



SOPHIATOWN

COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

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ANNUAL REPORT 2016

Reclaiming caring in a nation betrayed

2016 will be remembered by most South Africans as the year of “state capture”, of the “Zupta” network of patronage and the wholesale takeover of national assets and resources by a few handfuls of men and women who have turned the heart and soul of the nation into a commodity they are willing to willy-nilly exchange for money, status and immunity from being held accountable for their actions.

It will also be remembered as the year in which the “born-free” generation found its voice, the year in which student protests ground to a halt the well-oiled machinery of academic institutions and brought to light the profound inadequacies of the system ostensibly designed to ensure that young people from poverty stricken backgrounds can access higher education. It is the year in which service delivery protests, for many years confined to dusty townships streets, spilled into the suburbs and impacted, perhaps for the first time, directly on the middle-class.

2016 is the year when the cracks in our newly founded democracy became so big that they could no longer be ignored, and found expression in the calls for the president to resign as well as, for the first time, the failure of the ruling party to achieve a majority in local elections in critical municipal constituencies.

2016 is the year of big ruptures in the halls of economic and political power, ruptures which threaten to pull the country apart and make civil war a very real prospect. And yet while power battles continue to rage in the “Saxonwold shebeen”, in Luthuli House, and the Constitutional Court, the lives of ordinary people continue, for worse rather than for better- and as always those who suffer most from the actions of those on the top of the social and political hierarchy, are those at the bottom.

What, many will ask, does any of this have to do with psychological services, which after all are focused on the individual and at the most his/her immediate family or small group? In response we argue that essentially, psycho-social services are about the emotional well-being of the individual, the family, the community and ultimately the whole society. A political and economic system that fails to care not only

for the most vulnerable minorities, but for the vast majority of its citizens, cannot possibly expect to reconstruct a country already burdened with the legacy of generations of systemic violence and repression. And people who have never had their names called with respect, have never had their basic needs for nutrition, shelter, education, health care and protection met, have never had their aspirations acknowledged and provided for, cannot possibly be considered emotionally well. Instead these conditions are creating psychological damage which is passed on from generation to generation, and finds expression in violence, in social exclusion, in abuse, in addiction to substances, in depression and anxiety, in personality disorders, in apathy and dependency, in loss of agency, and most of all in the loss of the ability to truly care for and nurture others- in other words, in those conditions which injustice and inequality to be endlessly recycled.

At Sophiatown the maxim “the personal is political and the political is personal” is deeply entrenched in our value system. Our campaigning for socio-political and economic transformation does not take place on the streets, in court rooms, or in engagements with parliamentary subcommittees (this we leave to other partners in the sector who have the expertise and necessary political and social capital) but in the hearts and minds of ordinary people, and most particularly those on and beyond the margins of society.

We believe that at the core of much of our social and political dysfunction lies the loss of the ability to care, to nurture, to grow human beings who have the capacity to look critically at themselves, their relationships, and the world at large and to become agents of change and transformation not only in their own lives but also in those of others, and in the world at large. Just as the president does not care to listen to the voices of his disaffected people, so state officials, teachers, police officers, nurses and many others mandated to serve ordinary citizens do not feel the need to care, to listen, to be truly attentive to this person and her needs at this point in time. And the chain of indifference, disdain and abuse spirals further down into communities- to the taxi driver who drives at breakneck speed through crowded city streets, to the men who firmly believe that the bodies of women and girls are theirs to use and discard, to the nurses who refuse to attend to a desperate ill woman because she does not have the right paper, to the community workers who take home the food parcels they are meant to issue to AIDS patients, to children who physically attack their teachers- and finally into the intimacy of home and family, so much of this devastated by violence, disease, abuse and neglect.

And so, Sophiatown’s contribution to change and transformation begins at the bottom, at the place where all care, protection and development has its origins, the place where people’s destiny is shaped to a large extent by the nurturance and care they receive, the place where many seeds of destruction have been sewn, but the place too where love, hope and courage can meet to grow a different kind of world, one person, one family, one organization, one community, one generation at a time.

We trust that this report will give readers a glimpse into the ongoing work of healing as it unfolds in the two centres we call “west” and “east”; in the work with frontline community workers in townships and informal settlements around Johannesburg through the Siyabanakekela Programme, and with NGO leaders in the programme we call Sustaining our Community of Practice; as well as in collaborative efforts to address the many injustices impacting on the lives of the people we serve.

Sophiatown West: Windows of Hope

The Numbers

The team of community workers and counsellors working in Westdene and various neighbourhoods and informal settlements in and around Soweto saw a total of 496 clients during the course of 2016, 71% of which were “new” clients. The vast majority of clients are women and girls (72%) but this year there was also an increase in the number of adult men making use of our services. Children and adolescents made up 34% of the client population this year with an almost equal distribution between boys and girls. In this service there is also a relatively high proportion due to the focus on elderly caregivers of orphaned children and the fact that the weekly service in Mzimhlophe also tends to attract older people in need. In contrast to our service centre in the inner city where material need and the lack of access to basic services are the primary forces pushing help-seeking behaviour, the push factors driving people to seek help in the Westdene Centre are primarily family and relationship problems, exposure to traumatic experiences, and bereavement and loss. The weekly counselling service in Noordgesig needs to deal with a host of emotional problems associated with what we often refer to as the “failure of parenting” with children being abandoned physically by fathers often before they are even born, and single mothers seeking solace and survival in successive relationships with men, and having little time or energy left to attend to the emotional needs of children. In Melpark Primary School the counsellors attends to children who have lost their parents and/or those whose only means of expressing their emotional distress is through behavioural acting out. In the community hall in Mzimhlophe most of the presenting problems centre around access to grants or conflicts around family homes, although there is a slow but steady increase of clients who also take up counselling on a more consistent basis. This service was closed between September and December of the year as the social worker was on maternity leave in this period.

