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July 2025

Xenophobic blockade at Durban hospital
DHC-inspired film plays to full houses
Street Lit bookseller travels to Europe
Round-up of 'Mandela Day'



Film Director at World Premiere



Homeless bookseller in Poland



Officially our oldest volunteer

REFUGEES DENIED ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

Section 27 of the South African Constitution guarantees the right to access healthcare. This applies to everyone who lives within South Africa's borders and (unlike the right to vote, for example) is not limited to SA citizens. Nevertheless, a self-appointed group of protesters have been blocking foreign nationals from accessing Government healthcare facilities in central Durban.

Members of a group that calls itself 'March and March' have stationed themselves outside Addington Hospital demanding SA ID's from all patients trying to get inside. This has resulted in dozens of foreign nationals, and citizens without ID's, being denied the right to enter the hospital, increasing the difficulties already faced by marginalised people.

This blockade poses a challenge for the DHC clinic since 40% of our patients are from outside the country; in addition, many homeless South Africans do not have IDs. Since

we have limited resources, we often need to refer people to government hospitals and this is being prevented. Other non-SA patients, even those we do not usually see, have been coming to us having been stopped from collecting chronic medication from Addington which means they will not be able to manage persistent health problems like hypertension and diabetes.

For example, one of our community health workers was accompanying a refugee from Mozambique to Addington Hospital for a regular TB check-up. At the front door, the protesters illegally asked them both to produce identity documents and, even after the patient's condition was explained, the 'March and March' members refused to let them in. The patient, who is not in a very stable condition, had to leave without seeing the doctor, further complicating his already challenging situation. We asked him what would happen next: "I'm not sure what I'm going to do because I'm running out of medication and can't afford to buy more."

The 'March and March' members even challenged our health worker, who is a South African national, about why she was there. Later someone from the movement phoned our Clinic Co-ordinator, Thobile Mthembu. She recounted: "He was shouting at me and telling me to stop sending refugees to the hospital. I felt threatened because he went as far as calling our organisation illegal because we were helping refugees, and the fact that he has got my number and knows where I work."

Police are often stationed outside the hospital, but they do nothing to intervene even though the actions of the protesters are clearly illegal. What is more, people who are visiting friends in hospital are being barred unless they show an ID. And South African citizens who happen not to have their ID, or who were born outside of SA, are also being obstructed. Even worse, we have heard cases of SA-born citizens who are not Zulu, feeling intimidated about approaching Addington because of the illegal protesters.

An old friend of the DHC, Crispin Hemson former head of the International Centre for Non-Violence at DUT, was physically shoved when he tried to enter the hospital after refusing to show his ID. When he did gain admittance, he was followed 'in case I was trying to pick up medicines for foreign patients'. He later went to the nearby police station to lay a charge for obstruction but the police refused to accept the case.

Crispin commented: "The irony is that we have just marked the death of Chief Albert Luthuli [first SA Nobel Peace Prize Winner]. But, if these people had their way, Luthuli would be barred from the very hospital named after him since he was born in Zimbabwe!"

The authorities at Addington claim they can do nothing to prevent what happens on the street outside the hospital. But, of course, that is not true; and we also know that some of their own security guards have been reinforcing the ID-requirement. Meantime, in two Government clinics in central Durban signs have been put up saying "No SA ID – no access" even when there are no protesters there! One woman who is 36-weeks pregnant with complications was unable to get a referral so she could deliver her baby safely at a local hospital.

We are fearful that this illegal blockade will spread to other hospitals around Durban and even to other parts of the country unless politicians and police take action to stop it now. The Catholic bishops have already [issued a strong statement](#) of condemnation; we hope that all Durban religious leaders will be willing to stand up publicly against what is happening at Addington.

Meantime, the importance of the DHC clinic, providing care to those who need it most, regardless of who they are or where they come from, is made even more evident. Moreover, this comes at a time when we face the consequences of US Government funding decisions. Our own clinic is already R ½ million (£21,000) behind what it needs to cover its costs this year. We appeal to our supporters for [funds to support](#) the life-saving work that we do.

Photo (Sonwabile Mhlongo): A patient from Mozambique who had been blocked from entering Addington and accessing his TB treatment.



DHC-INSPIRED FILM PLAYS TO FULL HOUSES AT DIFF

Five years ago, during the COVID lockdown, a young film-maker called Michael James was volunteering at the DHC. He worked with some of our residents to help them turn their story into a short video and this can still be [viewed on YouTube](#). But the more he listened to the experiences of homeless men, the more driven Michael was to create a full-length film that showcased them.

'God's Work' finally opened this month as part of the prestigious Durban International Film Festival (DIFF) to rapturous acclaim. [The trailer can be viewed](#) here. Dr Ismail Mahomed, head of UKZN's Centre for Creative Arts that runs DIFF and one of the country's most respected arts leaders commented: "The film is a masterpiece in its artistry and authentic in its integrity. It is a marvel in its cinematography, meditative with its musical score and hypnotically creative about how it draws you into both the dangerous world and the fragmented lives of the five men."

