Then there’s ‘the township’ sometimes referred to, surprisingly, as ‘location’ (or loction in the patois of township-talk) by the black residents themselves. Tucked just out of sight, the homes of Chintsa’s black residents show up the disparity between the living standards of the well-off and the poor which is endemic to not only South Africa, but to many countries which are classified as third world or developing.

It is this difference, the ‘gap’, which strikes visitors almost as much as the beauty of the place. This cannot be changed easily.

In true South African style, Chintsa has two distinct parts. Dotted around a series of gentle hills, richly vegetated dunes and the estuary are the affluent homes of the white residents of Chintsa East. The magnificent views across a vast stretch of bay have ensured that property values have risen to such levels that Chintsa is now the preserve of the wealthy. The smaller, simpler beach cottages of the 70’s have been snapped up and transformed into large sophisticated dwellings. Evidence of the old mud and wattle rondavels of the original holiday camp has long since disappeared.

But there are ways of helping through finding constructive solutions to positively develop the less desirable aspects of township life. To encourage a move away from the mindset that makes one believe that they live in a temporary, make-do kind of limbo which will deteriorate around them, where homes and the school buildings become dilapidated, yards grow weeds and litter accumulates and children start to hang about the shebeens (local bars).

Closing this gap by working in partnership with township residents and local structures is the Volunteer Africa 32° South vision.
Arrival of the Whites

At one time Chintsa was in an area lightly populated by Xhosa-speaking Galeckas, until British occupation forced them to seek refuge across the Kei River, later to become the Transkei Homeland during the National Party’s apartheid era.

In true settler style, virgin tropical vegetation made way for crop and dairy farming. Wildly beautiful with its 18 km stretch of sandy white beach, the roar of the Indian Ocean, the backdrop of high dunes densely covered with milkwoods and giant strelitzias, the wonderful temperate climate and valleys of indigenous forest which afforded small hunting opportunities was the dramatic setting which became colonized Chintsa.

In the 1930’s some of the farmers in Chintsa were persuaded by relatives living on farms inland to construct small beach huts to which they could retire for their annual holiday. Ironically, these were identical in style to those of their Xhosa labourers; mud and wattle structures with grass-thatched roofs. Meals were prepared outdoors over open fires, pit latrines were the order of the day and washing facilities were basic – certainly no en-suites! This began Chintsa, the coastal holiday destination to which visiting farmers would come down by ox wagon, and later trucks toting pockets of vegetables and chickens and sheep, which would be left to graze around the beach huts and slaughtered when needed.

Chintsa continued to grow as a rustic holiday village, and in the late 80’s it started to attract a more sophisticated market that were looking for holiday accommodation of a higher standard. So too did the property demand and labor requirements grow.

To understand this “gap” in South African societies, it is necessary to delve into our history and look at the socio-political developments of our area.
The background of the township residents reflects the changing economic opportunities in Chintsa.

A large number of township residents come from a farm background. Having been displaced and subjugated by the British they sought work on the settlers farms and became part of a system almost feudal, living by the grace of the farm owner in huts which they built for themselves but which they could be ordered to vacate at his whim. Farm labourers therefore became locked into a situation of dependency and unable to project a clear future for himself or his family.

1894 saw the Glen Grey Act which did away with communal land rights, thus seriously affecting the living opportunities of, in-particular, non white South Africans. The Land Act of 1913 prevented non white South Africans investing their earnings in land. Ownership was only allowed in the Bantustans or homelands which were geographically defined areas from which the white dominated economic sector could draw labour at will. These homelands were presented as being tribal trust land in which communal rights existed and were to be managed according to traditional rule. In 1936 the homeland system formalized the separation of white and black rural areas. The South African Native Trust (SANT) was formed to manage the African Reserves. SANT underwent an elaborate system of registering and controlling the distribution of labour tenants and squatters which allowed “unlawful” residents on white owned land to be evicted. Where there was black land ownership in white South Africa, these areas were declared “Black spots” and the state were given powers to remove the owners to the reserves.

1950 saw the National Party come into power with one of its cornerstones of control being solidly rooted in the Homeland system whereby it could forcefully control access to resources and the movement of people around South Africa.

With a migrant workforce, the growth of a displaced and socially broken nation emerged. So too did the townships of South Africa which took root as migrant workers set up temporary accommodations on the outskirts of the white cities in which they were employed.

Chintsa was no exception and “loction” 16 was born. Initially government did very little to develop the location’s infrastructure. Instead, locations were merely tolerated as a labour necessity for the growth of white owned infrastructure. In the early 80’s there were a few families living in the present day Chintsa Township – the Gogolas and Pakamisas being the largest. Additional huts started appearing. In the late 1980’s white resort owners, concerned about the lack of housing for their increasing staff numbers, approached the authorities for land. To this was added the concern of other home owners about the need for their workers to be accommodated. It was hoped that houses would be built by the government and owned by occupants. Some Chintsa East residents objected – not caring where or how people should live as long as it was not nearby. This was not to be. In 1994, on a piece of state land right nearby - just over the hill – the new government’s RDP [Reconstruction and Development programme] provided 84 houses for the original 84 applicants. In the space of time between planning and execution an additional 17 applicants were acknowledged and given consent to construct temporary shacks on land adjacent to the township. A fledgling squatter camp was born and today it probably houses in excess of 150 families. The population of 17 (as it is still euphemistically referred to) is a mixed bag of job-seeking hopefuls, others simply hoping to acquire a state sponsored house by squatting in an area where houses have been promised while others are the grown-up children of the original families. In many cases shanty-style extensions to the formal house have been made for the extended family but where this is not practical a site in 17 has been occupied.

It is out of these locations that townships developed.

Having refashioned the meaning of the term for purposes of Apartheid, South Africa now has the distinction of requiring its own entry under ‘township’ as can be seen in the following (American) online dictionary definition:

‘TOWNSHIP – in South Africa, a segregated residential settlement for blacks, located outside a city or town.’
Volunteer Africa 32 degrees south, together with the community leaders of 16 and 17 wish to implement a series of projects in the area to address some of the humanitarian neglect from our past. Our primary objective will be to turn the township of Chintsa into a more structured village and introduce useable, communal areas of aesthetic upliftment in which a sense of pride and permanence can be instilled in the residents.

As far as integration goes, it is limited. Crime, which is seen as emanating from the township, causes mistrust. A less serious but perennial problem stems from wandering livestock. This issue reflects the more subtle dynamics of the strangely mixed yet separate communities. In spite of a formal agreement taken with the authorities that a ‘township’, by definition, means no livestock, goats, pigs and cattle enjoy a freedom not appreciated by the garden-loving residents of Chintsa East. The habits of traditional life are hard to change. As in an imzi, traditional rural village, ‘A man’s wealth is his cattle’ still applies. Traditional ceremonies still require animal sacrifices. On a municipal level matters are dealt with jointly by members of the white ratepayers association and a township representative. But as is frequently the case in this confusing country people ‘get along’. Where there is racism it is not apparent. If there is resentment it is hidden. White attitudes can be benevolent or paternalistic. Some have tried with mixed success to get involved in township affairs while a few have continued with their voluntary work.

The root of many of the problems can be seen in this history. The Chintsa community is not a true community in the African sense where people share clanships and old lineages, where leadership is traditional and is understood. Nor is it a village in the European sense of the word. It remains a township, Chintsa today, the gap.

It is time to close this gap!