



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Policy Brief:
Creating Life Chances

Art for Healing and Transformation for Disenfranchised Youth

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ISSUE AND EVIDENCE

The growing study of epigenetics has produced evidence that trauma is transgenerational. Consequently, South Africa's violent history continues to traumatize the black majority, which forms 80.7 percent of the entire population.¹ This trauma - the apartheid legacy - is not only individual psychological trauma but also collective and intergenerational trauma which negatively impacts communities. The trauma is often masked and reproduced as criminal behaviour such as extreme violence, and emotional, sexual and substance abuse.

Legacy effects such as broken homes and dysfunctional families count as two of the most common factors associated with juvenile delinquency and youth violence in South Africa.² In addition, children who grow up in poor families with fragile family ties and few work opportunities, are at higher risk of engaging in violence.³ Circumstances of continuous struggle and failure tend to isolate individuals resulting not only in a loss of connection with those around them but also a loss in the value and belief in others.⁴ Correspondently, youth and children can become disengaged from the school and the community, causing them to feel out of place and consequently gravitate towards delinquency and become prone to adopting risky behaviours. Such conditions predispose young people to deal with experiences of family stress and trauma (among others) before they can even start thinking about learning or pursuing a career.⁵ This results in youth falling into the trap of the

1 Department: Statistics in South Africa, "Mid-year Population Estimates 2019."

2 Ratele, Kopano. "Watch your man: Young black males at risk of homicidal violence."

3 Bezuidenhout, Christiaan, and Sandra Jeroma Joubert. "Child and youth misbehaviour in South Africa: a holistic view."

4 Blum, Robert. "School connectedness: Improving students' lives."

5 Bloch, G. "The toxic mix. What's wrong with South Africa's schools and how to fix it."

perpetual cycle of poverty. To remedy this situation is characterised by Matshiqi⁶ as one of the most spectacular failures by government.

Performance art modalities such as singing, dancing and storytelling are known to access and release trauma in young people without re-traumatizing them.⁷ Expressive movement, particularly in young boys allows them to access and express their anger and power,⁸ therefore reducing their chances of gravitating towards risky behaviours.

Engagement with visual arts has been proven to have a positive impact on overall health and wellbeing. Furthermore, the Center for the Economics of Human Development has through extensive research proven that character building results in “increases in monthly income and probability of employment.”⁹

STAKEHOLDERS

Creating life-chances is dependent on multiple interventions and collaborative efforts between government, business and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) if we are to break the cycle of hardship and poverty facing youth. Local and national institutions each have a role to play:

- **Department of Arts and Culture:** Provide resources and hire trained art facilitators to create and execute art programmes across the country.
- **Local municipalities:** Provide a safe space within communities for young people to engage in artistic expression

6 Matshiqi, A. "Vital for leaders to hold their gaze on strike's inevitable horizon." *Business Day* (2007).

7 Welma de Beer, interview with author, July 20, 2019.

8 Sian Palmer, interview with author, July, 2019.

9 James Heckman, Rodrigo Pinto and Peter Savelyev, "Character skills are more important than IQ in driving better life outcome."

- **Local NGOs:** Assist with recruiting young people into art programs and the monitoring of these programmes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATION:

The Government of South Africa should work with the department of Arts and Culture and local institutions to create multidisciplinary art programmes in marginalized communities. Art interventions should take place in a playful group setting, headed by trained facilitators who maintain a safe space and encourage personal healing and collective social transformation.

Outcomes

- Young people will have greater confidence in exercising their voice (agency)
- Young people will gain a better perspective of themselves and their place in society
- Young people will gain constructive methods of self-expression
- Young people will establish greater sense of community/ bond amongst themselves

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