

THUPAPOWER

Prepared by Phelo Muyanga

Mpower Programme Co-ordinator

Mpower works with vulnerable and disadvantaged children and youth, mainly from adolescent and youth-headed households in Cato Crest (Durban), and Etete and Nkobongo (KZN North Coast) with the aim of empowering young people by helping them to develop their life skills and by encouraging them to have a greater sense of agency and responsibility.

Mpower Soccer Teams

We would like to introduce you to the Mpower Soccer Teams. One of our community workers, Phumizile Mkhize, is passionate about soccer.

She has found a way to combine this passion with acting on Mpower's vision to provide the children of Cato Crest with an alternative to being on the streets in the afternoons and on weekends.

Phumizile is involved in coaching and managing 8 teams under the umbrella of Mpower. These teams consist of boys and girls from as young as 7 years old to young adults. On the side she also coaches a team of older women and grandmothers. She started this one when she was busy visiting families of vulnerable children and she noticed that their caregivers were often sick especially with sicknesses like high blood pressure and diabetes.

Her aim is to help them to also live a healthier lifestyle by exercising and playing soccer.



The photo is of the under 15 boys team that won a tournament recently. Phumizile reported that they sang all the way from the playground until they reached her house, where the photo was taken. We are so proud of them! Phumizile is planning another big tournament in the future so watch this space!

“I have a dream”

My name is Kwanele Ntombela. I live in Cato Crest with my sister and 2 kids. I don't have parents, my sister and her kids are my family.

My journey with Mpower began a few years back and at that time my life it was really difficult. I had just been through a traumatic experience in my life and on top of that I had just lost my mother, my pillar of strength. I stopped going to school but Mpower still continued to work with me. They encouraged me to go back to school. They helped me to feel alive again and to realise I didn't have to give up on my dreams because of my home situation.

My dream at that time was to have a Matric certificate. This was a big deal for me as I would be the first one in my family to achieve that goal.

This journey hasn't been an easy one there were lots of ups and downs but I had people who believed in me and my abilities. I managed to pass my Matric with a Bachelor. I was so happy when this happened and I was so proud of myself. I realised I had the ability to do more. After that I had another dream to be a Social Worker. I want to be a Social Worker because I believe in helping people as I have received help in my own life. I am still trying to pursue this dream. It's not easy. Not having money to further my studies has been a challenge but I haven't given up. I will get there one day.

So while I am sitting at home exploring my options I have been involved in voluntary work with Mpower. This is a fulfilling experience to be able to give back in this way to children who are in need of love and guidance.



At the beginning of this year through my church I heard of an opportunity to do a course in business studies and how to be an entrepreneur.

I decided to encourage my friend to apply with me. One of the advantages I had was that, through helping out at Mpower, I was

already volunteering in an NGO, and that increased my chances of getting in. I realised that if you have a dream while you are working on it you need to keep yourself busy. This helps you to keep the motivation and also it creates more opportunities for you. I always encourage other young people who are sitting at home to grab any training opportunities that come to their communities.

You may never know what might come out of that. If you are sitting at home you end up depressed because all you think about is how your life is not going the way you would like it to. Also you can get into all sorts of trouble.

I am a long way from reaching my dream but at least I am moving forward. I am doing something to improve my skills and have the chance to get to know new people. I don't know what the future holds for me or where I will get the money to further my studies but I know that I will continue to work on it.

Even if it means getting a job and studying full time, I will not give up on my dream.

“my aunt, Bongiwe, is my role model”

My name Is Thabi. My aunt Bongiwe works for Mpower as a community worker.



Bongiwe is like a mom to me. She has been very supportive since I do not have parents. My aunt works with young people and she loves her work so much.

I say this because even on weekends she doesn't mind getting her hands dirty and helping where she is needed. She has a soft spot for young people and children.

I have been hearing about the work that she does and the lives she has touched and in the process I didn't realise that I was one of the young people who has received her encouragement and support. My aunt has been encouraging me to go out there and get skills so that I can move forward in life.