Individual and Family Counselling

The annual review of a sample of clients revealed a number of positive changes which can be attributed to the counselling process have been noted. In adult these include the ability to both express and contain emotions; a shift from a passive and dependent stance towards seeing oneself as an agent of change; improved capacity to cope with daily stressors; and a reduction in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and traumatic stress. Half of the clients seeking help with conflict in the family reported significant improvement in family relationships, and most of the women exposed to domestic violence either expressed the intention to leave the abusive relationship or implemented it. Positive changes were also noted in parenting and in efforts to control aggressive or self-destructive behaviours. Those clients who felt most alienated and isolated from support systems made active attempts to re-connect with loved ones, or to expand their social networks.

*Each time a woman rises up,
something rises up in me. These are
moments of re-creating people- Clare
Sangweni, counsellor*

Katie (25) was referred by her employer because of constant friction with her colleagues. She grew up in a household characterized by alcoholism and physical and emotional abuse, and in the absence of a nurturing parent had to take care of herself and her younger brother without any adult support. She started drinking at the age of 12, and had a miscarriage at an early age. At the time of referral she had a 2 year old child and was in an abusive relationship.

Although Katie only attended 6 sessions she used them to unburden the long suppressed feelings of a little girl and this in itself helped her to start taking control over her life. She left her boyfriend and paid more attention to her daughter, also drawing for the first time on the support of her mother. She no longer fought with colleagues but was able to focus on work tasks and impressed her employers to such an extent that she was given the opportunity to advance her career.

Children have much less control over their environment and in most cases they depend on adults to bring them to counselling sessions and to support therapeutic gains in the home environment, and all too often the responsibility of “fixing the child” is shifted on to the counsellor. This means that we often need to work with the adult before we can meaningfully reach the child. Nevertheless, the majority of the children and adolescents reviewed showed remarkable growth in their ability to name and express feelings, and to articulate their needs, ideas and opinions with confidence. Improved behaviour at home, in the neighbourhood, as well as improved performance at school was reported in over 60% of the cases.

*Counsellor: What makes you sad?
Boy: When someone looks at me as if I don't exist*

Emotional Home-Based Care: Siyalalela

The Siyalalela project reaches out to people living with HIV in informal settlements, who are so isolated and alienated from systems of support that they are unable or unwilling to seek formal help. With the two community workers being well-known in the settlements of Zamimpilo, Pennyville, Slovo Park and Mlamlamkunzi potential clients are identified by neighbours, family members, or drinking buddies and relationships are built very slowly and respectfully, with conversations around a communal tap or dusty alleys, gradually leading to invitations into shacks and more intimate engagements with people's experiences, fears and anxieties.

The majority of the 45 clients visited on regular basis in 2016 are women between the ages of 36 and 60, reflecting on the one hand the ageing of the population with HIV/AIDS and on the other perhaps the benefits of early treatment reaching primarily the younger generation. Alienation from family and support systems in this group of clients is pervasive, with low self-esteem, depression, unresolved grief and anger, and an intense fear of dying often finding expression in either extreme withdrawal or alcohol abuse- both of these accompanied by the neglect of self and others.

The annual review of the progress of these clients revealed that at least half were taking better care of their appearance, their homes, and their children. Most importantly 60% of those who had defaulted from their medication had taken up regular clinic visits again, were compliant with their treatment, and had identified “treatment partners” to support them. Those who had not disclosed their status to partners found the courage to do so, and a number of clients stuck in abusive relationships made active attempts to disengage from them.

Bertha is a 39 year old woman in an abusive relationship who had stopped taking her treatment when she was first visited. She has a childhood history of abuse and neglect and had given her last child to a friend to care for. Her partner is extremely abusive, refuses to let her see the child and beats her up regularly. When first visited she was extremely fragile and agitated.

Six visits later there has been some positive change. Bertha spends more time with her child, no longer wanders around aimlessly, and takes much more care of her personal appearance. She has put on some weight and most importantly she has found a “piece” job which gives her some sense of independence.

Group Interventions

Groups continue to be a powerful way of reaching both children and adults who share common sources of distress:

Sivuyile

This group for children who have lost primary caregivers to HIV/AIDS and or violence has grown from strength to strength, with all 17 children finding words to meaningfully articulate their feelings of loss and grief, and finally being able to speak about their loved ones without undue distress or defensiveness. The highlight was the weekend camp in the Magaliesburg which allowed the counsellors to concentrate on supporting the children through the grieving process which many had been denied in their families. In the last months of the group process the focus shifted to helping the children find sources of strength and support in the current living contexts. The emphasis on talents, gifts, and education made it possible for them to envisage a future with possibilities, even in the face of loss. Real empathy and compassion developed between the children and most importantly they seem to have internalized the importance of finding a voice for experiences and emotions which are often negated in their everyday contexts.

