



Y-TALK

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Empowering Young People for Life, Leadership & Service

From the NGS



It is one of those moments when I am proud to be South African. In a time when Covid-19 crisis has burst our comfort zones, leaving many of us feeling weak and vulnerable, our leadership have stepped up. As the world battles this invisible enemy, we commend our leadership who are fighting hard to ensure all our eyes are open to see the enemy. While Covid-19 leaves most of us feeling helpless, we have at least had leadership who have been calm and consistent in their actions. While we remain anxious, we are content to obey and follow, because we feel the strong leadership. Politicians have parked their robust public debate and put differences aside to face the common enemy. This is true leadership. Today (April 29) our Health Minister, Dr Zweli Mkhize, reported that there are signs we are on track to win this fight. These

leaders will be remembered by our communities, our children and generations to come.

I trust that as YMCA we will continue to play a part in this battle and that our role will be remembered favorably by the communities we serve. It is hoped, that in this time when young people are vulnerable and in fear, that the YMCA will be remembered for having been the organisation to hear their cries. I trust, as YMCA Staff, as volunteer leaders, that we rise to be counted and remembered for the roles we have played.

OUR GLOBAL RENNAISSANCE

Dear friends, I greet you not only as your leader but importantly as your colleague, your friend and your African brother. In this crisis, we find ourselves at a watershed point in time, for humanity and for the YMCA. We must ask ourselves: How are we responding so future generations will be proud of our decisions and actions? I have been reflecting on how my time as General Secretary of the Africa Alliance of YMCAs prepared me for my role now. Together as Africans, we imagined and planned for the African Renaissance. We worked in fellowship and with dignity based on ubuntu. Our collective and cherished vision, values and philosophy... this is what fuels my journey, especially at this moment. *contd on Page 2...*



During my time with you, I got the taste of the Renaissance, of something new that would happen. And it will. Right now, I encourage you to imagine with me a Renaissance for the whole world. I was trained to be resilient while leading the Africa YMCA movement by imagining, waiting, working hard and believing that we would overcome. Africa was my training ground for being able to cope with and pull through shock after shock after. Our global resilience now relies on us carrying ourselves and each other through this shock.

What keeps me going now is my faith in God. This enables me to be still, to meditate and build my resilience. We are not alone. God is by our side to support us, guide us and carry us through. I imagine that God is smiling upon us. Before covid-19, we were talking about artificial intelligence and technology. Now in covid, we are talking about washing hands and simple hygiene. And who is keeping us alive and who is providing us with the

ability to live? The people society said did not count: the cashier, the person who collects waste, the community health care worker who does home-based care.

Society is now saying: I am, because you are. You count. You all count. We all count. So let us continue to work hand-in-hand – only in spirit now!

My fellow South Africans: **Keep hope alive.** The Renaissance of our continent is now interlinked with the Renaissance of the whole world. We look to Africa to give leadership on how we are managing our relationships. How we are living our unbuntu. Remain resilient. Covid will come, covid will go. And we look to the African Renaissance where YMCAs are giving young people the space and support to be in the driver's seat. **Siyahamba!**

Carlos Sanvee, Secretary General, World YMCA

OUR WORK MATTERS - BECAUSE OUR COMMUNITY MATTERS

Being a Community Health Worker (CHW) with the YMCA Athlone at this time has been a true test of the passion and the love I claim to have for the community I serve. Instead of curling up under the covers and embracing lockdown, we as the YMCA Athlone embarked on a mission to give absolute care even if it meant that we would have to go over and above the call of duty.

The Athlone YMCA has been a catalyst in ensuring that we have sufficient protection, not just to protect ourselves but to also protect the community we serve.

This is a huge effort as we are reaching over 10,000 people a week. It's also been an honour to serve alongside partners such as National and Local Government and NGOs to ensure that medication is dropped off for our most vulnerable citizens. We have also been called in to assist with mass screening and testing.

Where fear has disabled communities all over South Africa, passion has been put into action and the love we claim for our communities has been displayed by the way we've been serving.

