

# HEALTH PROMOTERS TRAVEL

Today we go on a journey with Gerian Alofs



In this interview, we spoke to Gerian Alofs about her experience and her trip to the Health Promoters in South Africa. Mrs/Miss Alofs has visited the organization several times in the course of the past couple of years to make videos and pictures for the Health Promoters. She also visited many places related to the Health Promoters and how they work. She found those trips special.

## How did you meet the Health Promoters?

"Accidentally because I got to know Harold Robles (Co-Founder). I work as a teacher at the Hogeschool Utrecht. I was also involved in a foundation called Eye For Others. That foundation also carries out projects in South Africa in a different area than the Health Promoters.

As a volunteer I went along with them a few times for a project. Because of this I was already touched by South Africa. The project leader of Eye For Others who met Harold at a meeting introduced me to Harold. We had called each other and immediately had a good click. Two weeks later, Harold gave a guest lecture to my students".

## When and with whom did you make the trip to the Health Promoters in South Africa?

"I have been to the Health Promoters in South Africa several times. The first time was 2014 where I made some videos for the Health Promoters in 2015, I did that again. In 2016 I went to South Africa with my children and father. I also wanted to show them what the work of the Health Promoters involves and what the organization does. I also attended workshops and made video recordings and photos for the organization. In the summer of 2019, I made again a number of portraits of women and children who attended the workshops".

## What was your motivation for visiting the Health Promoters in South Africa?

"I was encouraged by Harold's enthusiasm which made me think I am going back to South Africa. In addition, I really enjoy being able to do something useful. So that I can make photos and videos that the organization can use for the website, social media, or a movie".

## What do you remember most about these trips?

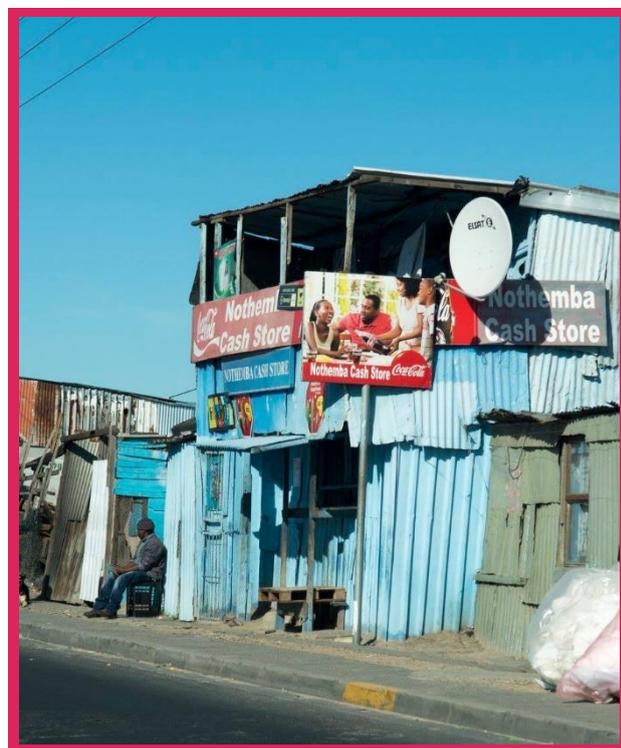
"The power and the warmth of the people there every time I am there. By now I know George, his family and the other Health Promoters I meet at those workshops. The sense of community in the townships is strong. You just notice when you are there that people care about each other and are very sincere in those workshops. To make sure that it also gets better for the other people in the neighborhood. I really like that. Also, always the positivity that people radiate, the circumstances there are of course not nice at all when you compare it with the Netherlands.

It is really a big shock when you walk around there for the first time. There is so much poverty and disease but then you notice that the people are positive in life, they are singing and dancing all day long. There is so much positivity in that, that is really a huge lesson for us as Dutch people.

Of course, we also have a particularly good life here and a luxury life, but I hardly ever find such a positive approach here in the Netherlands. And that you find it in a place where you least expect it, in a place where people do not have it right at all. The positivity just reigns there and that touches me every time. It is special in South Africa".

## What can you say was learnt while at the Health Promoters?

"A lot, every time I come back, I ask myself: "what has been most beneficial? Was it because I was going to make a movie or did not, I learn much from the people there? You become very much aware of how people stand in life, how they appreciate things and take care of each other. They celebrate life there. That is why I thought: "I am no longer allowed to complain about the little things that go wrong in the Netherlands. I think that is a nice life lesson."



*A township in South Africa, where Gerian has been*

## What has been your main duty to the organization during these trips?

"I have mostly made photos and videos for the Health Promoters. And I also had students from Utrecht University carry out projects for the Health Promoters or do internships in South Africa.

What Harold and I often talked about was how we could connect. How do we bring the projects to the attention of students? It is of course much more fun if students can bring something to the attention of Health Promoters. Harold wanted to introduce people to the Health Promoters, because he also knew that young people look at things differently and have new fresh ideas. From the moment I and Harold got to know each other, we have been trying to continue that".

**"I'm no longer allowed to complain about the little things that go wrong in the Netherlands."**

## Would you agree that prevention is key?

"I am completely convinced of that. Prevention is always better. I have been to many places in South Africa and have been able to see and experience the work of the Health Promoters. In a short time, I have visited crèches, community centers, schools and hotels and seen Health Promoters work. You can really see how much that information is needed.

This also became clear last year when I spoke to several women who attended the workshops. The women told you things you would think in the Netherlands how is it possible that people do not know this. There was someone who always thought that you could get cancer if you had done something bad, but now she had learned that that is not the case. Because of this she did not have to be afraid anymore and she could also help other people. There are also many mothers who want to know how you can prevent dehydration in children or prevent diarrhea.

Quite simple things, but which can make people sick or die. If you can teach that to people to move forward, then that is so important. In the workshops you can also see how attentively everyone listens, that information is really sucked up. They are incredibly happy with this often simple but important information".



*The women receive health education from the Health Promoters*

## Would you visit the Health Promoters again if the opportunity presents itself?

"Yes, I would love to. I decided in 2019 to stop flying because of the climate crisis and then it will be difficult to get to South Africa. If I go again, I really want to be able to do something for the Health Promoters. Not just to have a nice visit, but really to be able to do something meaningful".

"It is highly effective how there is being worked on and is certainly a good spend".

## What would you like to share with other people who read this?

"Continue to support Health Promoters in particular, it is extremely important work that they do. What is also so great about the organization is that it is a South African team that does it there. And not the know-it-all Dutch people who come there and tell them what needs to be done in South Africa. People learn from each other there. That way, uneducated people can become Health Promoters themselves and that is also a nice principle. The money that goes to Health Promoters is directly invested in the trainers and training courses. It is highly effective how people work there and is certainly a good way to spend it. It is a nice organization and continue to support it".