

Gugulethu beneficiaries receive houses, but struggle isn't over

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Years of living in informal settlements and backyards came to an end for 20 families who were handed the keys to houses in the Our Pride Housing Project in Eerste Rivier yesterday.

Yesterday's low-key handover spelled the end of 11 years of struggling to obtain a house for 18 members of a group of Gugulethu backyarders who teamed up in 2001 to obtain official housing.

The 18 Gugulethu backyarders were among 300 backyarders who got together in 2001 and formed the Gugulethu RDP Housing Project.

The vast majority of them received houses at Our Pride at the end of 2010 but 55 of their number were excluded from the list.

They allege their chairperson, Phumla Dlokolo, fraudulently removed their names and gave houses to friends, family and other people who paid her for a house.

Their allegations have sparked an investigation into the matter by Human Settlements MEC Bonginkosi Madikizela who reinstated members of the Gugulethu group on the beneficiary list.

There were ululations and hugs handed out to new neighbours as the beneficiaries inspected their new houses yesterday morning.

However, there was unhappiness expressed by one or two people that two families from Eerste Rivier were also included in yesterday's handover.

However, Lucretia and Eugene Fortuin, who had been living in backyards in Eerste Rivier for the last six years, received hugs and a warm welcome from their new neighbour from Gugulethu, Khulukazi Mpintsho.

Other Eerste Rivier backyarders who received houses in the 600-unit project a month or more ago said they were happy to now have people occupying houses in their street.

Tamara Valentine, who received a house a month ago and shares it with her mother and her daughter, said she was "happy to have neighbours. Places have been empty. One house was broken into a while ago".

New homeowner Thandiwe Bekwa said she he'd been living in Barcelona informal settlement in Gugulethu for over 15 years.

"My daughter is now 15, she was born there. She never experienced living in a brick house."

She said in Barcelona there were no toilets, just a bucket system, and it was dirty.

"My daughter couldn't invite anyone home from school, she was too embarrassed. I was also too embarrassed to invite anyone to visit."

She said she and her neighbours from Gugulethu would continue fighting to ensure the other members of their group also received houses.

Co-ordinator of the Gugulethu group Lungile Ntwanambi, who also has not received a house yet, said 37 people from the original Gugulethu RDP Housing Project were still waiting for houses.

He said the MEC promised they would all receive houses and was surprised, when called to a meeting held by his office on Wednesday, to discover that only 18 of their group were to be handed houses the next day.

Ntwanambi said the Human Settlements department officials told him they didn't have evidence to prove the other 37 people were part of the Gugulethu group and qualified for houses.

"We're still struggling," he said.

Human Settlements' project manager Greg de Villiers could not be reached for comment.