

## 'ALL I WANT IS TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL'



**STILL SMILING:** Refilwe Makau (17) sits next to the open sewer she has to traverse on a daily basis. Because of her disability, she has to rely on friends wherever she needs to go. The teenager is unable to attend school this year due to financial constraints.

PICTURE: STEVE LAWRENCE

## Brave girl is determined to succeed

BY ANNA COX

Seventeen-year-old Refilwe Makau was born with no legs, the RDP house she has been allocated has been invaded and her mom has run out of money to pay her school fees.

Yet Refilwe smiles and is optimistic that one day she will be able to open her own hair salon.

Now she is a virtual prisoner in a one-room Alexandra, Johannesburg, shack – just big enough to fit in a two-seater couch and the double bed she shares with her mother.

Refilwe's home is in a squatter camp where dozens of shacks have been randomly built, often less than a metre apart, allowing no space for her wheelchair.

She is piggybacked to the main street where she is able to use her wheelchair donated by MaAfrika

Tikkun, a Jewish organisation which helps the disabled and the elderly.

The Gauteng Housing Department has allocated an RDP house but it has been invaded.

Her mother – who does washing and ironing – managed to take care of her until recently. She has now run out of money to send her to a special facility, the Adelaide Tambo School in Soweto, where she was a boarder last year.

This year her mother cannot afford the R3 500 fees and decided to send her home to Venda to live with extended family.

But, in desperation, Refilwe phoned Alexandra community leader Linda Twala, pleading with him to bring her back.

"It was not nice at home (in Venda). All I want is to go back to school and finish my courses,

which included hairdressing and home economics. I was also doing shotput, javelin and wheelchair dancing, for which I received a trophy," Refilwe said.

Twala sent her R300 for her fare home. "I could not leave her there to rot. She has to be at boarding school, because there is no one to take her to and from Soweto every day. Just because she has no legs does not mean her brain does not function."

He, however, cannot afford to help with school fees.

The school refused her entry because she couldn't pay a R500 deposit for her boarding fees.

Lindela Nemani, the principal at Adelaide Tambo, said Refilwe could make arrangements to pay off her school fees of R1 100 for the year, but her boarding fees had to be paid in full upfront.

