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Bridging the practical gap: The start of the sustainability project to transform Science and computer labs

Gloria Khoza (Accounting Sciences, Co-Chief Executive Officer: Keep That Gold Shining NPC)



A heartwarming event is unfolding at Thulaganyo Secondary School in the heart of Mabopane township. A beacon of hope and inspiration is being lit for the learners who, for far too long, have faced a significant deficit in practical exposure due to the lack of essential equipment.

This transformation is being made possible by Keep That Gold Shining Non-Profit Company (NPC), with its project aimed at improving the sustainability of facilities at underprivileged schools. A dedicated group of talented second-year

students from the University of Pretoria (UP) led by visionary Sustainability Team Leader, Onismo Mashinini, undertook the task of painting and refurbishing the school's Science and Computer labs. The project, driven by a shared vision of creating a brighter future for township school learners, is an inspiring example of how passionate individuals can come together to uplift and empower their community.

The primary objective was to instill hope, improve aesthetics, and, most importantly, encourage learners to embrace practical aspects of their

education, particularly in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). One of the major obstacles faced by schools in underserved areas is the lack of resources, particularly in terms of equipment and facilities. Thulaganyo Secondary School is no exception. Despite the learners' enthusiasm for learning, their access to practical resources is severely limited.

The science and computer labs, which are under-resourced and uninspiring,

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are in the process of being transformed into vibrant, engaging spaces where curiosity and creativity can flourish. The transformation of these labs will entail more than a mere coat of paint.

The sustainability team will collaborate to design an environment that will stimulate learning and innovation. The walls will be adorned with educational murals, inspiring quotes, and interactive elements that will enhance the learners' interest in science and technology.

The once-bleak labs will radiate the promise of discovery and achievement. This project is not just about aesthetics; it is a journey of self-discovery for everyone involved.

The students are learning valuable lessons about teamwork, leadership, and the power of community-driven initiatives. This experience will allow them to understand the challenges faced by township schools and work together to find solutions.

Keep That Gold Shining NPC and UP have benefited significantly from this engagement. The University has been able to fulfil its commitment to community development through the Joint Community-Based Project (JCP).

This collaboration has enhanced the University's reputation as an institution dedicated to social responsibility and community engagement. Keep That Gold Shining NPC has benefited from the project by gaining access to resources and expertise from the University. This has enabled them to expand their reach and impact in improving the facilities at township schools.

Despite its success, the project has faced several challenges. One major challenge was securing funding to support various activities and initiatives. However, through strategic partnerships and

fundraising efforts, this challenge was successfully overcome. Furthermore, the project has a broader vision of taking this initiative to other schools that face similar challenges, ultimately creating a network of well-equipped science and computer labs in underprivileged communities, and this serves as a reminder that

with determination and community support, even the most challenging obstacles can be overcome.

Keep That Gold Shining NPC is actively seeking the support of sponsors and partners who are willing to contribute to this noble cause.



Matters of interest

- Save the date: Transdisciplinary Community Engagement Seminar coming up on 10 October 2024
- Refer to the links below to some of the recommended journals for submission of community engagement articles:
 - Community Development: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rcod20>
 - Journal for Community Practice: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/wcom20>
 - Journal of the Community Development Society: <https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/rcod19>

Conferences

- 10th Flexible Futures Conference, 'Reimagining assessment: Navigating the intersections of integrity, quality, and AI in higher education', 20–21 August 2024
- Transdisciplinary Community Engagement Seminar, 10 October 2024, University of Pretoria
- 27th International Service-Learning Conference, 29–30 August 2024: <https://seminario.clayss.org/en/home>
- Education Association of South Africa (EASA) Conference, 19–22 January 2025: <https://www.easa.ac.za/conference/easa-2025/>

The Unit for Community Engagement invites you to report on community engagement activities by submitting articles for publication in the next newsletter (Spring 2024).

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From left: Mr Albert Matlhekethla, Ms Kanye Rampa, Dr Eugene Machimana and Ms Londiwe Mahlangu

Masiphakame Project: Enhancing early childhood development in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

Prof Jeannie van der Linde (Head: Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology) and Prof Juan Bornman (Professor in Speech-Language and Hearing Therapy, Stellenbosch University; Research Fellow, University of Pretoria)



Left: The Masiphakame project logo, which translates to 'We all rise together'.

