Providing More Than a Meal at Service Dining Rooms

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor Science.

ABSTRACT

Factors at the individual, community, and structural level generate challenges that both contribute to homelessness and dehumanize street people. Working with Service Dining Rooms (SDR), a soup kitchen in Cape Town's Central Business District, we created a space to celebrate human dignity, establishing art and music programmes, collecting personal stories, and connecting SDR guests to other services through resource mapping. We worked with street community members and four co-researchers to implement sustainable outcomes throughout the project.

This is an executive summary of a WPI Cape Town Project Centre project that is fully reported at http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/projects/p2015/service-dining-rooms/

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OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT

South Africa is home to approximately 200,000 street people (Rule-Groenewald, 2015), with over 7,000 street people residing in Cape Town alone (Bernardo, 2015). Many factors lead people to the streets, including addiction, unemployment, and mental ill-health. Street people often face violence from other street people, mistreatment by law enforcement, or poor health resulting from lack of nutrition or medication and limited access to health services (Moyo et al., 2015). Many street people rely on non-government organizations (NGOs) not only to provide necessities, such as food and clothing, but also for developmental services, such as vocational skills trainings. Additionally, they view many NGOs as safe places for expressing themselves to one another and the wider community.

Service Dining Rooms (SDR) is a soup kitchen located in Cape Town that, in addition to serving meals for street people, recently started leading developmental services to provide additional opportunities for street people. Although SDR continually implements new programme initiatives, an opportunity to build stronger community within the space remained. Thus, SDR wished to develop additional programmes, implement interior upgrades, document the personal stories of regular guests, and address challenges that their guests' face as street community members. This project aimed to work with SDR to meet these goals through establishing art and music pro-grammes, collecting personal stories, enlivening the interior space with created artwork and documented personal stories, and addressing difficulties guests experience on the streets through resource mapping. Through the implementation of these improvements, this project aimed to create an atmosphere in SDR that is welcoming and reflective of the individuals it serves.

BACKGROUND

Unpacking Homelessness

The terms "street people" and "homeless people" are often used synonymously, and "homelessness" is often simplified to mean those who do not have a house. However, homelessness is a complex term. Homeless people may have no shelter, access to a temporary roof, or an informal shack that is not safe or secure (Rule-Groenwald et al., 2015). Further, for those who live on the streets, some may be temporarily living on the streets while others may have lived on the streets for many years. Given these complexities, this population is referred to as 'street people,' which more appropriately reflects individuals who have no access to a roof or shelter, live and sleep on the streets for a number of reasons, and have done so for any period of time.

SDR's Role

Established in 1935, SDR serves and delivers around 800 meals per day to homeless people, street people, and

anyone else choosing to enjoy a low-cost meal in the East City neighborhood of Cape Town's Central Business District. Richard "Ricky" Marais, the Programme Manager since 2014, leads a variety of programmes ranging from addiction support to job skills development. "Many such initiatives are part of Khulisa Social Solutions' Streetscapes programme,"an initiative hosted by SDR that provides work, development, and a stipend for street community members. Ricky also serves as a liaison between street people and policy-enforcing institutions like the Cape Town Central City Improvement District (CCID) and police. Further, SDR is an active partner of Cape Town's Street People's Forum (SPF), which is led by Greg Andrews, SDR's Operations Manager. SPF connects organizations working with street people in order to more effectively meet needs, alleviate challenges, and generate employment opportunities through skills development programmes (SPF, 2015).

Expressive Programming

Providing basic needs such as food, shelter, showers, and health care is important for street community outreach organizations; however, the experiences and community among clientele should not be overlooked. For example, some organizations in the U.S. provide music and art programmes. The Boulder Carriage House Community Table in Colorado hosts an instructed art programme for homeless guests for a few hours each week, focusing on its therapeutic value (Urie, 2010). The Stewpot in Dallas, Texas also provides homeless guests with art supplies, an opportunity

to display their work, and opportunities for the homeless guests to sell their work as an income generation strategy (Light, 2014). Music programmes for the homeless, both improvisational sessions and concerts, similarly offer a therapeutic outlet and an opportunity to build trust and connections among community members and service providers (Veblen et al, 2012).

