

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RESILIENCE NEWSLETTER

Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria



A WORD OF WELCOME

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK: PROF LIESEL EBERSÖHN

Friends and colleagues of the CSR, it is our pleasure to share 2021 news with you. We hope you have been keeping warm, safe, and are holding your loved ones close.

In this new edition, we have filled our pages with all the latest news and updates about the Centre's projects and affiliates. Despite the ongoing challenges posed by COVID-19, you will see that the CSR has been fortunate to remain as busy as ever. In addition to a number of new research product outputs, we are pleased to announce several new projects in collaboration with other noteworthy organisations. This includes a new Terre des Hommes project exploring the effects play-based interventions on the wellbeing of previously maltreated children in residential care; as well as a new collaboration with the National Youth Resilience Initiative to promote the psychosocial well-being and resilience of young people in South Africa in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This newsletter would not be complete without celebrating some of the contributions to resilience related research made by our dear colleagues. In this edition, we place a spotlight on the work of one of our valued interdisciplinary CSR members; Prof. Peet du Toit (Department of Physiology, UP). We also look forward to featuring more of our CSR community in the next edition of our newsletter.

Wishing you happy reading,

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn (Director of the Centre for the Study of Resilience)

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SPOTLIGHT ON A CSR COLLEAGUE

PROFESSOR PEET DU TOIT

Prof Peet du Toit's research career began at the Department of Urology, University of Pretoria in 1990. Initially, his work concentrated on urokinase and sialidase activity, kidney stones, testosterone and essential fatty acids. In 1995, he started working at the Department of Physiology at the University of Pretoria where he expanded his research foci to include Neuroscience, Exercise Science, Neuroscience of Leadership, Education, Brain Fitness and Performance. Since then, Prof du Toit has honed his passion through exploring the links between physical and mental well-being.

To date, Prof du Toit has published 71 articles, 1 book chapter, 9 non-refereed publications or popular articles and videos, presented in 121 conferences, workshops and short courses, and (co)supervised 153 postgraduate students to completion. In collaboration with the CSR, he is currently acting as a co-investigator in the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded project that focuses on Schools as Enabling Spaces to Improve Learning and Health-related Quality of Life for Rural

Primary School Children. Prof du Toit's role in this project has contributed immensely to the team's framing of health-related quality of life issues. He has also contributed to various other CSR-related projects with our network of colleagues, including the following:

- Applying the TEARS innovation to an intervention with child-parent pairs in a resource-constrained context, in support of a healthy lifestyle and holistic well-being. P. du Toit; R. Ferreira; G. Gericke; K. Botha; N. de Villiers; R. Swart.
- Health-related fitness of South African primary school children. R. Ferreira; K. Botha; P. du Toit; V. Nortje; M. Kleynhans; A. Rood.
- Influence of Brain and Body Agility training on the Cognitive Skills of school children. P. du Toit; P. Mabeta; A. Vermeulen; T. Vermeulen; I. Sipsma; G. Johnson.
- Trajectories of Physical Fitness Measures Between Different Working Populations and The Use of Resilience as an Indicator of Cardiovascular Disease Risk. P. du Toit; M. Kleynhans; V. Nortje; D. Holtzhausen; D. Tihale.

Moreover, Prof du Toit has developed six exercise and neuroscience multimedia packages as part of his unique contribution to research on resilience that makes use of a more holistic, integrated, and systematic approach. Through this, Prof du Toit's work continues to champion the need for transdisciplinary resilience research in health and sport sciences.



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Current research on resilience requires a more holistic, integrated, and systematic understanding, emphasising the need for transdisciplinary resilience research in health and sport sciences.
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CSR AND NATIONAL YOUTH RESILIENCE INITIATIVE RESEARCH COLLABORATION

PROMOTING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING AND RESILIENCE OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SOUTH AFRICA IN RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In recognition of the serious and adverse socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people and the urgent need for interventions to support them in coping with these effects, the Centre for the Study of Resilience (CSR) has partnered with the National Youth Resilience Initiative (NYRI) to promote access to support programmes and services during these challenging times. The project's vision is to draw on multiple pathways in order to empower young South Africans and to promote youth resilience during Covid-19 and beyond.

More specifically, the CSR is involved with the development of an evidence-based National Youth Resilience Framework and is partnering with other stakeholders to achieve this.

The project is being led by Prof Ruth Mampane (Head of Department, Educational Psychology, UP) and Prof Funke Omidire (Associate Professor, Educational Psychology, UP).

A PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT MANUAL

USING FLOCKING THEORY FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Epitomising the ethic of the CSR's work, Prof Liesel Ebersöhn has partnered with the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI) and the African Psychosocial Support Institute (APSSI) to produce a [manual](#) on Ebersöhn's theory of flocking. It has been designed for people who are involved in community work or anyone who is interested in strengthening social connectedness in a community. Flocking can be thought of as a social support pathway to resilience which identifies social vulnerability, promotes agency, regulates emotions and manages the supply chain and distribution of social



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*Prof Funke Omidire (left) and
 Prof Ruth Mampane (right)*

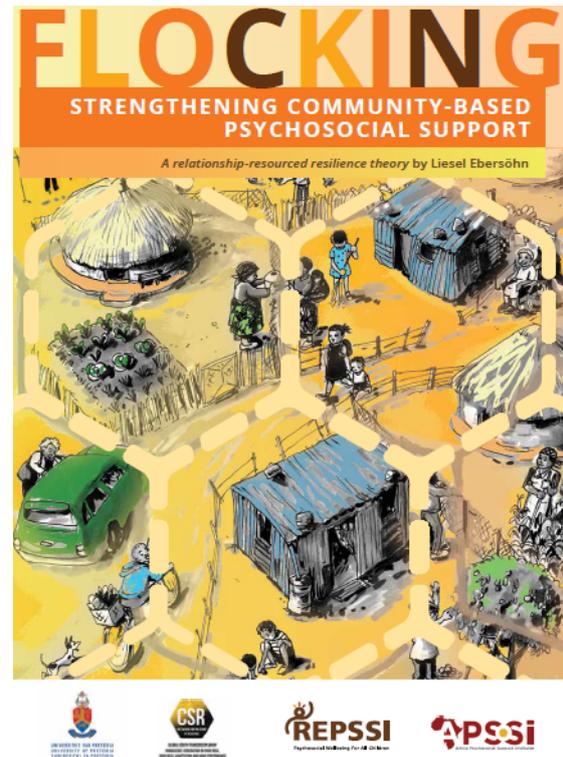
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resources in order to bolster better than expected wellbeing outcomes for members of a collective. Flocking includes psychosocial support as well as support in the areas of income generation, food and nutrition, health, spirituality and education.

Explaining further, Ebersöhn says:

“As indigenous psychology theory, the relationship-resourced resilience theory adds pluralism to the mix of dominant Global North discourses on resilience. The theory offers a Global South perspective on that which is resilience-enabling from an interdependent, and specifically Afrocentric, stance nested in spaces of atrocious inequality where not only are the majority vulnerable, but where customarily, given geopolitical trajectories, the heritage of a majority is often suppressed.”

Flocking provides a sense of inclusion, communal mastery, solidarity and control of a harsh environment where chronic vulnerability prevails. Flocking champions the efficacy of the collective to adjust positively to multiple risks based on what is collectively available in the social ecology.



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Flocking evidence has been translated into an implementable tool to assist those in the psychosocial support sector to provide socioculturally salient care to women, young people, and children to mobilise social support as a pathway to buffer against distress and promote well-being

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ADOLESCENT RESILIENCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

A STUDY OF MULTIPLE SYSTEMS

As a core colleague of the CSR, we congratulate Prof Linda Theron's (Educational Psychology, UP) excellent work on this NRF-funded Adolescent Resilience to Environmental and Socioeconomic Challenges (RYSE RuSA) research project. Theron forms part of a multi-national research team that is exploring the impact of oil and gas production's various negative effects on the mental and physical health of young people and how it is impacting their daily lives across different systems.

To understand the complex role resilience plays in the lives of young people affected by the carbon-intensive extraction and production industry, the study examines individual, social, and environmental system interactions across Russia and South Africa in 6 research sites.

Data collected for this research includes (1) adult community resource mapping activities, in which adults are asked to create a community map indicating possible risks and resources for youth in the community; (2) a youth-informed survey of risk and resilience, based on the original RYSE survey measuring (a) exposure to risks while living communities affected by oil and gas industries and, (b) the possible effects of these industries on the mental and physical health of young people; (3) a draw-and-write activity where young people are asked to draw what they believed has helped them to stay well in life so far. To determine the long-term effects that oil and gas production has on the natural resilience of the community, the research team is engaging young people to act as citizen scientists to conduct assessments of the environment. This will provide statistical data that highlights the long-term effects of the industry on the environment.

The project started in September 2019 and is expected to reach completion in December 2021. Thank you, Prof Theron, for partaking in this important work!