The world premiere was held at Sun Coast's Cine-Centre with almost 300 people present. At the end of the film, the cast and crew came on stage to take the crowd's applause and were joined by our director, Dr Raymond Perrier, and also two homeless men, Lucky Dlungwane and Zwelithini Ndadane, who are honoured as 'consultants' in the film's credits.

Michael, who was both director and writer, paid tribute to the work of the DHC and all our efforts in giving 'a voice to the voiceless' (*see photo at the top*). Raymond challenged the audience to be grateful to the homeless people we see begging at street corners: "They do us an important service because they are a constant reminder to us that we live in the most unequal society on earth. Their presence should motivate us to act."

The DHC, as happens each year, played host to general screenings during DIFF (this year of a selection of SA short films) thus enabling our service-users to enjoy the festival. We also had a special screening of 'God's Work' and a number of the homeless people who were paid to act as extras in the film were able to be present and celebrated. After the film (and the popcorn), we organised discussion groups and, for over an hour, homeless and non-homeless people shared their reaction to the film.

Dr Janine Hicks, a leader of Street Law at UKZN and a close partner of the DHC, led one of the conversations. "People spoke of the pain triggered by seeing on screen what they live and experience. Stating that it was important for this story to be told, people called for a kinder response from the state, that addresses the causal factors behind homelessness; for respect, not pity; and for opportunities to develop their skills and talents."

The third Durban screening was held in the plush surroundings of a cinema in Hillcrest, seemingly a million miles away from the streets of central Durban. But the fact that this,

like the first two screenings, was full is a credit to the genuine interest that, as we know from our own work, ordinary people have in the lives of homeless people in our cities. It is only unfortunate that, despite invitations being sent to them, no senior officials from the Municipality, the Province or the Police found time to attend.

We are immensely grateful to all those who made the film and the screenings possible. The film will now tour other film festivals around the world and, if you have connections to any, please [contact the Executive Producer](#), Toni Monty.

More about the film can be read/ heard via ['The Post'](#), ['Daily Maverick'](#), ['Sunday Tribune'](#), ['The Witness'](#) and [Lotus FM](#). And final DIFF screenings take place this weekend in [Jo'burg](#) and [Cape Town](#).

Photo (Sonwabile Mhlongo): Actor Mbulelo Radebe and the DHC's Illa Thompson introducing the film before a packed house at the DHC screening.



FROM TAXI RANKS TO INTERNATIONAL STAGE

Street Lit book vendor, Eric Badise, has just returned from an educational trip to Poland! He was visiting concentration camps and significant sites of WW2 atrocities as an ambassador from the Durban Holocaust and Genocide Centre, where he is a part-time educational officer.

Eric has been invited to represent South Africa and join 25 international delegates who all work in the field of Holocaust Education. He was probably the only non-academic, non-formally trained education officer, certainly the only Zulu-speaking person on the team, and the only person who has experienced homelessness. He was spending time with global specialists, including people from the UN and from different international museums

This was Eric's first international trip and his experience in Poland was life-changing, describing it as the "best week of my life" and a "dream come true." He was struck by the country's cleanliness, wondering how South Africa could learn from this. Despite being intimidated by the long journey, Eric felt his story resonated with fellow delegates, and he gained valuable insights into the human psyche and the Holocaust's lessons. He also said that the Holocaust's message extends beyond a Jewish story, highlighting how vulnerable humans are and how, what happened during World War II, can still happen again.

Eric is one of the longest-serving members of our homeless book-selling project, and trades at the Durban Botanic Gardens. And to think that a few years ago he was living on the streets and struggling to make ends meet by cleaning taxis. But he was encouraged to join the Street Lit programme and then his life took a dramatic turn.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, project facilitator, Illa Thompson, looked for creative ways to keep the Street Lit vendors engaged. She suggested that they should keep a journal, and gave them each copies of 'The Dairy of Anne Frank' to inspire them. Post lockdown, the team watched the 2007 movie "The Freedom Writers" in which Anne Frank's experience surprisingly resonates with a group of teenagers in a multi-cultural inner-city school in California. The Street Lit team spent time at the Holocaust Museum, reflecting on the movie and doing some related creative exercises.

This sparked Eric's interest in WW2 history, and he devoured books on the subject. His newfound passion led him to realise that the comprehensive library at the Holocaust Museum was missing an important new book about Anne Frank. When he told Illa that Bargain Books had a copy on sale, she arranged for them to donate a copy to the Museum. This gesture caught the attention of the Holocaust Museum leaders; they were so impressed that they encouraged Eric to spend more time at the Museum, eventually employing him as part-time Education Officer.

Eric's passion about history, and confidence about his personal testimony, have made him a valuable museum staff member and a sought-after keynote speaker. He has spoken at the National Homeless Conversation in Johannesburg and Durban, at various book festivals, and through the Holocaust museum network at conferences in Cape Town.