Interior Design

In addition to arts and performance programmes, thoughtful design of interior spaces, including soup kitchens, can generate an atmosphere of security, trust, and comfort (Payne et al, 2015; Davis, 2004). Sam Davis, having explored interior design for the homeless, suggests that simple consideration to the decoration of walls can affect the atmosphere of a space. Davis further argues that homeless individuals often struggle to define themselves in context with the world around them, so the interior of an outreach facility, like a soup kitchen, should make a client feel dignified (Davis, 2004).

Cape Town Street Community

Based on early discussions with guests and staff of SDR, many street people also feel dignified by sharing their sto-

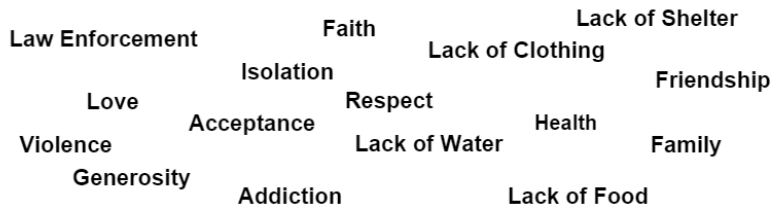*SDR October 2015, Before*

SDR December 2015, After

ries and expressing their challenges and frustrations with others. One such challenge is mistreatment by law enforcement. According to guests, law enforcement commonly mistreats street people and violates their basic rights. While law enforcement has a legal right to remove any informal construction built on public land, human rights should not be violated through abuse, harassment, and the taking of personal possessions (e.g. clothing, blankets, I.D. cards). Further, from discussions with guests, new street people come to the streets every day and often struggle to access basic resources to alleviate daily challenges.
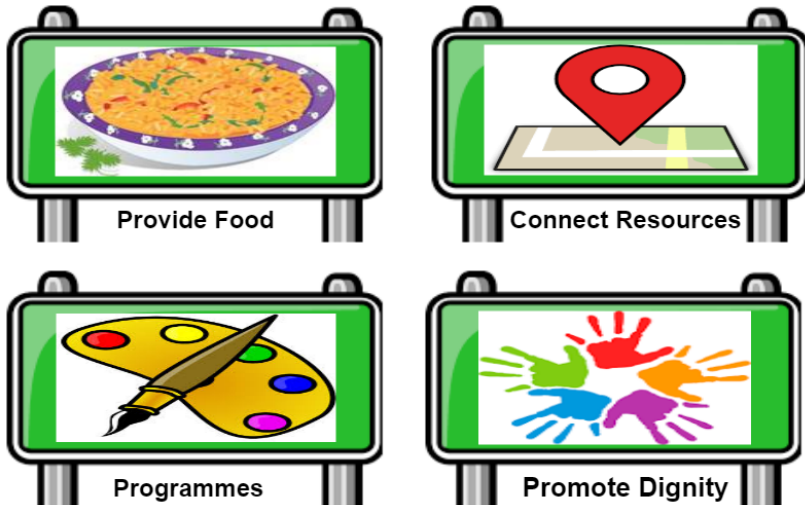
Addressing The Issues of Homelessness

Roads That Lead to Homelessness

Individual	Community	Structural
Addiction	Family Issues	Unemployment
Independance	Gangs	Government
Abuse	Violence	Capitalism
Mental Ill-health	Intolerance	Urbanization

Life On The "Street"

Law Enforcement   Faith   Lack of Shelter
Lack of Clothing
Isolation   Friendship
Love   Respect
Acceptance   Health
Violence   Lack of Water   Family
Generosity
Addiction   Lack of Food

Service Dining Rooms

Provide Food   Connect Resources

Programmes   Promote Dignity

MISSION STATEMENT

This project intended to build community among the guests of Service Dining Rooms and to foster a comfortable space that promotes self-dignity and relationship building by providing a way for individual stories to be shared, encouraging expression through art and music and addressing the challenges street community members face through resource mapping.

OBJECTIVES

The following objectives were utilized to guide the documentation of stories of SDR's guests, implementation of new arts and music programmes, and creation of maps.

