



GOING NOWHERE: Alverine Hans and her sons, Jared and Ashton, live in a backyard dwelling in Hanover Park. Hans has been on the waiting list for a house for seven years. *Picture: HANNA INGBER WIN*

Tired of waiting for housing, backyard dwellers plan action

HANNA INGBER WIN

TWO mice scurry across the portable stove, running next to a baby bottle. The mattress has no bedding on it because the wind blows dust and sand throughout the home. A bucket for human waste sits at the entrance.

When it rains, the family of five must stay inside. Even with the door closed, the water leaks in, flooding the one-room home.

The toddler has asthma, which the mother attributes to the poor living conditions. The family applied for a house from the city council, but after seven years, they are still waiting.

"We are tired of living like this year in and year out," said Alverine Hans, whose family

pays R300 a month to rent the backyard of a building in Hanover Park.

Her rent includes electricity, but it is often out because the landlord cannot afford to pay the bill.

Frustrated with the city council and desperate for houses, a group of 150 people have formed the Western Cape Backyard-dwellers Organisation to take control of their housing situation and try to build homes for Hanover Park's poorest residents, according to the group's leader.

More than 1 000 families live in such backyard dwellings in Hanover Park, waiting for years sometimes decades to get a proper house from the city council, said Richardo Sedres,

the chairperson of the organisation. Sedres and community members met with mayoral committee member for housing Dan Plato's office more than a year ago, and they have not received any response, he said.

"People are fed up," Sedres said.

Messages left with Dan Plato were not returned.

Tired of waiting, Sedres's group has construction companies lined up to build the homes, he said, but it needs funding and land.

It plans to reach out to groups like Habitat for Humanity as well as banks and the business community to form partnerships to build homes, Sedres said.

The poor living conditions

lead to a plethora of health problems and social ills.

Two newborn babies died recently because of the lack of ventilation in their dwelling, which now fits 10 people in no more than nine by six metres, according to the family.

The grandmother, Shahida Davids, has been on the waiting list for a new house for 18 years.

"Crime, rape, drug abuse it all comes because of overcrowding," said Shukri Allie, a member of the organisation.

The conditions are also safety concerns, he said.

Hans and other women living in such dwellings said they leave their stoves on at night to provide heat, and the rodents can carry disease.

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