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April 2026

With thanks to all workers on 1 May!

Reflection on the fight for justice
Art-makers inspired by the DHC
Homeless guys making art on the streets
From Homeless to Teacher



**Arabic sub-tiles
on a DHC-
inspired film?**



**Who has a heart
for the DHC and
the city centre?**



**Illa looking
unusually
stern!**

**“BAD MEN NEED NOTHING MORE TO COMPASS THEIR
ENDS, THAN THAT GOOD MEN SHOULD LOOK ON AND DO
NOTHING.”**

South Africans are, this week, between two public holidays and two great celebrations of good triumphing over evil. Each 27 April we recall that, in 1994 for the first time in the nation's history, all adult South Africans were entitled to vote for a democratically elected Government. At the DHC team prayers last week, older staff members – black and white – shared fond stories of that momentous day and how vivid it still is in their memories even after 32 years. And on 1 May, South Africans join with most other countries around the world in celebrating Workers' Day: an annual chance to recognise

how, after centuries of oppression and exploitation, workers were finally able to secure rights that we now take for granted.

Both of these achievements are also reminders that justice is not won overnight. It is the result of labouring away, raising awareness of an issue, and keeping it in public consciousness. The forces working against justice are most visibly the perpetrators of injustice. But they are assisted by otherwise good people who silently put up with the status quo, unable or unwilling to imagine something better.

Apartheid lasted as long as it did, not just because of the racist leaders of the National Party but also because of the quiet complicity of so many white South Africans and their supporters overseas. The exploitation of workers happened – and continues to happen – not just because of unscrupulous employers, but also because we as consumers are willing to benefit from the labour of others and not ask too many questions.

This reflection brings us to where we are today at the DHC. We have, since July of last year, been seeing the impact of xenophobic exclusion of patients from Government hospitals. Then we have, for the last five months, been seeing the impact of violent assaults on homeless people, funded by the local municipality. We have reported on these repeatedly through this newsletter and also in print and on the radio, thanks to our excellent local media.

Particularly shocking examples have enabled us to draw direct attention – the case of a woman dying in childbirth because she was blocked from accessing the hospital; the video footage that showed a man being beaten up by a group of Ensure Security staff. And we have had the benefit of key figures speaking up for justice – Prof Salim Abdool Karim outside Durban's Addington Hospital calling out the protesters; a High Court judge ruling that the police must act to stop this; Mayor Cyril Xaba at the DHC AGM restating his commitment to the rule of law.

And yet. The illegal protests and illegal beatings continue. And refugees and homeless people in Durban conclude that the law and the courts cannot protect them and guarantee their constitutional rights. The stories may not be in the media every day.

But the pain in the lives of marginalised people is a daily experience. And our clinic sees the consequences of this with more and more refugee patients, with massive increases in our spend on medicines, and patients appearing with wounds and bruises.

We and the refugee networks keep asking why the police and the Department of Health have still failed to act against the illegal protesters. We, with the Navi Pillay Research Group, keep asking what has happened to the investigations of the Ensure Security attack started by eThekweni Municipality and the police. All we get is silence. ([See article this week in 'Ground Up'](#))

The words at the top are from John Stuart Mill, an English philosopher writing 200 years ago. But, with some modernisation, they easily apply today. We do appreciate those good men (and women) who are doing something – and are especially grateful to those of you who have made extra financial donations to us to assist our clinic in their life-saving work. ([Click here if you wish to donate](#)). But for as long as good men and women in Government roles 'look on and do nothing', bad men (and sometimes women) will be able to get away with inflicting injustice on the vulnerable.

Photo: We continue to be inspired by Archbishop Hurley, seen here protesting in the 1980s. Note he does not condemn the police – and nor do we – but prays that they will have a change of heart. ([Contact us](#) if you can identify any of the other clerics in the photo).