Below: The Masiphakame project team at the conclusion of the first community awareness day



In low- and middle-income countries like South Africa, where poverty rates are high, over 200 million children under the age of five encounter significant obstacles in realising their full developmental potential, largely due to socioeconomic factors. This hinders their ability to communicate effectively, impacting their ability to form and maintain relationships, academic performance, and overall well-being.

Responding to this pressing challenge, the Masiphakame Project, which translates from isiXhosa as 'We all rise together', focuses on South Africa's most impoverished province, the Eastern Cape, where high poverty rates necessitate widespread social assistance

programmes. This initiative aims to identify and support children facing developmental difficulties at an early stage, making a substantial difference in their academic performance and future prospects. Moreover, it alleviates the strain on governmental resources that would otherwise be directed towards special education or intervention services later in life, aligning closely with South Africa's National Development Plan 2030.

The project held its first community awareness day on 24 February 2024, aiming to empower targeted communities to identify and support children with language difficulties, particularly in resource-limited settings. Community care workers and healthcare professionals underwent training to conduct

general developmental, hearing, and vision screenings using cell phones.

These devices were graciously loaned to the project by the University of Pretoria's Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. Furthermore, campaigns promoting health and developmental awareness were organised to educate community members about the crucial role of speech and language development in children using pamphlets, word of mouth, and radio broadcasts. Parents were equipped with vital information to help them identify signs that their child might require additional support.

Through collaboration with non-governmental organisations, regional universities, and public healthcare institutions, a comprehensive referral network has been established to assist parents whose children are identified as needing increased support. This network will help to ensure that community members can seamlessly access the services of speech-language therapists, audiologists, and optometrists when necessary. Early childhood development centres in the target communities have also undergone training on how to support children's speech and language development effectively in the classroom.

The Masiphakame Project aspires to make a positive impact on the lives of children and their families in East London, Eastern Cape, contributing to a brighter future through enhanced early childhood development.

Lesedi la Batho: Shining a spotlight on skills and psycho-social challenges in the community

Thapelo Mokwena (Manager: Lesedi la Batho)



need for Young Mothers in our support group to leave their children in a safe space in order for them to go and complete their studies. We also have a variety of support groups hosted by our qualified social workers and social auxiliary workers namely: Gender-based violence (GBV) Man2Man, Young Mothers, Ikemele, Commercial Sex Worker (CSW) support group.

Currently, the organisation's beneficiaries include 70 learners in the daycare centre and 190 students attending the skills training programme. Achievements to date include training more than 1 200 beneficiaries in various skills programmes, providing support to more than 100 GBV survivors, and educating more than 2 000 schoolchildren annually. The organisation works with the community to address their unique social challenges. Firstly, many children have no birth certificates or have difficulty applying for identity documentation because of family conflict, abandonment, or the death of parents or guardians. The lack of documentation may result in guardians being unable to apply for South African Societal Security Agency (SASSA) grants or schooling. Secondly, there is a high need for social work support in schools, where children often act out as a way of seeking help.

Social workers from Lesedi la Batho are often called to attend to cases in schools where there are signs of child abuse. There is a lot of bullying in schools, which may cause children to leave school or even harm themselves. There has also been an increase in children experimenting with alcohol and drugs.

Lesedi la Batho is a faith-based Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) operating a multifaceted community centre in Mabopane township in Pretoria. The organisation was founded in 2011 and currently employs 30 staff members and volunteers.

The organisation's goal is to inspire, empower, motivate, engage, and equip youth and the community at large through skills training, job placement assistance, female empowerment, social enterprise development, sports, and early childhood development. Its mission is to make South Africa a beacon of hope by providing youth and community with the opportunities and skills to realise their full potential and purpose, ensuring members of our society become empowered to make a difference.

We offer a variety of free skills training in order to equip our beneficiaries and make them employable which assist to address the high unemployment amongst youth and food security issues in the Mabopane community and surrounding areas, our course durations are for a period of 3 months. We have Ratanang Day Care Centre (ECD) on our premises which became a reality after we realized the dire

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We provide referrals to the relevant services, such as health care, SASSA, and Department of Home Affairs. The partnership with the University of Pretoria (UP) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) programmes provides invaluable support in the form of students assisting with computer repairs and software updates. In addition, Psychology students facilitate mental health workshops for staff.

Overall, working with UP students has been amazing because they go the extra mile to assist us. In future, it would be beneficial for the organisation to involve UP students in more ICT support services, maintenance and repair of sewing machines, and psycho-social support for social workers and auxiliary social workers, who constantly need a safe space to express their

own mental health issues. Students can also provide mentorship and assist with up-skilling opportunities for Lesedi staff and students. Additionally, we collaborate with Community Media Trust (CMT) and Open Disclosure.