“Children should be allowed to talk about the death of their parents, because it can be bad if they don’t, and they can even think about killing themselves”- Sivuyile child

Thandanani

The Thandanani group reaches out to grandmothers caring for orphaned grandchildren. These grandmothers carry their own huge burdens for grief while at the same time having to bring up children who themselves have been left bereft and vulnerable. The group encourages the grandmothers to support each other through their own grief and trauma, and in the process become more emotionally present for their grandchildren.

A bereavement retreat in October was a profound experience and created the opportunity for participants not only to mourn their children, but also their marriages, many of which are characterized by

Things used to happen in my voice and I said nothing. Now I say no!- Grandmother

abuse which older women feel culturally prohibited from questioning. The change observed between arriving at the retreat centre on Friday afternoon and leaving on Sunday morning is best described by the facilitator, Clare Sangweni: *“They could hardly walk on Friday and on Sunday there were dancing.”*

The group continues into the new year of focus more on the daily challenges of raising children in an environment that has become increasingly violent. One of the main challenges shared by this group of grandmothers has been the behavior of teenage grandchildren in the households, many of whom have become addicted to nyaope, a cheap but lethal street drug. In order to access the drug, children will steal anything, and this then creates conflict with neighbours and other community members who would otherwise have been a source of support.

Leseding

This therapeutic group for adults living with HIV is now in its 11th year, with some members having attended sessions since its inception in 2006. A concern around this group was that for some of the long-term participants it had become the group had become a “life-style” rather than a resource for mobilizing resources to move on with life. These group members had almost become too comfortable with their stories of suffering and exclusion and were challenged in 2016 to move beyond comfort zone of sadness into more life-affirming conversations and decisions. This also helped the newer members to shift their focus to more positive and active behaviors. Three participants disclosed their HIV status to their children for the first time, and were surprised to find out that all their anxieties had been unfounded- the children had long worked out why their parents were taking medication, but kept quiet for fear of upsetting them in turn.

I used to tell my son that I was taking flue medication. When I finally sat him down to talk to him about my status, he said he knew they were ARVs taken by people who are HIV+- Leseding Parent

The Girls Lekgotla

This group for teenage girls struggling to find positive identities in daily contexts of poverty, unemployment, gender violence and substance abuse is now in its second year, with 13 girls attending the weekly sessions. Intense conflict between the girls was at first difficult to manage but over time provided insight into feelings and experiences the girls never had the opportunity to express. They became aware that their own aggressive behavior patterns modelled those of their parents, and with the deepening of solidarity and support, determined not to repeat the patterns of intergenerational violence. The theme of loss also emerged as a dominant one- this not only is relation to the loss of loved ones through death, separation or abandonment, but also in relation to trust, hope, opportunity, and a vision for the future.

I don't know how to love because I never had anybody to love me. All my life I have to go the extra mile for people to accept me- Teenage girl

Strong bonds have now been formed between the girls, bonds which go beyond the group space. Many have expressed that they feel they have gained sisters who can give them a sense of belonging they never had before.

The Boys Lekgotla

This group mirrors the work with teenage girls, focusing on the many challenges and risks teenage boys are exposed to as they engage with the developmental task of shaping their identities. Nineteen boys attended the weekly sessions in 2016, with gender and gender violence being a dominant theme throughout the year. Most boys had strong views about their own superiority over women and girls, but over time the facilitator's own background in "loxion" culture, and his ability to demonstrate alternative perspectives in a non-judgmental way, succeeded in a shift in attitude in some of the boys. When their own family relationships were explored the lack of positive male role models was brought into focus, with some being expected to take the role of the absent father. It appears the deeply entrenched hostility towards women and girls has its roots not only in the broader culture but also in the intimacy of the family sphere where mothers are resented for not being able to hold on to the male figure the boys need in their lives. Recourse to drugs and alcohol as a way of demonstrating masculine identity is perhaps inevitable. What has been surprising is how many boys have little information about the risks associated with drugs, or tend to downplay them. The work with this group of boys is still in its early stages and will continue in 2017.

"Sometimes we need somebody to groom and guide us, somebody who thinks like a man, and somebody we can share our secrets or private man stuff"- Teenage boy

The Parent Holiday Programme

The object of this annual parenting programme is to support parents in becoming more conscious of the interface between their own childhood experiences, the many cultural assumptions which shape parenting in the past and present, and the needs and realities of children growing up in the current context. In 2016 fourteen caregivers from a local CBO who care for children in both their work and home settings were invited for the programme which takes place over nine days spread through the July and October holidays. Exploring the own childhood wounds and linking these to their parenting styles was difficult and painful for all the participants, but led to deeper insights and a commitment to more self-aware and emotionally present parenting.

It was tough to talk about painful past experiences. Thank you for giving me the skills to communicate with children and showing me how not to be the kind of father who is like a lion to his children. It is good to tell a child that you love them- Parent

Sophiatown East: Children and Families on the Move

The Numbers

A total of 518 clients were seen by the Children and Families on the Move team between January and December 2016. The vast majority are women and girls, with 50% of female clients being of child-bearing and-rearing age (i.e. between the ages of 19 and 45). In contrast, most of the male clients are boys aged between 4 and 18. Nevertheless, 43 adult men did make contact with the centre in the course of the year, which is a larger than usual number. As always, the clients represent the demographics of the community within which the Bertrams centre is situated, with 58% coming from the DRC, 7% from Zimbabwe, 10% from other African countries, and the remaining 24% being South African citizens.

