



HEROINE

ROMY TITUS

This journalist goes behind the scenes to make a difference to the lives of moms and their children living in prison.

→ **IT WAS A** news assignment that led Romy Titus, 30, a TV journalist, to start the public benefit organisation Babies Behind Bars (BBB), in a bid to improve the lives of infants living in prison.

In 2000, Romy was sent to report on a story to the Pretoria Correctional Centre and was exposed to the lives of babies born to incarcerated mothers. Seven years later she started working with correctional facilities to ensure that the lives of these children were as comfortable as possible.

For mothers in prison, winter is the hardest month, as it gets very cold and their children's nappies take longer to dry. Romy remembers one winter when she arrived at the prison with a package of disposable nappies: "When the moms realised they had a month's supply of nappies, they began crying, smiling and singing. The songs rippled through the whole female section of the prison in appreciation of something as simple as a disposable nappy. I still get goose bumps thinking of that day." BBB works with prisons in South Africa, Namibia and Swaziland to ensure that the basic needs of children born in prison are met. They provide proper nutrition, clothing, bedding, disposable nappies, toys, toiletries and a safe space to play outdoors. But one of Romy's main challenges has been in building trust between herself and the prison authorities, and with

women in prison, so she hopes to build a stronger relationship with the department of correctional services. Romy encourages other women "to get up and make a change, regardless of how small it may be," adding other mothers have been BBB's biggest supporters.

ROMY ON ...

→ **Awards and accolades:** "I don't do this for a pat on the back; I do it because it has changed my outlook on life."

→ **Learning by example:** "My late grandfather, Alexander Titus, was my hero. He loved gardening and taught me about flowers. He motivated me to learn as much as I could and to be anything I wanted to be."

→ **Trying new things:** "I did the South African Sign Language (SASL) course and I would like to campaign for SASL to become an official language."

→ **On making a difference in the world:** "If it comes from your heart you can never go wrong. Give without expecting to receive. Every little bit goes a long way."

→ **Persistence:** "If I feel like giving up, I reflect on moments that made my heart soar. This keeps me going."

→ **Inspiring literature:** "My favourite book is *No Woman No Cry* by Rita Marley. It showed me the strength of a woman."

—As told to Jennifer Thorpe

For details about Babies Behind Bars, visit babiesbehindbars.com or e-mail info@babiesbehindbars.com