As part of our community-building strategy, we organise social events that bring together members of our community to celebrate our unique culture. Some of these events feature catchy themes like 'Man2Man (Fathers Matter)', and there are also young mothers' events, graduations, school holiday programme and sports days. By holding these events, we are able to shine a spotlight on important issues affecting our community.

Students' reflections on the breastfeeding training course at UP

Karabo Patience Matobako and Skye Kampmann (Final-year Dietetics Students)

Dr Heather Legodi, Betty Mohlala, and Phumudzo Tshiambara (Lecturers: School of Health Care Sciences)

Karabo Patience Matobako

Today, I asked my mom about her breastfeeding journey with me, and I was shocked to find out that what we read in the textbooks and the literature can be very different from reality. She laughed and told me that she only exclusively breastfed me for four months. Thereafter, she introduced me to formula and gradually to porridge. She said she had to work and could not breastfeed for longer than that. This was the year 2000. The 12th of February 2024 was the first day of our breastfeeding course, and the Department of Human Nutrition and Nursing brought in amazing keynote speakers.

The speakers who stood out the most for me were Mrs Betty Mohlala and Mr Sthembiso Mnisi, who touched on examining our attitudes regarding breastfeeding, the global and national context of breastfeeding, and the role of breastfeeding in child survival. It is here that I learned that I know less about breastfeeding than I thought

I did. I realised I had been ignorant with regard to nutrition for infants, which is surprising, seeing that I am a dietetics student. Nonetheless, I was encouraged to advocate for breastfeeding and to educate myself about breastfeeding and the statistics thereof in our country.

I have a passion for child, infant, and maternity health, and I am currently researching the human milk oligosaccharides in the Advanced Human Nutrition (HNT 411) module, which links very well to the breastfeeding course.

All the topics covered on the day were important, but what stayed in my mind was the importance of breastfeeding, the terminology used, and the composition of breast milk. The cherry on top was when two mothers shared their positive experiences with breastfeeding, and we even observed one of the mothers breastfeeding her little girl. I plan to further my studies by doing a master's in dietetics at

the University of Pretoria so that I can learn more about this topic and share my findings with the community, including those in informal settlements.

Skye Kampmann

It is amazing to see how much of a positive impact breastfeeding can have on a child's life, and the fact that breastfeeding rates in South Africa are low indicates that there is a large knowledge gap around the benefits and the process of breastfeeding.

We really need more healthcare workers pushing the message of breastfeeding and educating moms about these benefits and how to breastfeed. We are very lucky to be able to do the breastfeeding course and gain the knowledge we need to be able to educate others and push the message of breastfeeding, which will hopefully make an impact on the breastfeeding rates and the health of children in South Africa.

#BreastfeedingMatters

Co-generating story maps: A collaborative project between the Historical Society of Mamelodi and the University of Pretoria

Rev Chris Nkomo (Chair: Historical Society of Mamelodi)

The University of Pretoria's (UP) Mamelodi Campus and the Historical Society of Mamelodi (HSOM) are collaborating on a research project aimed at digitally preserving the stories and history of Mamelodi.

This multifaceted initiative comprises five key components: training community members in the creation of personal digital stories using cloud-based video editing software, conducting interviews with senior citizens, developing an ArcGIS story map with students, empowering secondary school learners to create their digital stories, and compiling story maps highlighting significant events and individuals within the community. This project serves as a vital bridge between UP and the community, fostering collaborative efforts to capture and preserve their rich narratives.

The project started in November 2014 and aims to empower the community by encouraging individuals to share their stories. Through this process, we strive to promote healing and cultivate a stronger sense of community among people. The organisation is led by a dedicated team of five active members who oversee its operations. In addition

to this core team, the organisation boasts a membership of over 75 individuals who are connected and organised via a WhatsApp group.

HSOM provides training sessions on WeVideo and basic research skills during the University's vacation periods. These sessions cater to a diverse audience, including senior citizens and high school learners, offering valuable skills to participants.

Our most significant achievements to date include presenting a paper on digital storytelling at the Education Association of South Africa (EASA) conference held from 14 to 17 January 2024 at Mount Grace Hotel in Magaliesburg. Additionally, our annual Mamelodi tour, led by honours students from the UP, stands as another noteworthy accomplishment.