Thank you Ryan Benjamin, Tania du Preez and

YMCA for giving us the opportunity to do. And for giving us the role and responsibility to show the world that the work we do matters.

Charmaine Philander
Community Health Worker, YMCA Athlone



RISKS, ROLES and RESPONSIBILITIES



Ricky de Reuck, GS of Cape Flats YMCA, overseeing the feeding programme

As lockdown continues and food chains become more formalised, we are experiencing a shortage now of general donations for food. This means we are working harder and faster. Somehow we find the strength and spirit to rise up and support each other for the sake of those who need us .

Currently, YMCA is feeding about 600 homeless every morning, with an extra 200 over the weekends. Food is more critical than many people realise – for those withdrawing from the common highly addictive ‘dirty heroin’ street drugs, their need for food is huge!

Within this seemingly overwhelming situation, small victories are huge in impact. Some homeless people have been reunited with their families. Some will need much more assistance in the journey.

Our health care team continues with its core home-based care. We are now active in covid-19 screening. In one day last week, our 30 CHWs succeeded in this:

- ⚙ 250 households visited
- ⚙ 703 people screened
- ⚙ 10 people referred for testing

And tomorrow we do it all again.

On that note, our team is constantly taking stock ourselves. Tomorrow, we are all getting screened ourselves. We know the risks. We know our role. And we know our responsibility is to ourselves, our team, our families and those we risk our lives for.

The Cape Flats YMCA Team

HOW CAN WE HELP?

The YMCA Athlone has been in existence for more than 100 years and has faced many challenges and overseen many changes within our community. But nothing in our immediate past could have prepared us for this pandemic called Covid-19. The moment government declared a national lockdown, we as the YMCA Athlone responded by asking: how can we help?

To date we have provided screening and care for more than 3,000 community members.

Information and understanding is key right now so we are using all our social media platforms to constantly keep the community up-to-date on Covid-19 and its effects in our country and then within our community. We currently setting up a “COVID-19 Task Team” to ensure that our policy meets international and local standards. This is particularly crucial for the Sanitation Room which allows for the safe entry and exiting of our building and in-house sanitation teams that manage all these processes as we gear up for post-pandemic life.



Deeply concerned for the wellbeing of every human being on this planet, we at the YMCA Athlone take great comfort in knowing that He WHO began a GOOD work is FAITHFUL to COMPLETE it.

God bless you!

Gaston Parker
Operations Manager, Athlone YMCA

CHANGING THE WAY WE CHANGE LIVES

When we heard the news of first covid-19 case in SA, it was the night before a workshop with Kristin Glad and her group of students from Rønningen folkehøgskolel, Norway. We washed our hands a lot that night! During the workshop and related events we focused on social justice in the context of poverty and inequality. Our theme was masculinity as a response to the ‘war on women’ in our country. About 100 youth were involved in different parts of this, with a core group of communiversity youth at the Cape Flats Campsite. We talked of it through the lens of gangsterism too, being led by Ricky de Reuk, General Secretary and head of Cape Flats YMCA, through the gangster museum onsite, and with testimonies from youth connected to the YMCA and projects. We shared so many sobering moments, some tears and an incredible amount of understanding and acceptance – and hope!



Each year the Ronningen students run the Global Race in Norway at this time, to raise awareness and funds for our youth leadership Local Action Groups to make change in community. So as we are focusing on masculinity now, we want young men to drive change to stop violence against women. This is our journey, so this is what the global race is about this year. This week, our new friends are running ‘social distance’ global race. Romano had a Facebook live discussion on Monday night to share our vision for young men leading change, and the context of inequality and poverty.

Then on Tuesday, we both had a Zoom session with Kristin and the students where we discussed covid-19 in SA, in the areas we live, what the SAYMCA local associations are facing and doing: Durban, PMB, Athlone and Cape Flats. We spoke a lot about what we were doing in our personal capacity and with many initiatives we are working with.