Objective 1: Establish open, comfortable relationships with members of the SDR community, including guests of SDR and our co-researchers, by observing and interacting with them during their daily activities.

Objective 2: Formulate and discuss ideas to help foster a welcoming environment and build community with co-researchers, SDR guests, and sponsors, and decide which improvements would be most beneficial and feasible.

Objective 3: Design a step-by-step plan and implement beneficial changes with involvement from co-researchers and staff.

Objective 4: Assess changes by gathering feedback from SDR community members either informally or formally.

Objective 5: Reflect upon the new additions and explore new opportunities to make SDR a more welcoming, home-like environment.

APPROACH

Using these objectives as a guideline, our team implemented the main aspects of the project. Throughout the process, we incorporated a Shared Action Learning (SAL) approach that emphasized collaborative work with members of the SDR community (i.e. guests of SDR, our sponsors and co-researchers, Streetscapes participants, advisors) to implement sustainable outcomes.

Building Relationships
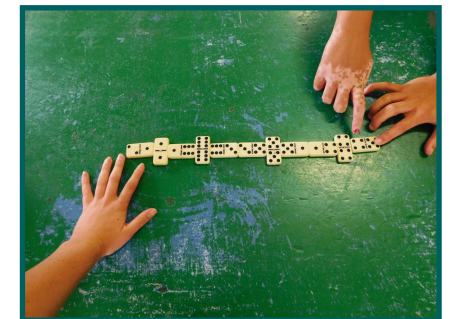
The first step in the project involved various activities that would assist the formation of open, comfortable relationships among community members participating in the project. Many activities included interaction with co-researchers and participants of the Streetscapes programme. This interaction occurred through gardening, playing dominos in the mornings, visiting the District Six Museum, and frequent conversation. Although initial relationships were built, activities, such as dominos, allowed our team to have fun, sustain relationships with community members, and form new relationships throughout the project. Frequent discussion allowed all parties to learn about the backgrounds, stories, and challenges of one another, establishing a comfortable atmosphere.

Documenting Stories

Documenting stories allowed SDR community members to share their life stories and to form a deeper understanding of one another. Different methods in capturing the stories were considered, including formal or informal interviews, and video or voice recording. Our team and co-researchers made a schedule for when we would speak with different people, but it had to remain flexible due to the fluid schedules of street community members. Co-researchers, Tessa in particular, led discussion that helped determine which questions to ask participants to appropriately learn about their stories and

experiences. Throughout the project, Streetscapes participants, SDR staff, and other guests of SDR were invited to partake in interviews, led by Tessa, or to fill out a template through handwritten responses, and given the opportunity to be photographed by a student from the Cape Town School of Photography. Feedback from co-researchers and community members contributed to the template and questions as it changed over time. With consent, captured stories and photographs were shared with other SDR community members through a photobook and on the walls of the interior space.

Starting New Programmes

Implementing new art and music programmes at SDR encouraged expression and positive interaction among guests. For the art programme, frequent discussions considered ideas such as a competition, street person-led sessions, and a simple creative, open space. After receiving input from local businesses and community members, and significant advertising, a weeklong creative programme with daily facilitators present occurred, ending with a final viewing celebration event. Our team and community members determined that displaying the artwork on the walls would enliven the interior and create dignity among participants.

Similarly, weekly music programmes took place following community input and discussion of improvisational music sessions, instrument lessons, and scheduled performances. The programmes initially incorporated both a facilitated aspect and community-led improvisation, but progressed towards self-initiated and led music and dance sessions before we departed. Throughout, co-researchers provided valuable feedback on all ideas and assisted in the analysis of each decision to make changes to the programmes as appropriate.

Incorporating Maps

Learning about the challenges street community members face, those involved in the project determined that two maps could assist in addressing

these issues. The law enforcement map, consisting of a large, laminated, satellite image of the city, allowed guests to pinpoint geographically where they faced personal difficulty with law enforcement. Different ideas for making the map most effective and user-friendly were explored, and physical changes to the map occurred throughout the project before determining the best method of involving color-coded stickers to categorize various difficulties. A second map, the resource map was developed through a process of gathering insights from SDR community members to determine resources that help alleviate challenges on the street, including access to food, water, clothing, and shelter. After considering input on utilized resources and ways to visually convey the information, a hand-drawn, interac-

tive social asset map was constructed to geographically locate resources, and a hand-written guide detailing the services each resource offers was developed as a key.