From HSOM's perspective, the core community challenges derive from various forms of brokenness. Thus, fostering a strong relationship with the Mamelodi Campus has proven advantageous, allowing us to address these challenges effectively. Currently, we are dedicated to cultivating similar relationships with other campuses, including the

Hatfield Campus, to extend our impact and reach. Presently, our collaborations extend to BScHons students from the Centre for Faith and Community and the Department of Geography, Geoinformatics and Meteorology, who are engaged in the development of story maps. This collaboration serves as a learning journey for both parties, as it exposes the students to township environments, challenging any stereotypes they may have.

The HSOM plays a crucial role in enriching the academic experience of honours students by providing them with informative lectures, often delivered in collaboration with Dr Martina Jordaan. Following these lectures, students embark on research projects, creating videos and story maps that explore various aspects of Mamelodi's history. Their tasks include sourcing and documenting community stories. Additionally, we organise an annual lecture where the students gain more of an understanding of our community.

Mamelodi is home to a network of community organisations with which we proudly collaborate, including Urban Studio, Thandanani Drop Inn Centre, and LifeLine.

Breastmilk: Natural and nutritious

Lethabo Tabane, Velia Mampane and Tabea Mokgethoa
(Fourth-year BDietetics [Community Nutrition] students)
Bongiwe Nkondo, Marion Beeforth, and Phumudzo Tshiambara
(Supervisors: Faculty of Health Sciences)



During the seven-week community nutrition internship at Eersterust Community Health Centre (CHC), we planned to increase the exclusive breastfeeding rates for infants.

Background information collected from the clinic staff and clients in the community showed that the rates of exclusive breastfeeding at the third dose of the hexavalent vaccine had decreased and were lower than the Tshwane Health District Services targets.

Furthermore, there was a lack of implementation on step ten of the ten steps to successful breastfeeding at the clinic (coordinate discharge so that mothers have timely access to ongoing breastfeeding support).¹ Professional nurses, community members, and pregnant women were interviewed on their knowledge,

experiences, and misconceptions about exclusive breastfeeding as part of the situational analysis. Mothers had a misconception about insufficient breastmilk production and a lack of knowledge of breastmilk expression by hand and the introduction of breastmilk substitutes when returning to work.

Sr Mudau from the Midwife Obstetrics Unit (MOU) said that 'mothers do breastfeed after giving birth', but she did not know what happened when they moved from the MOU to the wellness area.

The main purpose of the intervention was to raise awareness of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of an infant's life and to create a breastfeeding support group for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

They were given nutrition education on breastfeeding, including the benefits (for both baby and mom), breastfeeding in the context of HIV, frequent feeding to ensure adequate breast milk production, and storage of expressed breast milk. Demonstrations were based on correct latching and position of the baby, as well as correct hand expression technique and composition of breastmilk.

The programme was called 'Breasterust' as it was about breastfeeding and we were situated in Eersterust. Our motto was 'Breastmilk: natural and nutritious'. To ensure maximum support and attendance of the intervention, two invitations were sent to the Eersterust Community Health Centre

(CHC) and the community members. Furthermore, Poort FM (a local radio station) was visited to extend the invite to the Eersterust community and share the intervention details with the listeners. We would like to thank the local Eersterust Pick n Pay for sponsoring us with vouchers for the audience's snacks, the Eersterust CHC facility manager and staff for the venue and support, and our lectures for their attendance, guidance, and support.

Community healthcare workers were trained on breastfeeding to ensure the sustainability of the programme. They can continue to educate mothers when conducting home visits and continue to host the breastfeeding support group at the facility.

La Leche League leader Ms Tobie Muller also spoke to the mothers on the support available to breastfeeding mothers in Pretoria. Visual aids such as posters and leaflets were developed to raise awareness of the importance of exclusive breastfeeding, and these were placed around the facility to ensure sustainability.

Multidisciplinary teamwork is important when working with the community as it helps to have different perspectives, ideas, and solutions to the needs of the community. Engaging more with other health professionals and involving them more in our programme intervention would have made the handing over and sustainability of the programme easier, and it would have resulted in an increased number of participants.

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It is important to understand the community prior to hosting such an intervention and communicate in the local language in order to do things in ways they find familiar and interesting. We also learned that it is important

to find creative ways of delivering information to the community so that it is easier for them to understand and remember, such as doing demonstrations and engaging with them. Overall, working together as a team

to reach the goal is beneficial, and implementing the intervention helped us to grow as a team. It is rewarding to know that we are making an impact in the community and bringing about change for the benefit of the people.

