

## **The Dobsonville Ladies' Gym Club**

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Most women, as they grow older, simply wish to rest, sit back, and spend time with their grandchildren. The Dobsonville ladies, however, have chosen a different path, one defined by movement, laughter, and community spirit.

Every morning, they gather to walk together before heading to the nearby park to exercise. Their group, known as the Dobsonville Ladies Gym, has become a familiar sight in the neighbourhood, a testament to resilience and determination.

According to Mam' Simelane, "No one specific came up with the idea of going to the grounds. During our morning walks, it just made sense to use the gym equipment there, even though it's very little, because vandals have damaged the park." She adds that it was disheartening to watch the park being vandalised before their eyes, with no action taken by the community to protect it.

The women's motivations vary. Some exercise to manage health conditions, others simply enjoy keeping fit and socialising. Leadership is shared, whoever is able to lead a session takes charge. One of the regular leaders is Mama MaZet, known for her energy and encouragement. The group also receives support from uBra Phill, who joins them three times a week, on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, to guide them through more structured workouts.

Since starting the initiative, many of the women have noticed positive changes in their health and well-being. Yet, their efforts are not without criticism. Some community members have mocked them, accusing them of trying to look young or attract younger men. Still, the women remain undeterred, knowing that their commitment is about self-care and unity, not appearances.

They also face practical challenges. Bad weather often prevents them from using the park, and because it is a public space, they must share it with others. Mam' Zanele appreciates the park's visibility for safety reasons but feels frustrated when children play there and leave used condoms behind. "It's disrespectful and discouraging," she says.

The women also struggle with the presence of animals. Mam' Kelina Buda complains that people bring their dogs and cows, which leave waste on the grounds. She compares their park to the one in Tshepisoong, which is well maintained, fenced, and fully equipped. Mam' Moloi believes the Dobsonville park should also be fenced again to prevent animals from entering, while Mam' Dolly suggests using concrete fencing so it cannot be stolen.

Despite the challenges, the Dobsonville Ladies continue to show up, exercising not only for their health, but for their dignity, their friendship, and their hope for a better, cleaner, and safer community space.

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