Help-seeking is determined primarily by material need and the lack of access to basic services such as education, health care and documentation. Underlying these push factors in almost all cases are deep sources of trauma and emotional distress, usually associated with forced displacement, persecution, war, loss of or separation from loved ones, gender violence, xenophobia and the like

On average, there have been 7 client contacts per client in the period under review - the actual range extends from a once off contact (which usually ends in a referral or no-show after the initial screening) to 40 or more individual sessions in addition to attendance of group sessions. The average number of sessions attended by clients who commit themselves to the counselling process beyond the initial screening and intake is 22.

Individual and Family Counselling

The annual review of a sample of clients who had attended more than five sessions confirmed the emotional distress underlying the problems clients initially present with. Depression, anxiety, and loss of meaning and hope impacted negatively on the sense of agency and ability to cope with daily stressors in around 70% of clients and this was further aggravated by the loss of or alienation from social and familial support systems which affected well over 70% of the clients seen.

A major implication of high levels of anxiety and social isolation is that clients often present false narratives in the hope of gaining enough sympathy from the listener to have their most basic and desperate needs met, and in fact, 41% of the clients reviewed came in with personal narratives which were not authentic and in some cases these narratives had become so engrained that it was extremely difficult to find the real person behind the mask of the false self.

*The lady who referred me here said I will end up dying if I don't talk to someone. I wanted to kill myself. Maybe other people expect money or food. For me it was the only chance to talk-
Client*

Progress in terms of emotional well-being and social functioning is relative to a socio-political context that is increasingly hostile and repressive towards forced migrants who are the majority of help-seekers in this programme. Nevertheless, counsellors have identified small markers of growth of confidence, agency and hope in the vast majority of the cases reviewed at the end of the year. Finding the courage to insist on documentation at the Refugee Reception Office in Marabastad, getting a child into school, or taking the risk of selling tomatoes and bananas on the street corner with a constant preparedness to run when the metro police arrive, are all instances of agency and the ability to cope with daily stressors which many of our clients reclaim through the counselling process.

Perhaps even more important than what happens in the counselling session is what happens when clients return to their daily routines and contexts. 75% of those who had lost all contact with family members, made some attempt to reconnect, and 55% reported improved relationships with partners, while a significant number of women affected by domestic violence also made the decision to leave their abusive partners. Counsellors also observed that women became more active in their parenting and more assertive in the ways they stood up for their own rights and those of their children. A third of the mothers were able to successfully place their children at school, through their own growth in assertiveness, and often also with the help of the counsellor or social worker.

As positive as these changes are, it must be remembered that the context in which these families live the kind of sustained sense of autonomy which allows us to close a file is highly unlikely. Clients come back again and again, for a refuelling of courage and hope, often in states of acute distress and trauma as

another violent attack, another eviction, another rejection by a Home Affairs official, another preventable death, erodes the gains they may have made in previous sessions. We believe that the most valuable contribution we make to the lives of these clients lies in our consistent presence, a kind of emotional fuel tank to which they can return whenever they need to in order to confront the next challenge and the next with dignity and integrity.

Deborah (22) escaped from her home country after being kidnapped, raped and impregnated by a senior government official as a "punishment" for her father's resistance to the regime. After several attempts to kill her and the unborn child, she embarked on a torturous journey which ended in SA. When she was just beginning to find her feet she was abducted and continuously drugged and raped for weeks on end. After her "release" she found her way to the counselling centre and painfully began picking up the pieces of her life again. And just when there seemed to be some light at the end of a very dark tunnel she was abducted, drugged and raped again and then dumped on the street- this time also having lost her "piece" job and with it her only means of survival. Her relationship with her counsellor is the only thing that holds her together enough to stay alive. Very slowly, and even more painfully she is beginning to reclaim enough agency to get up in the morning. to attend to her child. and to face another day.

In a community in which parents, mainly single mothers are so pre-occupied with survival issues, the Bertrams Centre is often the only place where children and adolescents care free to express themselves. Most of the children are not referred by their caregivers but are identified as in need of support when parents request help with school uniforms, registration fees or food. Occasionally mother attending group or individual sessions will complain about the behaviour of a child or express concern about school performance. All children reviewed at the end of the year showed considerable growth in self-confidence. Symptoms of depression and traumatic stress were reduced in about a third of the children, a not surprising fact given that their living conditions expose them to the ongoing trauma of violence, abuse and homelessness. Nevertheless, in 80% of the cases reviewed parents indicated that the behaviour in the home had improved.

Six year old boy to his counsellor: I want to come here every day. I saw that when I come here I am very clever. I want to be clever. If I only come one a week it is going to take too long.

Group Interventions

The Suitcase Group

This is a group for displaced children who have recently arrived in the country and in 2016 included 11 children between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Most of the children were not at school when they first entered the group. By the end of the year all these children were registered for schooling for 2017. Much of the focus of this group is on sharing and processing narratives and loss associated with forced displacement, and on supporting them in adjusting to a new environment, which apart from language and cultural adjustments involves for most children a dramatic drop in living standards. By the end of the year a strong bond has formed between the children and the children are openly talking about their often very painful experiences of the past and present. One issue highlighting the confused world the children live in (and in the end creating a lot of laughter) was that of Mr. Xenophobia. The counsellors

"We did not have time to pack anything. I still miss my shoes, my clothes, and my toys. Now my parents can't afford to buy me new ones"- Suitcase child

discovered that the children had been warned a lot about xenophobia, but had no idea of the meaning of the word. They all thought “he” was some kind of bogeyman and lived in terror of being caught, and much explaining and mediating needed to be done for them to not only understand the meaning of the word, but also change their thinking about how to keep themselves safe and protected.