Reference

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Thandanani Drop Inn Centre

Thabo Kgosi (Director)

The mission and purpose of Thandanani Drop Inn Centre is to support the vulnerable members of the community by facilitating their reintegration into the community and restoring their dignity. For the past 13 years, the organisation has been serving the community by providing essential services, including nutritional support, counselling, family reunion celebrations, referrals to rehabilitation centres, aftercare for children, support for recovering drug addicts, skills development, and employment opportunities.

With 35 staff members and 12 volunteers, the centre is able to provide help to 250 homeless people, 32 people with drug and substance abuse issues, and 130 children who need after-school care.

Among the organisation's notable accomplishments to date is the establishment of a dedicated shelter in Mamelodi by a dynamic and passionate non-profit organisation. Secondly, it has facilitated successful rehabilitation journeys for individuals and provided them with

employment opportunities. Thirdly, it has achieved successful family reunions, strengthening support networks within the community.

Challenges in the community include illiteracy, high incidences of drug use and associated crime, which impact safety, limited availability of recreational spaces, demoralised youth, and a shortage of committed community builders.

The organisation has established a partnership with various departments and faculties of the University of Pretoria (UP), including the Faculty of Theology and Religion and the departments of Radiology, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Land Use and Transportation.

These partnerships underscore our commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and holistic community development. Engaging with students on community projects has been largely positive, yet there is room for improvement in terms of some students' commitment to fulfilling their responsibilities. Students can actively support our

centre's work by assisting with research and fostering meaningful connections by actively engaging with the beneficiaries we serve.

In addition to the University, we collaborate with a variety of community organisations to broaden our impact and address the community's needs. Some key partners include Second Chance Recovery, Entokozweni, Vhathu Phanda, the Community Policing Forum, and churches.

Some of the upcoming events and initiatives that the UP should be aware of are:

1. The annual 'Drugs Must Fall' movement scheduled for 16 June 2024 (This event raises awareness about substance abuse and promotes drug-free communities.)
2. Clean-up campaigns organised regularly to improve the cleanliness and aesthetics of our community while fostering a sense of environmental responsibility

Urban Studio: Mamelodi community-based organisation hub

Tinyiko Ndaba (Coordinator: Urban Studio)

The Urban Studio is a partnership project between the Centre for Faith and Community at the Faculty of Theology and Religion and the Tshwane Leadership Foundation. The project has been running in the cities of Tshwane and Cape Town for several years. One of the sites is the Urban Studio Mamelodi East at the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus.

Here, we collaborate with various community-based organisations working in and around Mamelodi, Eersterust, and Nellmapius. The townships are vibrant urban spaces with strong connections to one another; thus, one cannot work with community-based organisations (CBOs) in Mamelodi East and not engage with ones in Mamelodi West, Eersterust, and Nellmapius. These communities are extremely connected and share almost the same challenges and opportunities, although there are contextual differences.

Currently, we have a database of over 100 local change makers working in different focus areas. The main focus of the Urban Studio is to support these CBOs as we think through 'healing urban fractures' that perpetuate vulnerabilities in our communities. We acknowledge CBOs' efforts within the township and consider all organisations as local assets and research partners. They contribute beyond measure to our society's well-being and resilience. They are a reflection of the Urban Studio's goal: to realise just cities and thriving communities. The Urban Studio strategy is

focusing not on deficits, which are usually apparent, but constantly reflecting on the various assets within our townships, our expertise and capabilities, and how these can be better coordinated instead of working in silos.

This breathes life into our research component, where we grapple with the broader question of 'How best can a network of CBOs contribute to the well-being and regeneration of neighbourhoods?' This also leads us to explore how CBOs can be supported to do what they do best, considering the gaps they bridge and the impact they make in the lives of many in these areas, even with limited resources.

We work on the ground with CBOs, building capacity and establishing and maintaining bonds for sustainable relationships. The Centre for Faith and Community offers support through the various capacity-building programmes offered to community leaders working in the diverse areas within our townships. On the other hand, CBOs contribute knowledge and various resources, which feed into projects we embark on.

We have worked on different projects with CBOs, such as the [Tshwane homelessness count](#) and a mapping project whose product is utilised by various other organisations and entities as a resource for both organisational and research purposes. We strive to highlight the work done by CBOs. Our annual Mamelodi Expo is one of the events where we create a space to celebrate CBOs' resilience and raise awareness in the community about issues

of social justice and local public resources. This year's Expo will take place on 16 August.