Prof Linda Theron forms part of a multi-national research team that is exploring the impact of oil and gas production's various negative effects on the mental and physical health of young people and how it impacts their daily lives across different systems.



THE ISITHEBE SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS INTERVENTION

MANUAL DEVELOPED THROUGH A CSR AND SYNERGOS INSTITUTE PARTNERSHIP

Isithebe (meaning *eating mat* or *wooden tray* in isiXhosa) is a symbol of bringing family together. Of connecting people. Of preventing isolation. Isithebe shows nurturing, trust, comfort, care and support, as well as deep interest in one another. As is poignantly evident during COVID-19, it is the physical presence and social connectedness of others that remains instrumental for our personal and professional well-being, including that of teachers.

The CSR, in partnership with the Synergos Institute, have advanced the [Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention](#) to explore social connectedness as a pathway to teacher resilience in challenged education spaces. It is also the research outcome of the participatory engagement of the Imbumba Yabafundiso Ntsapho (meaning *strong teacher relationships* in isiXhosa) group of participating teachers who co-developed and implemented the intervention.

Isithebe is an evidence-based intervention that intentionally crafts spaces of togetherness using

arts-based activities to strengthen connectedness (rather than isolation and exclusion). Teachers from six primary schools in high-adversity neighbourhoods all showed increased positive emotion, sense of coherence, motivation and professionalism, self-efficacy and teacher efficacy. These strengthened capabilities are resilience-enabling for teachers to stay in the high-stress profession, experience eustress, and be motivated to provide quality education.

As a core part of the Isithebe Social Connectedness Intervention, a comprehensive manual was developed by Prof Liesel Ebersöhn, Prof Ronél Ferreira, Marien Alet Graham, Jessica Versfeld, Zahné Bosch, Irene Seaworyeh, and Joanne Tomlinson.

THE WELLBEING PROJECT

A CSR AND GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION

Georgetown University and The Wellbeing Project are collaborating with the CSR on a think tank that explores the relationship between the inner self and the outer world so that an inner wellbeing orientation deeply informs the thinking and work of the social change sector, and includes

ISITHEBE Social Connectedness Intervention MANUAL

Developed in collaboration with the:
IMBUMBA YABEFUNDISINTSAPHO-team

Social connectedness as pathway to teacher resilience in school communities in challenged education settings



ISITHEBE

Funded by The Synergos Institute

February 2020
Centre for the Study of Resilience
Faculty of Education
University of Pretoria

Liesel Ebersöhn, Jessica Versfeld, & Ronél Ferreira

Isithebe is a symbol of bringing family together. Of connecting people. Of preventing isolation. Isithebe shows nurturing, trust, comfort, care and support, as well as deep interest in one another.

educating the next generation of change-makers. The Wellbeing Project was launched in September 2020 with an initial focus on the publication of a meta-research paper that focuses on bringing together three interconnected communities: the academic research community, the social change sector, and the higher education community.

The Think Tank's important work will have a global reach, honouring the voices of those who have already been engaged in these areas for a

long time, and will actively seek to converge with the Wellbeing Project's emphasis on Art and Culture. The initial two focus areas are Intergenerational Trauma and Integral Ecology.

With these two key foci in mind, the primary activity of this think-tank is to develop new systemic lenses for social change informed by connecting the inner and the outer. Rooted in the research literature and shaped by interdisciplinary and cross-sector global perspectives, the CSR's colleagues Prof Liesel Ebersöhn and Dr Charity Mokgaetji Somo (Natural and Agricultural Sciences, UP) are contributing to emphasising the focus on lenses that are transformative and that help reshape orientations and profoundly empower the kind of extraordinary social change that we need in this generation.

UNESCO PROGRAMME ON SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING

AN INCEPTION WORKSHOP SERIES

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn and CSR colleague Dr Charity Mokgaetji Somo were invited to participate as expert contributors in an inception workshop

p of the UNESCO Programme on Social and Emotional Learning, that was held on 11 and 12 February 2021.

UNESCO, along with the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) and the Section for Global Citizenship and Peace Education (PSD/GCP) in Headquarters collaborated in the development of guidance tools for the integration, and improved provision, of social and emotional learning throughout the education system. This work stemmed from joint engagement in the promotion of global citizenship education, emphasising the importance of all three dimensions of learning - the cognitive, social and emotional and behavioural - and built on the study released by MGIEP in 2020 - 'Rethinking Learning: A Review of Social and Emotional Learning for Education Systems'.