At least half the children had been exposed to domestic violence in their families before they came to South Africa and were carrying a double burden of grief for loved ones lost through family conflict as well as for the familiarity of home. The language of art helped the children to express their feelings and to rely on each other for support in navigating their new social and emotional landscape.

Born to Rise

This group aimed at supporting teenagers from foreign countries navigate the emotional complexities of adolescence in a culture which is unfamiliar to their elders, and from which at the same time they are excluded by virtue of their lack of citizenship, was attended by 14 youngsters in 2016. It was a difficult group to manage, and for many months the facilitators struggled against intense competitiveness, hostility and lack of empathy amongst group members, all of which reflecting the realities of survival in the external world. The teenagers were unable to tolerate vulnerability in themselves or others, often resorting to nastiness and ridicule to ward off feeling these were not able to cope with.

Several turning points inside and outside of the group cumulatively resulted in an increasing number of experiences of cooperation, kindness and sharing in the group. When one child was hurt during an argument outside of the group, some difficult conversations were held to help the participants recognize and respect the limits of behavior. Participation in a street theatre process which required them to work together, also made them aware of how dependent they were on each other for support. And when the main facilitator of the group, Charity Dube, lost her child unexpectedly, the group pulled together in an unprecedented show of affection, empathy and compassion.

By the time the group came to an end in December, it had become a safe space for the teenagers and relationships had become more supportive and caring, allowing for the expression of feelings and vulnerability. In the words of Karen Weissensee: *The process had finally become more group and less “me-first” centred.* Most profound, moreover, are the simple words coming from the young people whose existence the world refused to acknowledge even with something as basic as a name and identity: *You noticed us. Don’t give up on us. Please keep talking to us.*

Umoja 1

Twelve women regularly attended this group throughout the year, some having fled violence or persecution in the DRC, but the majority having come to South Africa driven by the desire for a “better life.” For the latter the sense of disappointment and betrayal was profound as they discovered that the streets of Johannesburg were not paved with gold, and were now forced to eke out a living under conditions much worse than they left behind. Navigating a way through the reality of the betrayal on the one side and the persistent fantasy of a better life still to come elsewhere (with equally false hopes of resettlement in Canada, France or Australia) presented a real challenge for the facilitators of this group. However, by mid-year talk of “resettlement in Canada” faded away as the women realistically assessed their situation. Sitting through the intense feelings of hopelessness was a most painful experience, but for the women themselves still more tolerable than the idea of returning home with the burning

In January I had a big issue with documentation, rent and such things. I still have all these problems. But now I have the courage not to be afraid. I can even defend myself when I come across the cops- Umoja 1 participant

shame of empty hands and failed promises. Although the facilitators did not feel it at the time, months of confronting the heaviness without anything positive to counter it with, were not without benefits. When the group came to the end in December the women shared that even though nothing had hanged in their external lives, they had found strength in each other and were able to cope better with the daily stress of survival.

Umoja 2

Umoja 2 is a monthly psycho-educational project to which all women who have attended previous Umoja 1 groups are invited. In 2016 the group sessions focused on reproductive health and choices. Conversations were heated as participants struggled to reconcile with cultural values and assumptions with the constraints of their social and economic realities in an unfamiliar country. Many of the women remained deeply influenced by churches which condemn contraception and often present it to women as another form of abortion. Knowledge about HIV/AIDS was very scant and it was only when the film “Yesterday” was screened that some participants realized how much at risk they were of being infected by partners who were always away from home, looking for employment opportunities elsewhere.

I did not know a woman can be strong. I thought a man has to do everything. As a woman I can take care of my family

By the end of the year the women were able to talk comfortably and humorously about sex, condoms, and cultural practices around sexual intimacy. Although many more conversations need to held, the seeds of thinking differently about women, their bodies, their choices, and their right to autonomy have been sown.

Bertrams for Change

Bertrams for Change (BFC) is an open project run in the local park and targets children who would otherwise never access services formally. Between 30 and 40 children attend the sports and art activities organized each Friday afternoon. Through the activities the counsellors engage with whatever may be going on in the lives of the children, build relationships which can be drawn on when they need help, and develop a sense of community in an area in which social cohesiveness is still very much identified by race and nationality. Children in this neighbourhood are very much left to their own devices, with 7 or 8 year olds often dragging along younger siblings. Hunger has been noted to be present in all the children’s lives and the sandwiches made for the regular attendees often have to be stretched to feed little brothers and sisters and many other hangers-on. As in the more formal groups competitiveness between children for the attention of adults can be intense and the consistent present of the same facilitators is therefore very important for the children to develop attachments they can trust.

This is a broken heart. My heart is broken when there are problems at school or when there is no food at home. But when I am in the park, playing with friends, and having a good time, my heart becomes whole again- Boy in the Bertrams Park

Holiday Programmes

Two holiday programmes, one for children and one for teenagers living in overcrowded conditions in Yeoville, Berea and Bertrams were run in 2016. The spatial constraints of their homes (often single rooms shared by one or more families) coupled with the constant fear of violence or xenophobic hostilities,

leaves many children locked up in small spaces, with little or no opportunity to express themselves physically or emotionally, especially during the school holidays. Both three-day programmes were structured to provide both physical and emotional outlets for these youngsters, a total of 29, Activities (including a hike through a nearby nature reserve) were designed to make the children more aware of their feeling states at any point in time, and to help them find ways of regulating these feelings states when they became either too agitated or too depressed.