"ART SHOULD COMFORT THE DISTURBED AND DISTURB THE COMFORTABLE" (Cesar Cruz)

Durban's arts community continues to be a great source of support for our work. We have commented before on the irony of life imitating art: the attacks that homeless people have experienced at the hands of Ensure Security are remarkably similar to the fictional assaults by Durban Metro Police featured in the film '[God's Work](#)'. This full-length movie, which premiered at the 2025 Durban International Film Festival, was inspired by the DHC and the director worked with homeless people as consultants and as extras.

We are delighted to report that the film has just won a special jury prize at the prestigious Luxor African Film Festival in Egypt (*hence the Arabic subtitles for the film in the photo at the top*). The prize, for creative innovation, is only given if there is a worthy film which speaks to current affairs in Africa and has not been awarded since 2023, so it is very special.

Closer to home at the State Theatre in Pretoria, Empatheatre's '[The Last Country](#)' received four nominations at the Naledis, the biggest theatre awards in South Africa.

This play was actually created at the DHC nine years ago; performances at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg last year qualified it for inclusion in the 2026 awards. The themes are still timely since it looks at the lives of four migrant women in Durban – one from rural South Africa and three from other parts of Africa – and the similarities of the struggles they face and the small victories they achieve. Congratulations to Neil Coppen, Mpume Mthombeni and their team.

Zenzo Msomi, who was in Empatheatre's first DHC-based work 'Ulwembu' ('The Spider's Web') has been working with Michael James, the director of '[God's Work](#)'.

They have been at the DHC very recently creating a new piece of theatre that transformed our usually innocuous Napier B meeting room into a window into the conflict in Gaza. Michael's words explain more:

A funding grant from the National Arts Council, enabled our team to engage in months of intensive development, research and rehearsals to produce an immersive theatre project titled 'The Unfinished Image'. This rigorous process culminated in ten specially crafted 30-minute performances staged at the DHC. Written, directed and co-created by me, with Scout Fynn and Zenzo Msomi serving as lead actors and fellow co-

creators, the project was a visceral experimental encounter designed to bridge the profound gap between witness and participant.

The work functioned as a sacred act of remembrance in direct response to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. Rather than offering a traditional theatrical show, the ritualised journey took place within a total blackout environment where the textures of sand and cosmic light redefined the boundaries of the performance space. Each participant began their journey blindfolded, before being led into a cavernous sanctuary to be paired one-on-one with a guide. Through noise-cancelling headsets, participants encountered a haunting soundscape and a narrative that intentionally fractured the distance created by modern spectacles of violence. The performance moved through shared gestures of trust, and a communal dance of brokenness, before reaching its climax with a profound reading of Ghassan Kanafani's short story 'Letter from Gaza'.

This text grounded the struggle in the reality of flesh and blood, leading to the final bestowal of the specific name of one human being murdered in the genocide. By tying this name to the wrist of the participant with a red string, the ritual ensured that the person was carried back into the world as a living memory rather than remaining a cold statistic.

Choosing the DHC as the site for this creation was an essential decision due to my longstanding history with the institution and its reputation as a vital hub for artists engaging with social justice in the heart of Durban. While this initial work in progress was a success, we are now actively looking for funders, partners and collaborators to help expand the project into a larger and even more profound immersive experience. Our future vision includes working in more expansive spaces, and collaborating with specialised technicians to integrate advanced projection mapping as we continue to speak the names that the world tries to erase.

For more information [contact Michael James via email](#).

Looking ahead, we are in talks with the Drama Department of DUT to include a staging at the DHC next month of their retelling of the Greek tragedy, 'Oedipus', set on the streets of Durban. The director, Sikhuthali Oliver Bonga, was inspired by driving around central Durban and seeing some of the homeless addicts there.

Photo: Through the creative use of blackout, lighting and sound, Napier B became a window into Gaza.



HOMELESS PEOPLE EARNING MONEY AS STREET CLEANERS AND STREET ARTISTS

Inspired by the creativity of our art-makers in-residence, we also try to be creative in taking advantage of opportunities to help our homeless community. So we were delighted to hear from the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal who regularly host elements of their writing, poetry and film festivals at the DHC.