The Urban Studio has collaborated with various UP faculties and departments over the years. We recently worked with students from the faculties of Theology and Religion, Health Sciences, and Humanities—mainly the departments of Practical Theology, Occupational Therapy, and Psychology. However, we usually prioritise the needs of various CBOs within the network by matching their requests with students' proposed projects.

For instance, members of the elderly forum in Mamelodi have requests related to training on safe exercises and healthy nutritional plans, among other things. One CBO has requested the establishment of safe and hygienic sanitation stations for their Early Childhood Development Centres.

There are as many requests as the number of organisations we have on our database. Some of the requests are actual research questions—too many to list in this article as they are also changing over time.

We usually share these requests and research questions with students who have an interest in working with the topic in question. We find that it is not possible to find students to work through all the requests, but we appreciate the efforts. The Urban Studio recognises the impact of the CBO/faculty collaborations towards sustaining local projects and co-creating short- to long-term solutions to local problems.

Silverton Primary School receives intervention from occupational therapy student

Talitha Buys (Fourth-year Occupational Therapy Student)
Edited by Dr Helga Lister (Supervisor/Lecturer: Occupational Therapy)



occupational therapy students were placed at the school. Other departments, like Social Work and Information Technology, have also supported the school on various occasions. The occupational therapy students conducted weekly group therapy sessions over five weeks with some grade 2 learners who were identified as needing additional attention.

METT Centre (Midcity Trauma Therapy Centre) is a registered non-profit organisation that has a practice at the school. The organisation has developed a six-level support programme for children in primary schools in the form of individual, group, and family therapy.² It places its centres at schools because it benefits the children on academic and emotional levels.

The centre's staff focus on play therapy and trauma therapy with children. Their involvement at the school is beneficial to learners who experience abuse or the trauma of divorce or parental negligence and require emotional support. They aim to uplift children, families, schools, and communities. Furthermore, their mission is to break the cycle of abuse and neglect in the lives of primary school children.

Silverton Primary School is a public primary school situated in the Silverton suburb of Pretoria, South Africa. The school has a total of 1 838 children and 68 teachers. There are seven grade 2 classes in the school, with 30 to 35 children in each classroom. On SchoolClick, Kyla Venter-Louw, a

writer covering local schools in the community, claimed that Silverton Primary School is recognised for its outstanding academic performance and nurturing environment.¹

During the first block of work-integrated learning in the community in 2024, a group of fourth-year

The school has large classes, which makes it extremely difficult for teachers to provide individual attention to every child. It can create a disruptive environment.³

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Although this is challenging, the teachers are well-qualified and experienced, and they manage the learners as best they can. Parents are the most important role players in their children's lives, and their support is fundamental in all spheres of life.

For their children to develop optimally, parents need to create opportunities for them to be educated and also to play. Playing with other children enables them to develop social skills like communication, cooperation, and teamwork. Children should also be encouraged to be creative and participate in imaginative play to develop problem-solving skills, among other things.

Behavioural issues and stress can be reduced by letting children play outside. Their emotional well-being and mood also tend to improve. Lastly, playing outdoors stimulates cognitive development by providing opportunities to explore and discover. Children learn about the environment around them through first-hand experiences. Active play forms an important building block for lifelong learning.

As occupational therapists, we can advocate for more support and quality education, but the responsibility for implementing change remains with the parents, teachers, and the school.

The occupational therapy group sessions with the grade 2 learners were mainly focused on improving body functions and developmental skills.

We worked on focused attention by selecting activities that held the learners' interest and required maximum participation and effort from them.

The sessions involved listening, understanding, and following instructions. The learners explored gross motor activities by navigating an obstacle course and played games that improved their social interaction skills and fine motor skills, which, in turn, improve handwriting and pencil grip. Furthermore, the activities enhanced colour, shape, and letter-concept formation.

The learning and enhancement of skills were mainly facilitated on a kinaesthetic and 3D level (with objects or clay) and involved minimal 2D,

paper-based learning. The reason for this is that children learn, understand, and remember better when they act things out with their bodies.

For example, climbing under/over/through objects will help them understand where objects are in relation to each other. This can be transferred to understanding letters in relation to each other, which will enable them to recognise words and ultimately improve their reading skills.

Conducting sessions at the school as part of our community block was a wonderful opportunity—both for the students, who learned to work with a group of children, and in terms of addressing some of the skills the children require for school performance.