Khula Nathi

Khula Nathi (Grow with Us) has grown of a small homework support group for migrant and refugee children initiated by a group of dedicated volunteers into a bigger initiative aimed helping children and families cross the many barriers affecting their experience of school and learning.

[Access to Schooling and Learning Materials](#)

In mid-2016 access to schooling for the 2017 school year was facilitated for 15 Grade 1 and Grade 8 learners, mainly through the payment of “registration” fees. School and/or transport fees were also paid for four children with special needs. Full uniforms were purchased for 10 children entering new schools, while children who attend the two Study Buddies group were supported with items such as school jerseys and school shoes.

[Study Buddies East](#)

This homework support group was consistently attended by 34 learners from Grade 5 to Grade 11 in 2016. All these children are from migrant and refugee families and face a number of challenges, primarily related to poverty and the lack of learning materials for which parents are expected to pay. Textbooks for each subject and each grade were purchased in 2016 and learners are able to access these for their homework tasks on Saturdays. All these learners were also helped with basic packs of stationery and/or stationery or textbook levies. One teenager sadly dropped out of school in the middle of the year, while another failed her grade. All other passed with slight but still significant improvements in English, Maths, and Science.

[Study Buddies West](#)

This programme for 14 children, aged 9 to 14, affected by HIV/AIDS was in its second year of implementation in 2016. While the initial plan was to replicate the Study Buddies group in the inner city, it soon became evident that all these children had serious cognitive and social barriers to learning. Most were unable to master the basics of reading and writing. The programme was therefore adjusted to focus on the foundations of numeracy and literacy through a series of fun-filled experiential activities which kept the children engaged with and enthusiastic about the process of learning.

[Study Babies](#)

Study Babies is a learning support group for children in Grades 1 and 4 and for those whose schooling has been delayed by war and forced displacement and/or lack of documentation needed to access schooling. Eleven children attended this group run by a remedial therapist who focused her efforts on the foundational skills of numeracy and literacy which most of the children had missed out on. By the end of the year five children were ready to leave the programme as they had reached a level appropriate for their grade.

Siyabankekela: Caring for the Wounded Carer

The Siyabankekela Programme is based on the premise that no healing can take place without caring and that the healing of a society is entirely dependent on the quality of care people of all ages receive in their families and communities. It is a sad reality that caring (empathy, nurturance, compassion), the most critical element in the transformation of our country, is so profoundly undervalued by authorities. It is an even sadder fact that many entrusted with the task of caring for the most vulnerable groups in society, have never been cared for themselves and therefore find it very difficult to find within themselves the essential qualities required for meaningful care for others.

Caring for the wounded carer has become an essential part of Sophiatown's work and encompasses a range of therapeutic and developmental interventions aimed at helping carers at all levels of social and organizational hierarchies to become aware of the many hurts within themselves that can negatively impact on their caring work, to embrace self-awareness and self-care as essential components of their personal and working lives, and through experiential learning to internalize the skill and value of being fully present for the needs of others.

The following is a summary of the work done with child care workers, community health care workers, social auxiliary workers and leaders in number of organizations which for reasons of confidentiality cannot be identified.

Self-Awareness for Volunteers and General Assistants in a Child and Youth Care Centre

During the course of 2016, a series of interventions targeting all levels of carers in a local residential child care centre was completed. In 2014 and 2015 child care workers and their managers had been engaged in an intensive process of self-awareness and personal healing and reports subsequently received from the leadership of the organization indicated that there had been a significant improvement in the quality of the engagement with children as well as in the relationship between care workers and managers. Similar processes were requested for elderly volunteers who visited the young children on a regular basis, as well as for general assistants (drivers, cleaners, and kitchen staff) who in the course of the primary duties also interact with the children. As was expected, painful personal experiences surfaced in both groups and as these were shared, a real sense of solidarity, compassion and empathy could develop, the benefits of which were reported to be carried over into the work place. Areas of conflict also soon became evident and required some skilled intervention from which participants had much to learn. In the younger group, participants started to reclaim their dreams beyond their roles as cooks, drivers, or cleaners and were challenged to take practical steps towards these.

I was helped with anger. I had too much anger. I had such anger, I just shut my mouth when something bothered me. I would just look at you and ignore you. This place has helped me a lot in removing the anger I had- General assistant

Self-Awareness and Conflict Management in a Community-Based Organization

Work with this organization also started in 2014 and the community child care workers who had attended an intensive programme of self-awareness had made significant changes in their personal lives. However, within the organization there was little change and it was evident that the families served by the organization were bearing the brunt of its dysfunction. Communication between carers and managers had completely broken down and both sides engaged in unethical behavior. A turning point was reached when the child care workers were challenged to role play their behavior towards the children and became aware of how they were part of a cycle of abuse of which the children were the ultimate victims. Following three sessions with the child care workers and a further three sessions with the managers both teams finally agreed to a joint session during which grievances could be safely aired. Although this resulted in an agreement to introduce positive changes, a subsequent follow up session revealed that the decisions were not adhered to and that a toxic organizational culture prevails.