The ultimate goal of this work is to improve UNESCO's ability to support countries in their continued efforts to provide equitable and inclusive quality education to all learners, throughout life (SDG 4), making full use of current evidence on the benefits of social and emotional learning to improve the content, delivery and learning outcomes of education.



Currently presenting | Size Control | Stop Presenting

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

MGIEP Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development

Socio-emotional Learning – the key to building Global Citizenship

Dr. Nandini Chatterjee Singh
(n.chatterjee@unesco.org)

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The ultimate goal of this work is to improve UNESCO's ability to support countries in their continued efforts to provide equitable and inclusive quality education to all learners.
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CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RESILIENCE AND TERRE DES HOMMES RESEARCH COLLABORATION

EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF INTENSIFIED PLAY-BASED INTERVENTIONS ON THE SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING OF PREVIOUSLY MALTREATED CHILDREN IN RESIDENTIAL CARE IN GQEBERHA, SOUTH AFRICA

The CSR is pleased to announce its ongoing collaboration with Terre des Hommes (TDH) in this impactful research which focuses on generating systematic evidence on the resilience-enabling capacity of play-based interventions to promote the resilience of children. The children participating in this study are between 9-13 years old and live in two residential childcare centres (Oosterland Child and Youth Care Centre and MTR Smit Children's Haven) in Gqeberha, South Africa.

The purpose of this TDH-funded research is to explore the extent to which intensified, low cost play interventions can be resilience-enabling to improve children's multi-dimensional subjective well-being outcomes.

The study will research key indicators for child wellbeing outcomes such as health, learning, socio-emotional skills (emotional,

social interpersonal skills, positive social relationships, sense of belonging, pro-social behaviour), and ability to cope (self-regulation/self-efficacy, agency).

INTRODUCING THE CSR RESEARCH TEAM THAT IS LEADING THIS TDH-FUNDED PROJECT

PETRONELLA CHIRAWU



Petronella Chirawu is a Doctoral student at the University of Pretoria, Centre for the Study of Resilience, Department of Educational Psychology. She is a trained social worker and has a Masters in Global Health and Development from the University College London, UK. She has worked on several health and social science research projects with a focus on building the resilience of communities. Her research interests continue to be pathways to resilience of people facing adversity/challenged communities and well-being of children and adolescents. Her current studies focus on exploring the effects

of play-based interventions on the subjective wellbeing of previously maltreated children under the supervision of Prof Liesel Ebersöhn.

RUE HOPLEY



Rue holds a Master's degree in Theology from the University of Pretoria (UP) in the year 2011 and is an ordained minister at the Nederduitsch Reformed Church of Afrika (NHKA). After her postgraduate studies, she obtained certification as a Registered Behaviour Technician from the EDS Learning Institute. Her academic pursuit lies within the field of Applied Behaviour Analysis, with a particular passion to increase the quality of life and agency of persons with intellectual disabilities through behaviour intervention. Rue is currently a part-time Reverend at the NHKA Pretoria-East Congregation and a research coordinator at the Centre for the Study of Resilience (UP).

PROF LIESEL EBERSÖHN

Prof Liesel Ebersöhn is the Director of the Centre for the Study of Resilience and a professor in the Department of Educational Psychology in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria and a registered educational psychologist. A National Research Foundation-rated researcher and current Secretary-General of the World Education Research Association (WERA), Liesel is an expert on social dimensions of resilience with extensive experience in intervention research on transdisciplinary resilience-enabling pathways to positive health and wellbeing outcomes in severely challenged Southern African spaces. She is engaged in high-level global education and poverty think tanks, panels and boards, is influential in Global South education development circles and actively

supports education policy reform in the Global South based on evidence of resilience-enabling transformation in Africa. She is a recipient of numerous scientific association, national and institutional awards.

DR MOKGAETJI CHARITY SOMO

Dr Charity Somo holds a masters degree in Educational Psychology from the University of Pretoria (S.A.) and a doctoral degree in Human Development and Family Science with an emphasis in Marriage and Family Therapy, from the University of Georgia (U.S.). Her research is focused on family mental health and neurodevelopmental disorders in low-and-middle income contexts. She employs a relational and ecological framework to mobilize individuals, families and communities to experience resilience.

SFISIO MASINA

Sfiso Masina is a Master's student at the University of Pretoria and is enrolled for MEd Educational Psychology. He is currently working as a Teacher Assistant at the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Pretoria. He obtained his undergraduate degree at North West University and his post-graduate degree at Nelson Mandela University. He is a member of Golden Key. He has previously worked as a supplementary instructor (Tutor) at the North West University. His academic pursuit lies within the field of educational psychology with a passion for making change and promoting optimal function in the sector of education. His current studies focus on exploring the use of play-based interventions with children in residential care to promote resilience under the supervision of Prof Liesel Ebersöhn and Petronella Chirawu.

