

THE MEMORY OF EBRAHIM PATEL LIVES ON (Mohamed “Boeti” Eshak)

When 81-year-old Ebrahim Essop Patel succumbed to an ongoing illness on 23 April 2017, Lenasia lost one of its most favourite sons - “Mr Tiba”. A testimony of his community involvement was the long list of people who descended on his son’s home in Roosevelt Park in Johannesburg, when news of his death spread. In addition, hundreds attended his funeral that evening at West Park Cemetery.



Patel’s involvement in assisting the disabled goes back to 1973, when he was a management committee member of the Transvaal Coloured and Indian Blind Association (TCIBA). With the segregation of welfare services along racial lines under apartheid, the TCIBA formed a branch in Lenasia, of which he was Chairman.

Again, apartheid reared its ugly head and the Lenasia branch had to cater for “Indians only”. It was forced to change its name to Transvaal Indian Blind Association (TIBA) and Patel served as Deputy Chairman to the late IFH Mayet. In 1987, Patel took over the chairmanship of Tiba and was re-elected unopposed every time, until 2013, when ill-health forced him to retire.

Born in 1936, Ebrahim Essop Patel matriculated in 1953 at Dundee High School. He got his teaching diploma at the old Transvaal College of Education in Fordsburg in 1957 and obtained his BA degree through Unisa in 1966.

He taught at Standerton Secondary School, Nirvana Secondary School and Roodepoort Secondary School as Vice-Principal, before moving to Lenasia as Deputy-Principal at Trinity High School. His final post was as principal of Greyville Primary School, and he retired in 1961. When Nurul Islam School was started in 1993 he was appointed its first principal and diligently served them for four years.

Apart from Tiba, Patel, was Vice-Chairman of the 1974 Committee formed to establish a pre-school for learners with hearing impairment. He was also a founder member of the Lenasia Society for the Deaf in 1977, and served as its chairman until 1981, as well as Secretary of the Lenasia Society for the Deaf Trust. He was also on the board of management of the MC Kharbai School for the Deaf from 1980 to 2007. Patel was also a founder member of the Johannesburg Council for the Disabled (JOCOD) in 1995 and was this organisation's Vice-Chairman.

He served on various government and provincial welfare bodies before and after the dismantling of apartheid, including the Regional Welfare Board of RSA, Johannesburg Council for the Disabled, founding member of the Lenasia Bowling Club, and the Greater Johannesburg Welfare Forum. Patel was a trustee and chairman of the Tiba Development Trust, which was established in 1998.

Patel's dedication to Tiba saw the organisation grow from rented rooms in various parts of Lenasia to the establishment of a fully grown multi-faceted Tiba Centre, which was officially opened on 17 November 2007 jointly by Essop S Bhana, the blind Justice Zac Yakoob and himself.

Apart from its core business of catering for the visually impaired, Tiba now caters for pre-school children with profound learning disabilities, a protected workshop for the handicapped and their regular eye clinic. Under his leadership, Tiba also entered into a partnership with Lenmed Private Hospital (now the Ahmed Kathrada Private Hospital) to provide free cataract surgery to deserving clients.

Patel's sterling work was officially recognised 1999 when he was one of the recipients of the South African National Council for the Blind's 70th anniversary awards. A memorial service for Patel was held at the Tiba Centre on May 13 - hosted jointly by Tiba Services for the Blind, MC Kharbai School and Lenasia Deaf Trust.

The greatest tribute to this great stalwart came later that year when the Tiba Centre on Nirvana Drive was renamed the EE Patel Tiba Centre, a just reward for his lifelong commitment to the less fortunate. Patel was succeeded as chairman of Tiba in 2013 by his long serving deputy, Dr Cyril Samuels, who served two terms.

Ebrahim Patel leaves behind two sons, Yusuf and Ziyaad, daughter Fazila, and grandchildren. To carry on the great legacy of Ebrahim Patel, one of his sons, Yusuf, joined the management committee of Tiba Services for the Blind and the Tiba Development Trust.

(Prepared by Boeti Eshak, chairman of Tiba Services for the Blind since 2017)