

MANENBURG – BREAKING THE CYCLE OF CRIMINALITY

Giving prisoners a second chance is part of a broader strategy of the Community Work Programme local implementing agent to break the cycle of criminality that plagues the Cape Flats township and build a new Manenberg.

The name Manenberg is famous around the world because of jazz musician Abdullah Ibrahim's iconic track. It is just as infamous for its gang wars, and remains one of the poorest, violent, fractious and polluted neighbourhoods in Cape Town.

Manenberg is a highly criminalised society, says Amelia September, the CWP secretary. Apathy is rife – and there is a sense of engrained helplessness. “Many residents circulate through the correctional services system, often repeatedly as a result of drugs and gangsterism.”

To reduced the chance of re-offending, the CWP is working to reintegrate prisoners and actively provides space for parolees coming out of prison.

Joan Cloete, the safety sector co-ordinator, assists ex-convicts coming from prison into Manenberg. Through a partnership with the Department of Correctional Services, when prisoners from the area finish their sentences, they exit into the CWP. At first their work is a form of community service, after which they can become full members. The parolees are provided with training, such as conflict management. Family members are involved as part of the rehabilitation process. So far more 15 have passed through the programme with more than 50% of them making it into the CWP after a month's trial period.

Proudly Manenberg, the local implementing agent (LIA), has given a lot of thought to how residents are recruited to join the programme. This approach is rooted in the organisation's anti-apartheid grassroots experience and favours a broad-based participatory process of attraction to the programme rather than a top-down recruit and placement model.

“Proudly Manenberg was established in 2005 and has since been engaged in a turnaround strategy to build a new Manenberg,” says site manager Mario Wanza. “We are doing this in partnership with government through the CWP programme, which complements our work in the community. The CWP brings much

needed economic relief, resources, skills development and opportunities to poor communities. It also contributes towards building the self-esteem and dignity of people.”

To include residents in developing the CWP focus, when the programme was first started they took to the streets and asked as many residents as they could about the main problems in Manenberg. The following issues were raised: gangsterism that terrorised the community and stole the lives of young boys and men, drugs, high levels of teenage pregnancy, a criminalised community that was recycled through the correctional services system, high levels of school drop-outs, low literacy and low skills, high levels of unemployment, domestic and other assault, violence, theft, vandalism – including the proliferation of gang insignia on walls, overcrowding, poverty, hunger and malnutrition, limited recreation for children and teenagers, dumping and other environmental dirt and hazards, and unmaintained houses and flats.

Based on this, 11 sectors were identified for the CWP: arts and culture, business, environment, education, faith, gender, health, housing, safety, sports and youth. Each sector has workers who decide how that issue will be tackled: for example the housing sector is examining the unmaintained houses and flats and finding ways to do maintenance.

Part of what has attracted residents is that the work the CWP is doing is visible, such as transforming of a dumping site that was once a crime hotspot into a recreational community park that is now referred to as the “peace garden”. Other visible signs of the CWP presence are the gardens growing outside the blocks of flats in place of the piles of junk that used to be there, a block watch and neighbourhood patrol, and the weekly soup kitchen that feeds the hungry.

People started joining the CWP slowly at first. “Perseverance is necessary to dealing with apathy,” says Mario – and it paid off. Participation has grown.



Proudly Manenberg's emphasis on open engagement has also stood it in good stead through conflicts within the organisation, within the community and between the organisation and other organisations in Manenberg. This approach is extremely innovative in the Western Cape where many organisations tend to become paralysed by the multi-level conflicts that characterise neighbourhoods like Manenberg.

They are also attempting to keep communication with other organisations in the area open – important in a highly politicised and politically divided environment like Manenberg, Cape Town and the Western Cape, where many organisations tend to see each other as competition and close down communication.

This broad-based participatory approach has helped the programme to weather hard times. For example, just before the CWP was established in 2008 the LIA was given funding for a cleaning and greening project as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme, run from the Western Cape Province Government. This project was intended to merge into an IDT project. Unfortunately there was a seven-month gap where there was no money for the workers. Despite this, the workers carried on cleaning and gardening in Manenberg for free for seven months.

These same people are working on the CWP programme today and are likely to remain loyal to its goals in the future. The sense of ownership and vision for their neighbourhood is tangible both around the offices of the programme and in the neighbourhood.

One example of how their approach is working via the safety sector is the intervention in conflict and assistance with conflict management. An example is a shooting two years ago when a child was shot. Members of the safety sector visited both homes. For a community mired in endless cycles of senseless

violence, this type of intervention, which targets both families for negotiation, is attractive.

The second aspect of attracting people into the CWP programme is the hands-on placement that tailors help to each member that joins. This allows participants to find a work "fit" within the programme that keeps them stimulated and fulfilled.

Lydia spent lots of time as a child with her favourite aunt. When she was 20 years old she stabbed someone to death in a fit of rage. She got a life sentence in Worcester prison. In the prison she was co-operative and attended many groups and skills development classes. She grew close to the warders and some of the other long-term prisoners.

After 19 years, in June 2011, Lydia was released to live with her aunt in Manenberg. "I was frightened," she says. "But I was determined I would not just *ronloop* (wander) but would get a job." She arrived in Manenberg on a Friday afternoon, and says she felt sad as none of her old friends were around.

A Correctional Services officer contacted Joan about Lydia. On the Friday evening, a few hours after Lydia was released, Joan stopped by Lydia's house. They chatted. According to Lydia, Joan was perceptive and realised that Lydia was shy and also took stock of her skills. Joan offered Lydia a position in the clothing co-operative, part of the business sector.

"I was relieved," says Lydia. "I found the other workers friendly and have made friends." Lydia also attends a parolee meeting every second Tuesday where all parolees decide what they want to do. At the moment they are planning a "jol", where they go to prisons and play netball with inmates who don't get visitors. Having found a safe niche for herself where she can be productive, she says she is now able to help others.

John grew up in Manenberg. He says it was tough being a child and growing up there. There was immense peer pressure to commit crime and join gangs, "I never did," he says. He was married with children when he lost his job. Being unemployed was stressful and depressing. And he turned to drugs – using them as well as selling them and drug paraphernalia, such as tik pipes. His life got so bad that his wife left and took the children. During this time, there was also a break-in and he was shot in his leg by a man after the drugs in his house.

John got a fright and stopped with drug dealing. He then started working with a car theft syndicate, stealing and processing cars for sale. He was arrested for car theft and let out on bail. While out on bail, he was arrested a second time and given six years in Paardeberg, a prison in Paarl. After serving three-and-half years, John was released in May 2011. Correctional Services referred him to the CWP. He needed R300 to attend a course called Life at the Crossroads that would enable him to be a facilitator of the material, which he describes as "instilling good character". CWP helped him.

John says the CWP has inspired him to give back to the community and he wants to run his course at schools. Joan is assisting in facilitating this for him. He says he is becoming the role model he always wanted to be for his children. He feels empowered and wants to share that.

This profile is part of a series that looks at local innovation in the South African government's Community Work Programme (CWP). It was produced by Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) for the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG). For more information about the CWP go to www.cogta.gov.za/cwp.