For example, last year she told me about an opportunity at The Clothing Bank so that I could be trained as a entrepreneur to have my own clothing business. My aunt was there to support and encourage me throughout this journey. I learnt a lot from this programme, even things I didn't know about myself.

My aunt has been though a lot in her life but she never gave up. She kept on pushing, going to training and volunteering, until she found something that she was passionate about. The opportunity to do what she is passionate about didn't reach her while she was sitting at home – but when she was out there being visible and available. That is another lesson I have learnt from her - to be visible, available and open to opportunities. I would like to say thank you to my aunt for opening my eyes to some of the realities of this world. For giving me hope in difficult times. I know that you do this for other young people as well.

Please continue being the hope and encouragement that you are to me and many other young people that you have inspired!

Children's Afternoon Club

Cato Crest

Earlier this year when we resumed our Children's Afternoon Club we were faced with the challenge of continuing to fund the sandwiches that we have always provided the children with. I shared our story on FB and with some of our friends and people responded and donated the 12 loaves that we needed. Then a sponsor came forward and pledged to cover one Monday per month. We were very excited to receive this support for the children. As the facilitators who work with the children we know how much they appreciate their sandwich. We have seen their faces, their smiles and we have experienced their hugs! We shared with them the story of the 3 guardian angels that made sure they were fed. We shared with them that although these people have never met them they know about them and wanted to make a contribution. We asked them to do a thank you in their own way and in their own words so that the people may be encouraged by seeing that the children were happy as a result of their gift.

The children decided to do portraits of their angels and to write a thank you message. We too would like to say thank you to those guardian angels.



'Gratitude is the memory of my heart'
Jean -Baptiste Massie



Beading Group and Safarina Dance Group

The young people in the beading group are learning new beading styles and we are busy making samples to showcase our work in different markets. We have already received an order from one of the schools we work with. They have asked us to do some beading for them in time for their Heritage Celebrations. The dance group is ready to dance if we have a function at Mpower or even in the community. The group is becoming known in the community and they even had an opportunity to dance for a Christmas Party for the aged that took place late last year.

Reported by Phumzile Mkize, Mpower Community Worker, Cato Crest



News from some of our Teen Life Skills Groups

Siyakudumisa Group – Cato Crest

(This group is sponsored by St Thomas Church)

Siyakudumisa is a group of young, struggling, school girls that I facilitate. I have noticed that by opening up to the girls and being transparent with them that they are growing to trust me. One young girl asked to speak to me and told me that she doesn't know her mother or her father and that she feels like a stranger in her 'adopted' home. She confided in me that at home she has to watch what she says and does but that with me she feels so free. I have identified that this is a space where I can practice what I have learnt through my narrative training. (Reported by Bongwiwe Mthembu, Mpower community worker, Cato Crest)

Hambanathi Group

(Nonhlanhla's group)

It is still early days for this group but I realised that working for Mpower has given me an opportunity to do more in my community. The training and the skills I have received gave me an opportunity to go back to my old school (Msobomvu) and talk to them about offering a life skills programme for their learners. I feel empowered going back to empower those that are following behind me. (Reported by Nonhlanhla Mpuku, Mpower Community Worker, North Coast)