Outcomes

Breaking Barriers to Establish Comfortable, Meaningful Relationships

Although some awkwardness was present initially, through our conversations and interactions, we were able to build strong connections with much of the SDR community and to create a comfortable atmosphere for communication and collaboration with the SDR

community. We realized that despite the differences in each person's hometown, upbringing, family, personal experiences, clothing, or the amount of money in his or her pockets, we are all just people who experience the same emotions and have the same basic needs.

Shared Action Learning

Through SAL, our understanding of the culture of the SDR community was deepened, and, similarly, we feel the community was able to benefit from our perspective as students and the enthusiasm we brought to the project. Each of our co-researchers brought a unique perspective, and, without their

lead and feedback, this project's initiatives would not have had the impact that they did. Similarly, without support from other community members, these initiatives could not have been possible or sustained. This project allowed all key players to learn, grow, and benefit from its outcomes because of effective collaboration under the SAL model.

Forming a Creative Space: Initiation of an Arts Programme

The initiation of an arts programme served as a key part of this project's efforts to provide a means of expression for the SDR community. In addition, it created a more comfortable space of which people can feel a sense of ownership. In the weeklong art event, approximately 20-40 people participated and most displayed their work on the walls. At the art viewing, about 70 people engaged in a lively atmosphere and new connections were formed; one local businessman even expressed interest in creating a postcard out of one of the generated pieces of art. Further, staff members and guests have already expressed a desire to continue the programme. We generated a list of possible grants to apply for supplies funding and have details for contacts interested in continuing hosting and supporting the programme in the future. Much of the artwork remains on the walls of SDR, beautifying the space and allowing those who created the artwork to feel a greater sense of belonging.

A Universal Connection: Building Community through Music

Starting a music programme in SDR allowed street community members to express themselves and have fun. After the first event, positive feedback fueled succeeding sessions. Many bonded over singing, dancing, laughing, learning to play the guitar and djembe, and teaching our team about popular South African music. The continuation of these programmes will allow for these connections to continue growing and for fun and laughter to keep illuminating SDR. One local musician and a regular SDR guest have expressed interest in leading future sessions.

Implementing Maps to Address Community Challenges

Mapping promoted discussion regarding the challenges faced by street community members who frequent SDR. Guests expressed passion toward the struggles street people face on a daily

basis, including mistreatment from law enforcement and lack of access to necessities such as food, water, clothing, and shelter. Addressing these difficulties gave guests an opportunity to express their experiences, and, from gathered feedback, let guests know that people cared about trying to address these challenges. In addition, each map encourages continual guest interaction, whether it is placing a new mark on the law enforcement map or adding an additional resource to the social asset map. Not only did mapping promote discussion on these challenges during the project, but these maps will continue to highlight these issues for as long as they remain on the walls at SDR and are maintained by staff who expressed an interest.

This is Who We Are: Sharing Stories of the SDR Community

As part of an ongoing process, documenting personal stories allowed members of the SDR community to share their experiences and personal stories with others and a written version was placed in a photobook and/or hung up on the walls of SDR. It was powerful to see how dignified guests felt when they would be able to read their life story and see their picture on the wall. SDR was becoming their space. One staff member expressed his interest in continuing this initiative after seeing the photobook and stories on the walls, and hopefully this staff member, a student from the Cape Town School of Photography, and a few guests of SDR, will continue the work.

Creating Connections to Encourage Collaboration and Sustainability

Building connections and relationships with outside individuals and organizations was instrumental in helping reach the intended goals of this project and providing ways to continue its initiatives. Collaborative efforts with organizations such as Artsauce, which sourced materials for the art event and promoted the event to the public, and the Cape Town School of Photography, which posted a request for a photographer to come take quality photographs of those we interviewed, helped start and pursue this project's initiatives. Further, the sustainability of this project will rely heavily on the connections made.

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