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING (2020/2021)

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF RESILIENCE (CSR), FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The annual Advisory Board meeting of the Centre for the Study of Resilience for 2020/2021 was held on 16 March 2021. This meeting was chaired by the Dean of Faculty of Education, Prof Chika Sehoole.

The attendees included Mrs Nasrin Amla, Representative for Mr Naeem Moolla, Director: Finance, UP), Prof. Barend Erasmus (Dean: Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, UP), Prof. Elsabe Loots (Dean: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, UP), Prof. Chrisna du Plessis (Proxy for Prof. Sunil Maharaj, Dean: Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and IT, UP), Prof. Jerry Pillay (Dean: Faculty of Theology and Religion, UP), Prof. Vasu Reddy (Dean: Faculty of Humanities, UP), Prof. Ruth Mampane (HOD: Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, UP), Prof. Linda Theron

(CSR Executive Committee member, Department of Educational Psychology, UP), Prof. Ingrid Gogolin (International member: University of Hamburg, Germany), Dr Phumzile Langa (Director for Rural Education, National Department of Basic Education (DBE)), Ms Marlene Ogawa (Programme Manager, Synergos Institute), Prof. Adrian van Breda (Department of Social Work, University of Johannesburg (UJ)), Dr André Viviers (Senior Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF), Prof. Phumudzo S Munyai (Proxy for Prof. Elsabe Schoeman, Dean: Faculty of Law, UP).

The CSR's response to operating amidst the COVID-19 pandemic was a major discussion point in the meeting. Prof Ebersöhn reported that the CSR sees the past year as an opportunity to adapt to unpredicted and unexpected challenges and that the need for positive conditions and outcomes have further highlighted the importance of resilience. Moreover, these challenging events have increased the intensity and frequency of resilience-related research.

Attendees congratulated the CSR for continuing its important work during these difficult times, and particularly



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A screenshot from the CSR Advisory Board Meeting

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**Centre for the Study of Resilience,
Advisory Board Meeting**

DATE: 16 March 2021
TIME: 10:00
VENUE: Virtual



NEW CSR-AFFILIATED PUBLICATIONS

JOURNAL ARTICLES

- Bemath, N., Cockcroft, K., & Theron, L.C. (2020). Working memory and psychological resilience in South African emerging adults. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 50(4), 493-506. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0081246320920868>
- Cianfagna, M., Bolon, I., Babo Martins, S., Mumford, E., Romanelli, C., Deem, S. L., & Ruiz de Castañeda, R. (2021). Biodiversity and human health interlinkages in higher education offerings: A first global overview. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.637901>
- Ebersohn, L. (2020). Collective resilience to global challenge: a collective wellbeing agenda to transform towards sustained equitable education. *Práxis Educativa (Brasil)*, 15(e2016344), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.5212/PraxEduc.v.15.16344.082>
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- Höltege, J., Ungar, M., & Theron, L. (2021). The Differential Interplay of Home Routines and Comforting Beliefs on Adolescent Mental Health in Situations of Severe Parental Conflict. *Adversity and Resilience Science*, 2, 5-17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-021-00029-7>
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- Ungar, M. & Theron, L. (2020). Resilience and mental health: How multisystemic processes contribute to positive outcomes. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 7(5), 441-48. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(19\)30434-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(19)30434-1)
- Ungar, M., Theron, L., Murphy, K., & Jefferies, P. (2021). Researching multisystemic resilience: A sample methodology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11(607994), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.607994>
- Woollett, N., Bandeira, M., Marunda, S., Mudekunya, L., & Ebersöhn, L. (2021). Adolescent pregnancy and young motherhood in rural Zimbabwe: Findings for a baseline study. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13362>

CONNECT WITH THE CSR

WE'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Director: Prof. Liesel Ebersöhn

Tel: +27 12 4202337

Fax: +27 12 4205511

Email: liesel.ebersohn@up.ac.za

CSR Secretariat:

Ms. Liz-Marié Basson, Ms. Kirsten Dingle & Ms. Amber Eksteen

Email: csr@up.ac.za

Website:

<http://www.up.ac.za/centre-of-the-study-of-resilience>

Address:

The Centre for the Study of Resilience (CSR)

Student Centre (Building 10), 3rd floor

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria

Groenkloof Campus

C/o George Storrar/Leyds Street Pretoria