HEALTH in every Hobeni hut

EVEN though sick and 83 years old, Qumbeleli Hlungwane never saw his childhood friend Donald Woods again after he fled into exile in 1974, he is happy the renowned anti-apartheid activist’s memory lives on in the rural hills around Hobeni where he used to hunt birds as children.

One of 14 local people screened by the Donald Woods Foundation’s (“health in every hut”) programme since 2005, Hlungwane is convinced more people would have died from illnesses like HIV/Aids, hypertension, high blood pressure and diabetes if the foundation was not there to help.

“Donald Woods has been gone from here for a long time but he has not been forgotten.”

“Since the foundation started there have been big changes in the community and the health of everyone has improved. You now have people coming to your door to check if you are okay.”

Although the Woods family trading store closed down years ago, the old buildings have been renovated and now form part of the Donald Woods Centre where the acclaimed international anti-apartheid activist founded his foundation.

“It makes me proud that the boy we named Zwemjungu – the world is shaking – never forgot rural roots.”

Born in 1921 and raised in Hobeni, near the Haven Hotel, Woods was fluent in Xhosa and his family still hold a special place in local people’s hearts. Elderly Mlonomshwa Jo, who has never forgiven how the Woods family gave him 10 cows on credit years ago so he could use them as lobolos to get married, is convinced he would not be alive today if DWF community health outreach workers (Chows) had not visited him in his rural Cwele hut to treat his hypertension.

The 88-year-old is now also blind and unable to walk. Jo said regular visits by local Chows coworkers Khanyisa Volibi had vastly improved his quality of life.

“I was stuck in my hut until the foundation helped me get treatment for my hypertension. I now have hope.”

Since the foundation outreach team visited Jo’s homestead overlooking the Ntondweni River and, in their turn, tested his family for a range of illnesses like diabetes, his health has also been given a wheelchair so he can sit outside and watch the world go by.

“I do not feel lonely any more, my quality of life has improved a lot.”

In 2007 the DWF renovated and now have been transformed into a beacon of hope.

NEW HOPE: The Donald Woods Centre, which includes the old family trading store (inset), accommodation and training facilities, forms a vital part of the foundation set-up up the former Daily Dispatch editor’s rural homestead

ON THE SCENE: Health in every hut workers check up on the health of 83-year-old Qumbeleli Hlungwane at his rural homestead

Although hard work goes into fundraising, Woods says plans are afoot to make the centre financially self-sustaining.

Next year, our aim is to widen the use of the centre as a project base and training centre to have more of a community focus and community interaction.”

FORMER anti-apartheid activist Donald Woods was born on December 12, 1933 in rural Hobeni, where his family ran a trading store.

After two years as a legal apprentice, Woods chose journalism instead and worked as a reporter for the Daily Dispatch. In the late 1950s he spent two years in the UK.

On his return, Woods married Wendy Bruce. They had six children: Jane, Dillon, Duncan, Gavin, Lindsay, who died in infancy, and Mary. In 1963, aged 30, Woods was appointed editor of the Daily Dispatch and expanded the readership to include black readers.

His friendship with Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko led to the security police monitoring him. Soon after Biko’s murder in 1977, Woods was placed under a five-year ban, stripped of his editorship and subjected to increasing harassment.