I am rotten inside. I am so hurt and damaged and it is by one of us here on the team. My scars are so deep- Manager

Child Development for Community Child Care Workers

Sophiatown's engagement with the above organization ended with a final course in basic child development for the community child care workers who have no formal or informal training in working with children, as it was felt, that despite the dysfunction of the organization as a whole, a basic knowledge of child development could help them to respond more appropriately to the needs of the children in their homes and work place. By the end of the six days training all child care workers reported how the insights they had gained were changing the interactions with their own children and those in their households. Sadly again, this did not translate into the organization which was unwilling to give the care workers the space to use their new found skills and knowledge.

I am able to understand myself more and to speak to my inner child and tell her to please tone down in certain areas- Child care worker

Self-Awareness Skills for Leaders

In 2015, sixteen social auxiliary workers, all based at six community-based organizations around Johannesburg, were trained running support groups, as always with an emphasis on self-awareness and experiential learning. This was followed up in 2016 with leadership skills development as social auxiliary workers in these organizations are responsible for monitoring and supporting home-based care organizations. It soon became evident that most participants lacked good leadership role models and that they were severely limited by the dysfunctional nature of the organizations to which they were allocated by the Department of Social Development. A lot of time was spent exploring the participants' own lack of self-esteem (and in particular the fear of standing out as a woman) and building confidence through deeper insights gained from reflecting on one's strengths and abilities. The participants were also encouraged to find out more about the lives of the carers they supervise, to show more interest and caring, and to report on the effect of this on their work. By the end

I asked some of the carers I supervise about their own children and I noticed that when I took an interest in their lives they started believing that they matter and took more care with their work- Social auxiliary worker.

of the process all participants had demonstrated a growth in self-confidence as well as in sensitivity to the needs of others. They continue to meet and support each other outside of the scope of this intervention.

Self-Awareness and Support for Community Health Workers

A programme for support for community health workers from two organizations coordinated through the Diocesan AIDS Commission started in 2015 and continued through to September 2016, with a particular focus in the second year on the skills of dealing with conflict without resorting to aggressive confrontation. With some of the workers in 2016 being recruited as full-time employees by the Department of Health, while others continued as volunteers and were subjected to long “dry seasons” without any stipend, much pain and envy had to be processed before concerns and grievances could be openly discussed with management. The open sharing of fears and resentments eventually gave way to some constructive problem-solving which met the needs of those left behind while at the same time relieving those who had gained employment of the burden of guilt.

Community health workers in the south of Johannesburg who had been part of the Siyabanakekela programme in 2015 before they allocated to a local clinic as part of the “re-engineering” process affecting community health workers previously managed through CBOs, re-established contact with Sophiatown in 2016 and regular monthly sessions with 45 community health workers (split into three groups of 15) were resumed towards the end of the year.

A group of ten senior community workers drawn from a number of community-based organizations which were until recently coordinated through the Diocesan AIDS Commission continued to meet for debriefing and support on a quarterly basis. One indication of the power of this group of carers is the establishment of a WhatsApp group through which members keep abreast of happenings in their lives and alert each other if there is a need for more active support.

Sustaining our Community of Practice

Sustaining our Community of Practice is programme which developed out of the realization that no organization can effectively render services on its own, but is part of an interdependent network, and that this network is under threat in the current socio-political climate. The objective of this programme is to sustain and strengthen what is left of the community of practice, by supporting leaders in their various struggles, providing opportunities for deep and meaningful reflection, and building partnerships around the common purpose of serving the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized sectors of our society. In 2016 this programme, initiated in mid-2015, came into its own, and through a range of activities a strong network of service organizations committed to supporting each other for a common good is emerging.

The Directors’ Circle

While directors of organizations are expected to put into place systems of support and care for employees and volunteers, they themselves have, by virtue of their role, very limited access to support for themselves. The Directors’ Circle has evolved over the years into a support structure that is designed to break through the loneliness and isolation experienced by many NGO leaders. It offers a space for leaders on reflect on the world within which they work and to deepen their understanding of themselves in this world. Themes which have emerged from conversations and explored more deeply in the monthly meetings include the interplay between leadership and organizational culture; leadership seasons in the

development of organizations; burn-out and compassion fatigue; leadership within a network of leaders; leadership responses to uncertainty and complexity; and “being brave enough to start a conversation that matters.”

As the Director’s Circle grows and matures, the conversations tend to emerge from a place of awareness of the inner self as it responds to events in the outer world. Participants have learnt to listen to the inner voice and have become more responsive to the need for self-care and nurturance. They have also begin to listen with greater intentionality and presence to the concerns of others and to temper the problem-solving reflex with consciousness and discernment which makes their peers in turn more open to suggestions.

Coaching

Several coaching sessions were offered to leaders struggling with organizational issues, in particular those related to governance and relationship with boards.

Debrief and Learning Circles

These were facilitated for two organizations whose work involves intense emotional content. The idea of these circles is to provide team members with a safe space to unburden themselves, to reflect on the impact of their work, and to explore ways of sustaining personal wellness and integrity in highly demanding work contexts.

The Elders Retreat

The idea of a retreat for elders in the NGP sector arose from the observation that many of the leaders in the network are in their fifties or beyond, have traversed through difficult political eras, and continue to advocate for the most vulnerable members of society in the current socio-political context. While these elders have a wealth of experience and wisdom to share they seldom have the opportunity to reflect on the legacy they want to believe behind. At the same time many leaders struggle to hand over the rein of their work to the younger generation or plan for their own journeys into a different phase of life. The Elders Retreat held in August was an opportunity to reflect on personal and organizational narratives as they intersect with different socio-political eras of the past and present, and to open up conversations around interacting more purposefully with emerging leaders and envisioning a personal future for oneself beyond the organization. Ten elder attended the retreat which was facilitated by Doug Reeler of CDRA, and ended with the collective commitment to develop more opportunities for intergenerational dialogue.