Unfortunately, the time available was very short, and this school, like so many others, would benefit from long-term intervention provided by a permanent occupational therapist.

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Mamelodi Old Age Home

Olga Radingwana (Centre Manager: Mamelodi Old Age Home)



Introduction

Mamelodi Old Age Home has been a cornerstone of the community since its inception in 1962. Dedicated to upholding the rights of the elderly through funded resources, the organisation prides itself on its unwavering commitment to providing compassionate care to its residents. This report outlines the mission, operations, challenges, and partnerships of Mamelodi Old Age Home.

Mission and purpose

The primary mission of Mamelodi Old Age Home is to uphold the rights of elderly people by providing them with comprehensive care and support. The organisation is driven by a passion for connecting the elderly with capable hands that deliver services with compassion. This commitment remains unwavering, ensuring the well-being and dignity of each resident.

Operations and challenges

Mamelodi Old Age Home operates as a vital resource for the community, offering both care for the elderly and employment opportunities. With a team comprising eight volunteers and 32 staff members, including nurses, drivers, laundry attendants,

kitchen staff, office administrators, security personnel, and cleaners, the organisation efficiently manages its day-to-day operations. The dedication of these individuals has enabled the home to provide consistent care for its elderly residents over the years.

Despite its invaluable contributions to the community, Mamelodi Old Age Home faces several challenges. One significant issue is the lack of familial involvement, as family members often fail to visit their elderly relatives regularly.

Additionally, there is a prevalent misunderstanding within the community regarding the organisation's role and significance. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensuring the well-being and happiness of the residents.

Partnerships

Mamelodi Old Age Home has forged partnerships with various entities to enhance its services and support. Collaborations with occupational therapy and psychology students from the University of Pretoria have provided enriching experiences for the elderly residents. Furthermore, partnerships with social

development agencies have enabled the home to receive vital subsidies, ensuring financial stability. Generous donations from corporations such as Ford and Merseta further augment the resources available to the organisation.

As part of its commitment to fostering a sense of joy and belonging among the residents, Mamelodi Old Age Home hosts monthly birthday celebrations. These events serve as opportunities for residents to come together, celebrate milestones, and enjoy each other's company, further enhancing their quality of life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Mamelodi Old Age Home continues to play a vital role in the community by providing compassionate care to elderly people and creating employment opportunities. Despite facing challenges, the organisation remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the rights and dignity of its elderly residents. Through strategic partnerships and unwavering dedication, Mamelodi Old Age Home will continue to serve as a beacon of hope and support for generations to come.

Prevention and nutritional management of diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease



Magubane Nontokomalo and Sonaba Olona (School of Health Care Sciences, Faculty of Health Sciences) Kamogelo Nkoana, Marion Beeforth, Shaszia Alli, and Phumudzo Tshiambara (Supervisors: Faculty of Health Sciences)

The Nutrition Intervention Day took place at the Mooiplaas Community Old Age Home, with a specific focus on providing nutrition education on managing diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. The success of the event was attributed to a collaborative effort by a multidisciplinary team, which comprised nurses, dietitians, health care workers, patient treatment facilitators, and community health workers. To ensure the smooth execution of the intervention, sponsors were approached to provide financial assistance for transportation and refreshments. Their support was instrumental in making the event possible.

The master of ceremonies, Sr Violet, did an amazing job of keeping the audience engaged and entertained. She skilfully engaged the audience by communicating in their language and establishing a rapport with them. Additionally, Sr Dudu and Sr Dikeledi assisted in setting up the venue and ensuring that all attendees were served refreshments.

Community health workers played an important role in the team, offering assistance wherever needed. Ms Kamogelo Nkoana,

supervisor at Laudium Community Health Centre, delivered the opening speech, focusing on the role of dietitians in managing non-communicable diseases (NCDs) through nutrition. She emphasised four key components in the nutritional management of diseases: anthropometric measurements, biochemical laboratory tests, clinical findings, and dietary assessment.

These components, when integrated, optimise patient care, she said. Ms Nkoana further encouraged openness and honesty in communication with dietitians to ensure proper care and effective management of conditions.

The group presented a talk on food groups, focusing on starch, protein, fats, fruits, and vegetables. Emphasis was placed on managing diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and the importance of variety in a one's diet.

