Pioneering Models For Community Development

Teacher Learner Care Project

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The GM South Africa Foundation is not a grant making organization. The Foundation follows a process of undertaking the project management of innovative education and housing projects in the Eastern Cape, usually within the Nelson Mandela Bay area. All the lessons learnt and material developed during the piloting process are written up in the form of practical and implementable guidelines.

This information is then shared with interested organizations across the country in order to promote the replication of successful new development models and to influence the State in the formulation of practical policies and implementation procedures.

**Mission statement**
The GM South Africa Foundation’s mission is to facilitate meaningful and sustainable socio-economic development in South Africa’s disadvantaged communities by implementing new developmental projects structured as innovative replicable models which draw all key stakeholders together behind a common vision.

The Foundation employs a highly innovative and effective approach to Corporate Social Investment, called Corporate Social Action.

**Current education and housing projects:**

**Education initiatives**
- Achieving out of the Dust Training DVD
- District Office Model based on Circuit Teams
- Governance Training
- Peace Education including Peer Mediation
- Personal and Professional Leadership Programme
- Ready for Success
- Representative Council of Learners Programme
- Building Solid Foundations
- Skills in Science, Technology and Maths
- Concentrated Language Encounter
- Teacher Learner Care
- Whole School Evaluation and Development

**Housing initiatives**
- Medium Density Housing
- Metro Housing Policy
- Mixed Tenure Projects
The need to assist learners at risk

Many learners in South African schools can be considered at risk in the sense that they are affected by factors that influence their present and future well-being and holistic development. These factors include the following: the loss of one or both parents, severe illness (i.e. TB, HIV/AIDS, etc.), drug abuse, gang membership, a dysfunctional family life, sexual abuse, pregnancy and other barriers that seriously hinder learning progress.

During 2008, the GM Foundation commissioned a research project to ascertain the extent of the needs of learners at risk and to identify ways of assisting learners affected by these factors to cope better with and possibly overcome these risks. The Teacher Learner Care Project was designed as result of this feasibility study.

Research results

The research yielded the following information:

- There are common challenges that learners face: not living with their biological parents; a rise in HIV/AIDS infected and affected children; the impact of dysfunctional family life; poverty; pressure to join gangs and take drugs; bullying; the negative impact of social media, etc.

- Teachers indicated that many of them are assisting learners to deal with problems. They are not trained to do this and have very little support. There are no structured systems in place at the schools to support both teachers and learners in this process.

- Should learners have a choice, they would prefer to discuss problems with a trusted teacher.

TLC project goals and objectives

To empower teachers to assist learners at risk to address their psycho-socio barriers to effective learning through:

- Applying basic counselling skills, as a first point of contact to assist learners (and teachers in the case of trauma debriefing) engage with presenting problems and situations.

- Proactively and confidently engaging with learners around presenting problems.

- Understanding behavioural and developmental issues affecting learners and applying these as required.

- Having a solid knowledge of key psycho-social barriers and knowing how to assist learners to navigate problems in these areas.

- Networking with relevant support structures and organisations to assist and refer learners and

- Following the correct procedures and processes when working with learners at risk.

Desired outcomes

- A group of educators in each participating school offering a professional counselling service for learners (both proactive and on request).

- A counselling venue identified for each school.

- Formal structures, processes and networks in place in each school to address, refer and record the measures taken to address learners’ psycho-socio barriers and

- Support networks across participating schools where teachers draw on the support and resources of other schools and teachers.
Project partners
Project partners consist of the project participants, school principals, school-based learner support teams, GM South Africa Foundation, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, and Community-Based Organisations.

Module topics are:

Module 1: Focus on self (6 hours)
This module focuses on the participants’ own values and belief systems and looks at issues around personal self-esteem in relation to helping others. It also explores emotional intelligence and the importance of this in helping professions.

Module 2: Boundaries, stressors and wellness (6 hours)
This module acknowledges the fact that people who have a desire to reach out and make a difference in the lives of others are often selfless, generous, self-sacrificing and strong on behalf of others to the point where they compromise their own mental and physical well-being because they put themselves last. The module addresses the temptation of helping others to one’s own detriment. Case studies serve to support theory and highlight practical application.

Module 3: Developmental stages (6 hours)
Those helping children and youths need to understand the different developmental stages and some of the emotional, physical, social and psychological features of each stage. This module explores the different development stages from childhood to young adulthood.

Module 4: Ethics, legislation, administration and referrals (6 hours)
This module explores the role of ethics in the helping professions. It introduces the learners to different categories of counsellors to create an understanding of the level of counselling provided by each. The importance of record-keeping receives attention and sample documents are provided.

Programme structure and content
The programme structure consists of the following:
- Ten workshops (6 hours per workshop).
- Mentoring sessions where teachers are encouraged to share challenges faced at school and to be debriefed.
- A quarterly forum where participants are briefed on specialised topics by guest speakers, and
- Onsite (at school) mentoring and support.

The TLC Programme is modular based, each workshop focussing on a different topic. The programme is therefore presented in its entirety, or as stand-alone modules.
Module 5: *The counselling process*

Whilst the purpose of this programme is not to train professional counsellors, participants are exposed to basic counselling skills. The aim is to introduce counselling as a process that focuses on enhancing the psychological well-being of the young people they work with. The teacher/counsellor can offer a different perspective on problems to help young people think of creative solutions. Participants are practically introduced to the steps of the counselling process.

Module 6: *Identifying youth at risk (6 hours)*

Participants are sensitised to signs and symptoms that could indicate abuse, neglect or trauma experienced by youths. Different intervention strategies and referral agents are discussed.

Module 7: *Trauma debriefing (6 hours)*

The module focuses on creating an understanding of trauma and related acute symptoms. It explores different levels of crisis intervention and provides a model for trauma counselling. Participants are introduced to common professional terms that are associated with trauma. Theory is underpinned by role play.

Module 8: *Protective behaviours (abuse, suicide & relationships) (6 hours)*

The Protective Behaviours Process is a practical approach to personal safety, encouraging self-empowerment and providing the skills to avoid being victimised. This is achieved by helping people to recognise and trust their intuitive feelings and develop strategies for self-protection.

Optional workshops:

**Generational issues and technologies (6 hours)**

The generational gap is a term popularised in Western countries during the 1960s referring to differences between people of a younger generation and their elders, especially between children and parents. This module focuses on ways of bridging the cultural and linguistic divide separating today’s teachers from their students.

**Barriers to learning**

Barriers to learning range from cognitive barriers and ADD/ADHD to psycho-social barriers such as a lack of support at home or abuse. Many people who work with children and youths are not equipped firstly, to identify these barriers and secondly, to find ways of working with them or referring learners.

This workshop looks at the primary barriers to learning that present in children and youths and explores ways of addressing these.
The pilot programme

The TLC Project was piloted with five primary schools in 2009 and further refined during 2010 when it was presented to teachers from 14 primary schools in the Nelson Mandela Metropole. Since secondary schools are different to primary schools, the project was piloted with secondary schools during 2012. Members of NGO’s and CBO’s have also attended the programme and found the training very valuable and applicable to their field of work. Apart from attending workshops, forums and mentoring sessions, participants are required to successfully complete a Knowledge-Based Assessment and to compile projects on case studies that they have dealt with.

To obtain more information on the TLC programme please contact Samantha Naicker on naicker.psychologist@gmail.com or 073 696 3505.

NMMU partnership

The programme content has been registered as a short learning programme with the NMMU’s Department of Development Studies and will be offered under the title Youth and Child Support Skills for Development Practitioners.

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