritus that covered any open ground. There is no privacy, no peace, no green space in Khayelitsha-other than CATCH Trust's incredible artificial pitch.





## FOUNDATION

The Centre of Cricket Excellence is based at one of Khayelitsha's schools and is like a beacon of hope. As we arrived, we saw the 60 girls and their coaches gathered for the Township Trophy tournament, all in brightly coloured shirts with CATCH Trust and MCCF logos. Soon they were battling it out under the afternoon sun, demonstrating absolute focus and determination and some fine cricketing skills. It seemed miraculous, that in the midst of this township was this haven of security, this opportunity to embrace the joy of sport, these remarkable facilities and it made us feel that anything is possible in this world.

Chris Austin, a MCC Member based at the British High Commission came along to umpire. As the competition unfolded, singing filled the air, the excitement of the teams was palpable, and the screams as wickets fell became deafening. As I watched, I felt that this is what MCC Foundation is all about - bringing opportunity to those who have none and watching them grasp it and grow through the experience.



*The tournament was full of thrilling moments that had spectators leaping out of their seats*

As the weekend progressed, we got to know the girls, and heard their stories. For girls in townships life is tough and they feel safe neither at home nor on the streets. What was clear was that cricket makes them feel safe. They all said it. They never feel safe outside of the cricket environment. They have big dreams, they want to be doctors, teachers, cricketers, but their life opportunities are slim. One girl told us that every day she fears her family will not be able to find their next meal. She wants to earn money so that they never have to feel this way again.







# FOUNDATION

The programme is designed to support these girls and their coaches in the challenges they face. They will have sessions throughout the year which combine cricket with support on mental health, nutrition, fitness, sexual reproductive health, employability, finance, and other life skills. The coaches and beneficiaries will pass on their learnings to other young women in their schools and young female leaders will emerge to take the project forwards.



*Girls in the programme listening to the talks*

Our second day of activities included a visit from cricketing giants, Gary Kirsten and Vince Van de Bijl, and a series of interactive sessions from a South African female cricketer, a world-renowned female physiotherapist and from the "toothbrush Mamas," (from the Dental Wellness Trust) who taught oral hygiene through upbeat songs which nearly brought the roof down. Then the girls were invited to sign up if they wanted to join the year-long empowerment programme - and the queue said it all. An incredibly exciting final took place in the afternoon with one of the Khayalitsha teams victorious.



The 4 Township Teams from Khayalitsha, Masiphumelele, Langa and Mitchells Plain



# FOUNDATION



*BBC's TMS team, Antony Phillipson, coaches and girls from Khayelitsha, Sarah Fane*

The British High Commissioner, Antony Phillipson, held a celebration in honour of MCCF and the Women's World Cup at his Residence. We are very grateful to him and to MasiSports, CATCH Trust, and all our generous donors, including Stonehage Fleming who have backed this project and made it possible. The England and Wales Cricket Board was incredibly supportive, helping to facilitate the visit to Boland Park and arranging tickets for the girls to watch South Africa play. BBC Test Match Special gave me the opportunity to talk about our programme and the work we do globally in an interview with Henry Moeran during the England V West Indies match.

What a week the Khayelitsha girls had - from playing with the England Captain at Boland Park, to participating in the tournament with girls from other townships, to watching their home nation win a match, to being invited to the High Commission! They sang everywhere they went.



*Girls with England Women MCCF Playing Ambassadors*

We will certainly never forget our visit and will continue to support the girls and their coaches. There are plans afoot, sponsorship permitting, to bring them to play against girls from our UK Hubs at the Home of Cricket.

**Sarah Fane, Director MCC Foundation February 2023**

[Click here](#) to listen to Dr Sarah Fane on Test Match Special (skip to 1hr 57mins)





# FOUNDATION