Additionally, a community member shared insights on starting a garden, and this was followed by a discussion led by the Mooiplaas health promoter on hygiene practices, particularly crucial in the informal settlement context to prevent illness and complications of NCDs. Ms Sylvia, the patient treatment facilitator, gave a talk on adherence to medication guidelines, which resonated strongly with the audience, many of whom discovered they had been taking medication incorrectly. The audience engaged actively, asking questions and displaying an eagerness to learn.

Community health workers were given the opportunity to explain their role in managing NCDs, urging community members to reach out to them during fieldwork visits. The day was a success because of the collaborative efforts of various disciplines and invaluable support from the lecturers.



Literacy enhancement project in collaboration with Sun Books and HearBuilder®

Prof Mia le Roux, Prof Salomé Geertsema, and Dr Carmen Milton
(Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology)

Prof Mia le Roux, Prof Salomé Geertsema, and Dr Carmen Milton from the Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology launched a literacy enhancement project in primary schools in Gauteng. Currently, the project has been rolled out at a primary school in the Pretoria Central Business District (CBD). This project was facilitated by the technological input of Sun Books, an affiliate of the World Literacy Foundation, both non-profit organisations. Sun Books seeks to merge literacy with technology. Hence, this exciting collaborative project aims to enhance literacy by providing technical educational resources.

Many children worldwide are taught in classrooms with no Internet and limited access to educational resources. To contribute to addressing the dearth of educational resources, Sun Books provided tablets preloaded with the Sun Books app. The app contains an e-library of content available offline and/or through other devices.

This innovative technological tool includes literacy enhancement activities based on localised educational resources for children in remote locations. Sun Books believes that the incorporation of local cultural content, stories, sounds, images, and the active participation of the community in which they are working is the key to educational success. The materials include e-books with age-



Learners are hard at work enjoying various phonological awareness activities

appropriate stories, phonological awareness skills, phonics, and spelling activities, inter alia. In addition to the material available in the Sun Books app, the researchers got permission from HearBuilder® to use a free trial of their award-winning app for the duration of the current research project. HearBuilder® is an online software program for students PreK-5 that focuses on improving listening, auditory comprehension, and memory retrieval skills. HearBuilder® consists of four sections: Following Directions, Phonological Awareness, Auditory Memory, and Sequencing. The activities in each of these sections help children build a strong foundation for literacy and reading.

The researchers undertook this opportunity to engage in community engagement and literacy enhancement as a research project that aims to determine if the

implementation of the electronic materials and tools will enhance the literacy skills of grade 3 English second-language learners.

In March 2024, the researchers and a team of students from the Department of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology visited the school to do hearing screening and assessment of literacy skills—including early literacy skills.

The group of students assessed the participants as a pre-test procedure. Teachers were trained to use the electronic materials. The materials will be used with an experimental group of participants to determine whether they increase the group's literacy skills. Post-test assessment is planned for the end of the year. The participating students benefited from their involvement in that they gained practical experience in a resource-limited community.

Community Engagement Forum Members 2024



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Representative/Secundus	Faculty/Department
Prof Gerrit Stols	Director Department for Education Innovation
Dr Eugene Machimana	Head of Curricular Community Engagement Department for Education Innovation: Unit for Community Engagement
Faculty support: Department for Education Innovation: Unit for Community Engagement	
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	Humanities
	Veterinary Science
Mr Albert Matlheketha	Health Sciences
	Law
	Theology and Religion
Ms Londiwe Mahlangu	Economic Management Sciences (EMS)
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Dr Zelda White	School of Health Care Sciences (SOHCS)
Prof Ahmed Bhayat	Dentistry
Mr Mahlatse Moropeng	School of Health Systems and Public Health (SHSPH)
Mrs Felistus Ndamba	Humanities
Mr Eddie Hanekom	Law Clinic
Ms Karabo Ozah	
Prof Nerhene Davis	NAS
Dr Hanri Taljaard-Swart	
Mr Lance Thomas	Theology and Religion
Ms Irene Thomas	
Dr Alfred Kgasi	Veterinary Science
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Dr Martina Jordaan	Mamelodi Campus
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Mr Rowan Watson	Security Services
Mr Rikus Delport	Institutional Advancement
Ms Isabel de Necker	
Mr Juan-Pierre van der Walt	Student Affairs (DSA)
Ms Veronica Israel	
Ms Khanyi Mahlangu	Student Representative Council (SRC)
Mr Kamva Diko	
Mr Abe Mathopa	Department of Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Education
Ms Christine Nel	Library Services
Ms Pfano Makhera	