Today, Eric is a role model to the Street Lit team. He married his long-term girlfriend, Thuli, and together they share a small city apartment. He continues to sell books in the Botanic Gardens and has built a stable life for himself. Even after all this transformation, he is still proud to identify himself with the homeless.

Eric's story is a testament to the the impact of books and the power of seizing opportunities. As he says, "Street Lit means a home for me because when I was homeless, they gave me a home. They gave me, and still give me, constant opportunities to better my life."

Illa Thompson commented: "We are hugely proud of Eric. He is living proof that with determination and commitment, someone can turn their life around. He is a brilliant example to the homeless community, reminding them of the power of hope, and that change is possible. He, and the other vendors, subscribe to the Street Lit mantra: 'Books and care can change the world!'"

Photo: Eric Badise with Claudia Blythe-Hooper, the Education Manager for the Durban Holocaust & Genocide Centre.



CELEBRATING MANDELA DAY

A very humorous episode in 'God's Work' involves old friend of the DHC – renowned comic actor Aaron McIlroy – sending up those for whom Mandela Day is just a chance to show off on social media without giving any thought to the real needs of the people they claim to want to help. We are grateful that that cannot be said of the many individuals and organisations that provided extra assistance to us throughout July, thus spreading their goodwill through the whole of 'Mandela Month'.

'67 Blankets' is a national movement which turns the idea of '67 Minutes for Mandela' into an invitation to knitters and crocheters to create beautiful blankets and scarves for those in need. The Durban branch came to the DHC armed with 150 scarves (plus some matching beanies) for our social workers to hand out to homeless people and refugees who would appreciate the hard work that had gone into making them.

Following on from our major book drive last year, the staff and readers of Independent Newspapers collected hundreds of books for our Street Lit programme. We had extra volunteers from DUT (international office) and from MUT (community outreach) as well as from Fatima Dominican Convent School and Holy Trinity Musgrave. We also benefited from the wider sandwich drive that the Union of Jewish Women run each year – and at which our own Street Lit booksellers are keen volunteers. Some local corporates were also involved: staff from the Toyota plant at Prospecton brought in blankets; Nimble Credit Solutions donated food, and so did our regular friends at Boxer Stores who also brought a wonderful 'Mandela Day' cake.

A particularly special group of volunteers came from the Black Sash office. Celebrating their 70th anniversary, this organisation was a key player during the Struggle against Apartheid and one that Archbishop Denis Hurley greatly admired. At a time when they only had women members, +Hurley was granted honorary membership! Black Sash formed a 'guard of honour' at his funeral in 2004 and one of those present then also joined today's members when they came to the DHC. Having just celebrated her 94th birthday, Coral Vinsen the doyenne of social activists in Durban, can now officially claim to be the DHC's oldest volunteer! (*See photo at the top with Black Sash's Oliver Meth*).

Though not linked to Mandela Day, we also received some distinguished guests in July. Rev Molefe Tsele (former Secretary General of the SA Council of Churches, and one time Ambassador) was accompanied by Peta Mashinini from the Batho-Batho Trust to catch up with the DHC. They have been loyal funders of the DHC in various ways since the very start of this project. We were also delighted to be included in the opportunity to meet the new US Consul General in Durban, Rebecca Gonzales and we look forward to welcoming her soon to the DHC.

We did welcome His Excellency Austin Gormley, as we have every Irish Ambassador since we opened in 2015. He spent over two hours touring the DHC and hearing about the work that we do, inspired by two proud Irish-South Africans, +Hurley and Paddy Kearney. He met a number of team members including Dr Don O'Mahony, a doctor of Irish origin who volunteers in our clinic two mornings a week. The Ambassador was especially pleased that the Irish Embassy in London had hosted our UK supporters for a reception last year. He was in Durban for the launch of a book (edited by UKZN's Prof Donal McCracken) about the impact of the Irish in South Africa – which features the DHC prominently on the back cover.

We are grateful to all those who made an extra effort in July – and equally grateful to the many individuals, schools and corporates who volunteer and donate throughout the year. If you missed your chance for Mandela Day, or if you recognise that helping those in need is not limited to one special day, then [do get in touch](#). We need volunteers and food donations, whatever month it is, if we are to meet our 2024 record of 180,000 meals in one year!

Left to right: Sue Eslick and Shirley Olivier from '67 Blankets' either side of Sphesihle Ntanzu (Street Lit bookseller) and Zama Mantwana (homeless trader) who were the first to benefit from the beautiful hand-knitted scarves they brought to the DHC.



Director: Raymond Perrier (raymond@denishurleycentre.org)

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If you wish to support our work, you can donate by EFT:

First National Bank Durban Main branch 221426

Account: Denis Hurley Centre Trust A/C No. 622 0426 1002

For more information, and to donate from outside South Africa, see:

www.denishurleycentre.org

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