The Leader’s Retreat

The Leader’s Retreat is now an annual event, with the second one taking place early in December 2016. Thirteen NGO leaders attended this retreat, facilitated in line with the principles of reflective social practice by Sue Davidoff of the Proteus Initiative. The focus of the retreat was on agency to counter the often pervasive sense of hope-and helplessness, experienced by NGO leaders in the current socio-political context. The sharing amongst peers, elicited through deep reflective processes, broke through the isolation and strengthened relationships in the community of practice, the benefits of which are now evident in the willingness of leaders to go the extra mile to assist a partner in the network with difficult situations or problems. All participants indicated that they felt more positive about the future and could go into 2017 with a greater sense of hope.

For the first time in a very long time, I was knocking at my own door, and found that I am still there- Social Worker

Advocacy

Most of the distress the Sophiatown team witnesses in the intimacy of the counselling space is directly related to the violation of the basic human right to dignity, care and protection. Many of our clients are suffer from hunger and homelessness on a regular basis, are exposed to violence and abuse, and are denied access to health care, education, and documentation. Victims of forced displacement, domestic, gender or criminal violence seldom see justice done, and are often further violated by the very officials constitutionally mandated to serve and protect them. Psychological dysfunction and emotional distress is never only a personal tragedy, but only the final result of how power relations play themselves out at global, national, local and familial levels. While Sophiatown CPS is not an advocacy organization it plays an important role in advocating for individuals and families, and linking themes emerging in the counselling room with larger advocacy strategies.

[The Johannesburg Child Advocacy Forum](#)

Sophiatown CPS continues to be an active member of the Johannesburg Child Advocacy Forum. A total of 562 children and their families were assisted through case work interventions (drawing on the resources of the member organizations and their networks). Of these 200 children were helped to access basic shelter, health or social services through case conferences and liaison with various service providers. JCAF also engaged in case work promoting children's right to alternative care and social services, by providing access to statutory and support services, as well as facilitating their access to justice, through diversion programmes, legal services and court reports.

[The Psycho-Social Rights Forum](#)

Sophiatown CPS is also active on the Psycho-Social Rights Forum initiated by Lawyers for Human Rights advocates in particular for the right of forced migrants to access mental health services as well as for basic conditions of life which promote emotional well-being.

[The Medico Community Care Workers Network](#)

Sophiatown CPS is part of a network of organizations (Sinani, People's Health Movement, Khanya College, Wellness Foundation, and Section 27) drawn together by a common concern about the working and living condition of community workers, in particular community health and child care workers, most of whom have no formal employment contracts and are extremely vulnerable to abusive labour practices. Each organization in the network performs its own advocacy role, with Sophiatown's contribution being primarily in ensuring that the psycho-social issues affecting the lives of community workers are heard and acknowledged in the bigger process of advocating for labour rights.

Our Partners

In our last annual report we expressed our appreciation to the many dedicated partners in the social service sector without whom our interventions with individuals and families in distress would be at best piecemeal and at worst useless. This year we would like to thank another group of partners whose

professional and personal commitment to the cause of healing and social justice tends to be obscured by the names of the agencies they represent- and even these are often just listed in audited statements as “donors”, a term which does not do justice to the meaningfulness of the relationships of mutual trust and exchange of experience and wisdom which has developed over many years of engagement with each other. We have therefore taken the liberty of mentioning the frontliners of these agencies with sincere appreciation for their unique contribution to our work:

- ❖ Mary Higgins from the Stephen Lewis Foundation for her emotional presence and responsiveness to the personal and organizational challenges beyond their impact on budgets, or financial agreements and reports
- ❖ Charlotte Spiewok from Bread for the World for her endless patience as we struggle together through complex financial budgeting and reporting requirements, and her willingness to engage with the real issues on the ground
- ❖ Katharina von Allmen from Aids Und Kind for long, meaningful and honest conversations in the true spirit of learning from each other
- ❖ Simeon Mawanza from Stichting Porticus for his persistence, attention to detail, and the many questions which challenge us to look at our work from different perspectives
- ❖ Klaus Piepel and Leonie Crass from Misereor for their trust, their honesty, and their unwavering, long-haul commitment to the organization
- ❖ Barbara Hauer-Nussbaumer from Women’s World Day of Prayer for her faith in the integrity of our work and our accountability
- ❖ Annegret Klaasen who in her limited spare time manages a small donor base of individuals and congregations in Germany

Our souls are not for sale

These words, uttered by former Finance Minister, Pravin Ghordan, as he left office on 31 March, 2017, following a bizarre cabinet reshuffle in the interest of furthering the cause of state capture, ring with a profound truth. While we are living in a time in which national assets, resources, and more importantly the destinies of millions of people are offered for sale to the highest bidder, it remains a fact that human souls are not for sale, cannot be reduced to commodities, and will always reach out, no matter how long it takes, to the light of truth, hope and love. As the Sophiatown team it is our task to offer the kind of nurturance and care needed for people to actively reclaim not only their agency, but also their longing for truth, integrity, and humanity. We remain committed to make our contribution, to ensure that those entering our healing spaces, will know that their souls are not for sale, rise above the betrayal, and each in their own way continue the work of caring that transforms the world, one person, one family, one organization, one community, and one generation at a time.