This has been no ordinary journey with R o n n i n g e n t h i s y e a r . O u r experience in the Cape Flats at beginning of March was about us connecting in very real ways, SA youth and Norwegian youth, to take the concept of global citizenship to a deeper level. We have kept in contact with each other since then. We participated in their fundraising for us, we shared our journey with them. But it was more than that – they shared their stories with us, their life in lockdown, their views

and feelings. And now they are sending videos of support and solidarity to each other, between SA and Norway during lockdown in both countries.

We are so blessed to have this amazing relationship with Kristin and her young students. It is certainly lifting our spirits during this time. Corona connections are changing the way we change lives.

Romano Kock, Youth Worker, Cape Flats YMCA and Gil Harper, SA YMCA Associate.

FROM DESPAIR TO WHOLENESS

At the start of the COVID19 shutdown in eThekweni (Durban), Beauty* found herself relocated to a local YMCA. This was the result of a plan instituted by local government to negotiate with woman living on the street to spend quarantine in a shelter.

The plan was a joint effort between local law enforcement, the city and community based organisations like the YMCA. Little did Beauty know how the

Coming to the YMCA has literally changed my life.

extremely sick, mentally disorientated and full of despair upon arrival at the YMCA.

The first morning she woke up in the shelter she was greeted with a "Good morning. How are you feeling today?" This simple caring gesture was something she had not experienced for several years. In her words "This was the first time I saw some light at the end of my dark tunnel that I was in. I was like a broken glass that cannot be fixed.

Coming to the YMCA has literally changed my life. Living on the street I did not feel human. I somehow feel human again."

Through inter personal counseling offered by YMCA staff while maintaining a family orientated approach to the women; providing healthy meals and structured activities in a caring environment has had a profound impact on Beauty's life, along with many of the other women at the shelter.

The journey to recovery for Beauty has just begun. She is determined to make the right choices towards a better life for her and her estranged family. Its a tough battle to change from being a homeless, addicted, abused women on the street, to wholeness. She acknowledges that the shutdown has provided her with an opportunity to turn her life around. Being part of an extended family that the YMCA has become to her, is part of her solution.

The YMCA will stay with her and support her through rehabilitation, counseling and reintegration towards a better life.

Mpumbe Zama - National Y-Justice Coordinator

** The real identity of Beauty has been withheld on her request.*



corona virus was going to bring a ray of light into her life in such a dramatic way. A well educated and travelled young woman, Beauty was nonetheless

During the month of April, in response to the COVID19 crisis, the YMCA has reached the following numbers of people:

- at least 10,000 individuals for health issues, awareness campaigns
- has served about 25,000 meals and food packages
- provided direct support to over 250 homeless people
- housed 124 people who were unable to return to their homes

A LIVING MIRACLE

At 20 years old, Wandile Gumede has been living on the streets since he was six years old. He has been a regular participant for many, many years in the Y Justice programme of the Pietermaritzburg YMCA. He does not remember any of his family members. He was fostered by a granny who is suspected to have stayed at Enketheni but she passed away while fostering Wandile.

It has been a difficult past few years for us all in our journey with him. His glue addiction has ruled his life, resulting in anger, irritation and erratic thinking and behaviour. He would often arrive very high at our centre; dirty and then would refuse to bath and wash his clothes. Even though he came to us, he was reluctant to join any of the activities unless we spent a lot of attention on getting him to do so. He always refused the idea of staying in a safe environment like a homeless shelter and didn't want to participate in any of the activities in the programme without being begged to do so.

In the past few months something happened... a transforming Wandile has taken control of his life and begun to shine! He has been taking care of himself physically and taking pride in his health and hygiene. He is able and interested in having meaningful conversations and discussion. Before lockdown at the YMCA, he began complying with rules, participating in activities and enjoying a great game of soccer. Right now, he is living at the homeless shelter in Pietermaritzburg. He is drug free and talks, smiles and laughs a lot.

He is sharing his emotions and interacting with people. More we do not know, and tomorrow we cannot plan. Right now, this is a living miracle.

Nonku Zuma, social worker, Pietermaritzburg YMCA

