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Report (Update)

Siyaphumelela Group 2015

Project Composition: bi-monthly Siya meetings for educational purposes + extra projects

Report by: Anne Löffler

Background Siyaphumelela

Youth qualifying for the Siyaphumelela group are adolescents between the ages of 14 and 18 years. Adolescence is defined to happen in the years between childhood and maturity which in general terms are regarded to lie in between 12 to 21/ 14-25 years (Medovy, 1964). However, it is the phase when children and youth are developing and defining their identity (“sense of self” – see project report youth camp “Journey called I”) – which is not an easy discovery path. They become moody, secretive and can temporarily develop attitudes of unreliability and rebelliousness. Also during these years, frequently children feel not understood and even alone. Now, despite the unsettled feelings about themselves and the world surrounding them they need to become well and independent adults. Yet, in these times they need to learn many strengths and healthy mechanisms of coping:

“These include: positive self-image, competency and strength, healthy level of independence, knowledge and skills, appropriate conduct within law, adjustment to physical and emotional changes, choice and appropriate conduct within law, adjustment to physical and emotional changes, choice and appropriate action with a sexual partner, lifestyle and spiritual choices, strong human relationship skill, right to respect from both within and outside the family. For most people, these strengths have been acquired by the early 20s.” (Family Health Magazine, N.d.)

The Raphael Centre operates a *Wellness Programme* for children and youth with the intention of accompanying them in the process of growing up and fostering the development of strengths, healthy hearts and minds.

The children who are invited to attend the programme stem from contexts with low future perspectives for various difficult living conditions: In many families there is HIV present. A few children are HIV-positive themselves. Some had lost one parent or both to Aids. All the children the Centre works with live in poverty. And, living in poverty is traumatising due to different attributes and side-effects of poverty. In addition, since 2015, the Centre embarked on involving children with special needs into programme activities. The Raphael Centre decided to do so because they especially are vulnerable to abuse and traumatising memories gained by discriminating and marginalising responses of peers and adults in their daily lives (e.g. at mainstream schools). And, all of these different pre-conditions have impact on the individual development to adulthood.

With its interventions the Centre wishes to encourage and assist children and youth to become purposeful and responsible members of the society. To facilitate resilience, purposeful living and emotional competence, such as empathy and caring, there was designed a child and youth programme made of life-skills and wellness interventions. It involves children and youth between the ages of 7 and 18 years. As mentioned above, the oldest age group, its adolescents, was named “Siyaphumelela-Group” (isiXhosa for “We succeed” - short: Siya Group). The Siya Group was established in 2012. Its activities in the past and as they were planned for this year aimed at fostering healthy growth and development during adolescence. Activities have involved knowledge and skills development - for instance for informed opinion and decision making. But, part of growing-up also is to learn that there are consequences of their choices. Here, the Centre tried to give guidance and proper input for confident and healthy minds. Furthermore, there was given space for discussing teenager-problems the youth had encountered. An important aspect of the programme is to support youth in developing positive self-images, especially at times of creating the-self (see above).

Current Situation

In consultation with operations manager and director the programme coordinator of the Child and Youth Wellness Programme Ndumi decided to release the majority of the group. Only a few are still eligible to attend Raphael Centre activities. Originally the group was attended by 32 youth. In May of this year, 29 of them were given letters of exemption from the programme. In consequence, the group has been resolved until the next generation of younger children - who at the present still belong to the 11-13 years old - has graduated to Siya.

When Ndumi invited the youth at the beginning of this year she carefully prepared them for the meeting and project dates of 2015. Also, she informed them that a commitment to attend the projects is elementary to remain on the programme. The teenagers were told that if they cannot attend meetings or projects they are expected to send apologies to the team – whether through their friends who are attending or by using phones (whatsapp etc.). Also, the youth was informed that they risk losing eligibility for attending the programme if they miss activities without apologies for more than three times in the row.

Unfortunately, frequent and continuous absence from the activities reached peak in the months of April and May this year. Despite of being aware of the situation around teenagers (see page 1) the Raphael Centre cannot afford planning activities for 32 youth and finds only three pupils attending as it wastes resources and time. In consequence, Ndumi found herself forced to introduce consequences and suggested closing Siya temporarily.

We are aware of a few reasons for the youth to not attend the programme: The oldest children, which are the ones who regularly attended last year, are undergoing matric in 2015. Therefore, they have important commitments and practices at school this year. Among the younger children we often had the problem that there was always enthusiastic interest in attending youth camps. However, often there was missing serious commitment to attend the Siya-meetings which are held regularly twice the month. Some projects - which usually required once off-meetings - were well attended. However, some other projects which lasted for more than one month and required weekly attendance suffered from inconsistent participation. This is a pity as some of the topics and activities were suggested by the youth themselves. Unfortunately, without proper support by the parents it will be difficult to have motivated and attending youth at the programme.

Also here we intervened. Since 2015 we started to work closely with the parents which has not been victory path yet but requires time and patience. Most parents are not used to being involved with the education of their children (see project chart “Fokus Areas”).

Despite of the exemption from the programme all youth are welcome at the Centre in case they seek counselling regarding any problems (such as difficult family situation). By next year some of the 13 years old will graduate into the next age group of 14-18 years (Siya ages). Also, they were encouraged to consider engagement with “The President’s Award”. In August this year we will plan the 2016-programmes. Here, we might reconsider our plans and see if there is potential for Siya 2016.

The Siya-decision is affecting a few projects of the Child and Youth Wellness Programme and we discussed options of maintaining these project: Some of them we are going to facilitate with our younger age-group (11-13 years). Concerning some other activities we consider inviting youth from community partners: We already established this idea with the Eluxolweni Child and Youth Care Center in Grahamstown. Only a couple of activities had to be cancelled. The last section will deliver details of the Siya-planning 2015 and our approach for each single project:

Way Forward

Planned Project	Date	New Plan
Candle Light Campaign for children (11-18 years)	1 st May	Attended by Raphael Centre 11-13 years
Environment days (11-18 years)	16 th , 17 th + 18 th September (environment workshop, cleaning neighbourhood, planting trees)	To attend by Raphael Centre 11-13 years + looking at option: inviting Eluxolweni 11-18 years youth
67 min Nelson Mandela Day (supporting old and sick people with cleaning their houses)	18 th July	<i>Cancelled</i> (parked for 2016/2017)
Youth Camp "Journey called I" (13-16 years)	5 th -9 th October	To attend by Raphael Centre 12-13 years + looking at option: inviting 12-16 years youth from Jabez
Computer Classes	Originally planned for 2 nd term, Realisation in process for 3 rd term	To attend by Raphael Centre 11-13 years
Future Orientation and Career (16-18 years) Career Orientation Day + Campus Tour at PE College	September 2015	Career orientation day: <i>cancelled</i> Campus Tour PE College: Elaborating on possibility to invite old very engaged Siya students who do matric this year + Jabez and Eluxolweni 16-18 years
Siyaphumelela Group	15 meetings on Friday afternoons: 13.2., 27.2., 13.3., 27.3., 17.4., 8.5., 22.5., 5.6., 26.6., 24.7., 7.8., 21.8., 4.9., 18.9., 2.10.	To attend by Raphael Centre 11-13 years

References:

Family Health Magazine. N.d. (available at:

http://www.familyhealthonline.ca/fho/adolescent/AD_behaviourconcerns_FHb95.asp , last access: 27.05.2015)

Medovy, H. 1964. Problems of Adolescence. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. 90. 1354-1360.