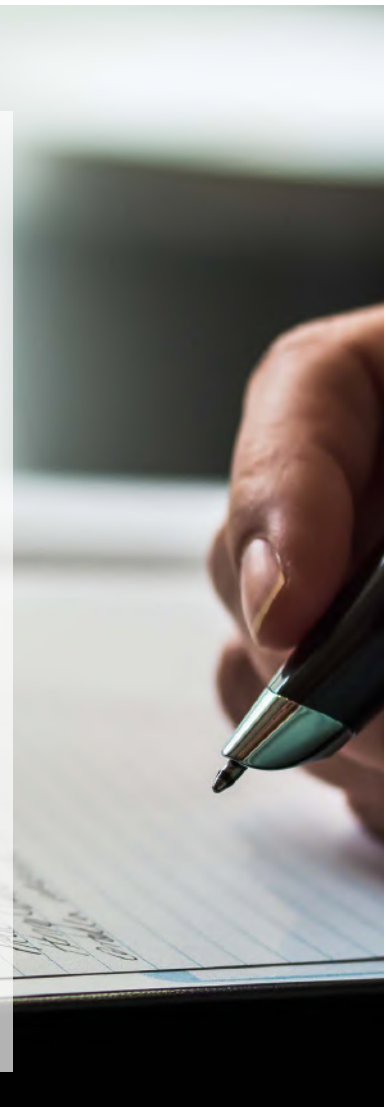
Team Development

Our Mpower team had the opportunity to attend a workshop on A Narrative Approach to Community and Trauma work with Elize Morkel, one of the champions of Narrative Practices in South Africa.

It is important that we continue to invest in growing in our skills and as a team so that we can always be relevant in the communities we work with. These training opportunities are also inspiring because we get to network and hear about what other people are doing in their spaces. I asked some of the members of our team to share what the training meant to them and this is what they had to say:

Joann Du Plessis

The narrative workshop with Elize Morkel was inspiring not only in terms of the excellent teaching she presented, but also in terms of being able to participate in hearing her stories about her own experience, the highs as well as the lows, of working in the community on the Strand in the Cape. Elize shared with us tips and techniques that she has learnt over the years on how to approach trauma and community work from a narrative framework. The workshop was valuable for those who have done intensive training in narrative therapy as well as for those (like myself) from a psychology background who are starting to understand what it means to look at challenges in our NGO work from a different “storied” perspective. We interact with teenagers and young adults in KZN in community settings where access to and acceptance of individual or group psychotherapy is limited, so when faced with challenges we need to have a broader view on how to engage with the youth in our group programmes. A narrative approach is a more relevant and useful framework to use in our regular work with youth and also when dealing with specific community challenges that crop up. Elize shed light on the theoretical and practical aspects of using this framework that made me, for one, feel energised by the possibilities it presents in community work.



Nonhlanhla Mpuku (Nonny)

It was a very interesting workshop for me and I am grateful to have been a part of it. The part that stayed with me was when Elize was sharing a story about 5 boys who wanted to get a clean name instead of a bad name that they had. This story stayed with me because it reminded me of my community and the problems we face. It's a wonderful story about being given a 2nd chance and that is what some of these young people need: A 2nd chance and someone to believe in them. I also realised the importance of working together. At the end of the training I felt lighter, like something had been lifted off my shoulders. I think it was the exercises we did as well, they were good for me.

Bongiwe Mthembu

My experience during the Narrative and Trauma workshop was amazing, I learnt a lot during this two day workshop. One of the things that my eyes were opened to is that sometimes the assumption that we know what the young people that we work with are feeling or supposed to be feeling regarding the situations in their lives. It's better to listen more. I also learnt the power of giving young people a chance; that its possible for a bad group to change to a good group and that it takes a community of supporters to do this. I was very honoured to be a part of this workshop and also to be a part of the Narrative community.

A word from our director

For me, the thread of hope is what weaves the stories in this issue together. We're all connected as human beings and we all have the power to spread hope. What I love about this issue is that it is made up of stories about how our Mpower team has brought hope into the lives of individual beneficiaries, some beautifully told by the beneficiaries themselves. But it is also about how opportunities for training and networking in our wider community of Narrative Practitioners helps keep the hope alive in our committed team who carry out this important work.

Nonhlanhla (North Coast facilitator and community worker) speaks of a case study presented at the Community and Trauma workshop, in which a community of supporters believing in them gave school boys wanting to change their reputations for the better a second chance. I want to thank all of our supporters for believing in us and this work. I hope you have enjoyed these stories and that you feel affirmed about the part you play in keeping the hope alive where it is most needed among our vulnerable youth. Thank you.

Jeanne Haley

