

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.



The topic of our paper was:

A generation for change.

The Voice Club learners' campaign against violence and weapons in their school and the surrounding community of Cato Crest in KZN.

Narrative Conference 2015

Mpower had the opportunity to present a paper at an International Narrative Therapy Conference in Cape Town in August this year. This was an exciting time for us because we were able to share our work with the wider community of Narrative Therapy practitioners and also to be inspired by how others are using Narrative Therapy in their different contexts.

We presented on our project to support Mayville Secondary School and The Voice youth club in their goal to make their school a safe space for learning.



This plaque naming Mpower as an “An NGO working with young people to create change in their lives and community” now hangs in the school reception area.

**The wall mural interpretation: Through self-control the destructive power of the bullet is transformed into the creative force of a paintbrush, bringing colour to the wall and the school. The door symbolises that this school is a place that offers shelter, where students can go and learn in peace.

Through personal pledges not to carry weapons and through role plays and posters the Voice Club spread the news of their campaign and encouraged others to join them in committing to making their school a weapon-free zone.

The campaign culminated in the students from the BAT Centre arts programme in Durban being commissioned to paint a mural on one of the walls of the quad where school assemblies are held. The purpose of the mural is to create

awareness in the school and community about the dangers of weapons. The BAT center adopted this exciting project as their community outreach project for 2014. The creative power and insights of The Voice Club members created

the concept behind the mural. The wall was unveiled at an event, which also commemorated former learners who have died as a result of violence. The vision for the wall is that it will act as a reminder for future learners of the value of life and education.

Here is some of the feedback we received from our audience at the Narrative conference.

Dear Phelo and Jeanne,

I was so moved by the work you are doing in KZN and the hopeful stories you brought to us about the Voice Club. I have written a letter for the Voice Club members and would be grateful if you would share it with them. Thank you so much for presenting this work. It has left me with renewed hope and enthusiasm for my work and our country!

Dear Phelo and Jeanne,

Thank you for your inspiring presentation at the Narrative Conference. I left your presentation enthusiastic for community work and acted on this energy. I decided to share my services with Ashley Primary School, Pinetown and am looking forward to the journey. I hope to share stories with you in future.



Casework

Our community field workers work at grass roots level

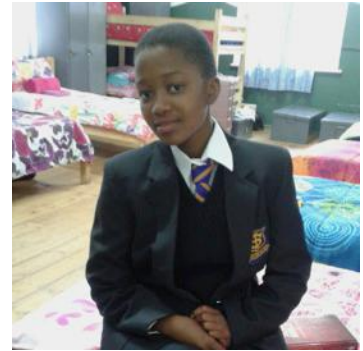
They fulfill the role of consistent and supportive adult figures that listen, encourage, affirm and offer guidance. Their work involves coming alongside MPOWER's beneficiary families in everyday, ordinary things. The field workers also fulfill the role of adults with "know how" and status as adults who are on the children's side and can stand up for them in situations where they feel they are being exploited, overlooked or taken advantage of as a result of being a child or a young person.

Mpower currently cares for 20 households and our work continues to grow in this respect. Earlier this year a community primary school referred a new family to us that needed our attention. Two young people lost both their parents in a tragic car accident. They were left with their older sister who is barely an adult herself. Mpower quickly jumped in to check on the situation at home and what sort of help they needed.

**Feature
story from
our families**

Nosihle's Story

“Hi My name is Nosihle Mvumbu. I would like to share a little bit of my story. Towards the end of last year Mpower told me about an opportunity to apply for an ISASA M&E Bursary. They helped me with the process of applying and I had to go and write a test. I was excited to be part of this experience. I lost my parents at a young age and my Aunt raised me. She was also very excited for me, sadly she passed away in December. She knew that I got the bursary but she never had a chance to see me off to my new School. I am doing grade 8 this year . I would like to be a lawyer one day. One thing I've learnt so far through the experience I've had is that never look at your background and limit yourself you should still pursue your dreams no matter where you come from. I want to thank Mpower for exposing me to this opportunity my life has changed since then.”



Community Projects

In addition to the weekly home visits to support our beneficiary families our team facilitates various life skills groups.

Children's Afterschool Club

Our Kids Club (after school programme for children) in Cato Crest continues in high spirits every Monday. They are enjoying the theme of Music – the beat this term. We are exploring different genres of music and learning to make our own musical instruments. Their goal is to do a concert at the end of the term and invite their parents and caregivers.

Beading Group and Safarina Dance Group

They started with a few beads and about 20 young people.

The adults in their lives are excited to have Phumi teaching them traditional isiZulu beading, as it is a very important part of their heritage. Some of the parents and caregivers have even donated some of the beads for their group to continue. Their long-term goal is doing beads for Mpower to create awareness for different causes and also to showcase their work in some of the markets to generate funds for their group to continue. On Thursdays Phumi runs another group teaching children Sarafina dancing. This is just the beginning, as she would like to expose them to other types of dance in the future.

Phumi runs a beading group every Tuesday.



It has long since been a vision of Mpower to provide a safe space for young children to play, have fun and learn in the afternoons when caregivers are often away from home at work or busy with chores. Now through the Monday, Tuesday and Thursday afternoon groups this vision has been realised for the children of Cato Crest.

Siyakudumisa Group

Bongiwe runs a group of pre-teens with the support of St Thomas church under the umbrella of Mpower. This group started out as a knitting group but it is now branching out into tackling new skills for living. Doing life skills with them has helped Bongiwe to get to know the girls better and to follow up in some of their home situations to help where she can.



Teenagers empowerment groups - Etete and Nkobongo

These two teenage empowerment groups continue every week and we have witnessed positive change in the lives of these young people who are becoming more comfortable and confident to explore who they are and their place in the world. We had an opportunity of exposing these young people to the opportunity of having their eyes tested; a privilege they would ordinarily not have access to. This was done through Umhlali Methodist Church and Bridging for Tomorrow, a group who visited us from the USA.

Hambanathi Group

Nonny is growing in her facilitation skill and she has decided she is ready to start an empowerment group for teenagers in a school in her own community. She had her first session a couple of weeks ago and she says that she is excited to start this group as this has been something she has been longing to do for a long time. She says she is glad that she has Mpower backing her every step of the way!

Team Development - Hero Book Training

When Jeanne and I were in Cape Town After the Narrative Conference we had another opportunity to be trained on the Hero Book, a narrative tool developed by Jonathan Morgan. Hero Books are a way to provide psychosocial support to children who have faced painful and traumatic life experiences. Not only that but the process can also help the groups we work with to be more self-aware, hopeful and feel more empowered to tackle the obstacles they face and to go for their goals. We are currently training our Mpower team on how to use this tool. This is yet another skill our team is acquiring to use in their groups next year.