They had been invited by the Industrial Development Corporation's Social Employment Fund to develop arts-based projects that would engage unemployed young people.

The CCA asked if we could come up with something and we did: a programme which deploys nine homeless people to work in our area to clear rubbish from the streets and turn the trash into art! As well as being gainfully employed for eight months (working 57 hours pm), and also having the pride of impacting their locality, the participants also attend workshops organised by the Music in Africa Foundation.

One of the participants, Mangi Mbatha, sent this write up:

Seeing discarded plastic shopping bags swaying in the wind is a common sight to patrons walking the bustling streets of Durban city centre. Harmless as that may seem to the naked eye, the actual damage caused by not disposing of our trash in a correct manner can have adverse results on our environment and nature in general.

The problem of high volumes of litter piling up in the streets, clogging drainage systems and causing unsanitary living conditions affect many organisations around the city including the DHC. Sandwiched opposite the iconic Victoria Market, as an NGO Denis Hurley Centre is sanctuary to hundreds of the city's homeless people who congregate in Paddy Lane every day to get a plate of warm food, a shower and have their clothes cleaned.

We want to combat the scourge and lend a helping hand by intervening in a situation that seems to be quickly spiralling out of control in our once beautiful city. So, an arts initiative was born, simply termed 'Street Arts' and headed by the DHC's Empowerment Manager, Stuart Talbot. The intention is to reduce trash and re-use it for the better, whilst sending a public message on the long-term effects of littering. A group of nine enthusiastic creatives have been selected for this eight-month programme and began working in February. We clean up and sweep the areas around the DHC, Emmanuel Cathedral and West Street Cemetery, working in teams to repurpose, refurbish and restore structures that were once the highlight of the city.

After hours of sweeping and cleaning the spaces comes the mammoth task of sorting amongst the mounds of rubble and clutter. We are constantly thinking of creative ways to re-use a piece of brick, shreds of assorted scraps of fabric off-cuts, discarded plastic bags, cans, and even electronic devices destined for landfill. Creative juices flow and ideas are brought to life in pop-up art installations that grace the fence of the DHC. At other times, walls get a bit of a facelift with chalk art. The plan is to keep on creating.

The fight against trash is on-going and 'Street Arts' remains determined that, shred by shred, the destructive path of litter will slowly come to a halt, returning us to a beautiful clean city.

Photo: At the top, a heart made from discarded fabric graces the DHC fence; below, the Street Arts workers tidied up the mess left by Municipal road-diggers and left a warning for passers-by.



FROM HOMELESS MAN TO BOOKSELLER TO TEACHER!

We are super proud of the recent achievements of one of the Street Lit project's most faithful members. In February, Kagiso Phihlela came to us asking for our help in finding more formal employment.

He had arrived in Durban with an undergraduate degree in accounting, but his dream was to become a teacher. So a few years ago, with assistance from local college MANCOSA, he secured his Post-Graduate Certificate in Education. We sent out his excellent CV to various schools and were delighted when the venerable Durban High School (DHS) called Kagiso in for a meeting. He was interviewed by the proactive and enlightened DHS Headmaster, Anthony Pinheiro, and various senior colleagues. And they offered him employment as a junior intern teacher in the school's remedial section, and as assistant chess coach!

Kagiso has been able to move out of the homeless shelter in town and has secured a room in a homely flat in the suburb of Umbilo – with a caring landlady, his own fridge, and use of a washing machine, kettle and stove. Musgrave Methodist Church kitted him out with a new wardrobe of work clothes.

"I am now able to dress formally every weekday and what I have realised is that there is a strange dignity in the collar. The church didn't give me a bag of hand-me-downs, they handed me a version of myself that I thought had died on the streets, invisible to passers-by," said Kagiso.

"Having been overlooked for years on the streets, merely surviving, with this new-found life I now hope to make my contribution to society. Living in the suburbs with shiny shoes, belt and tie and a job that values my time I realise that 'home' isn't a physical address but the space created by a community who decides you are worth the effort.

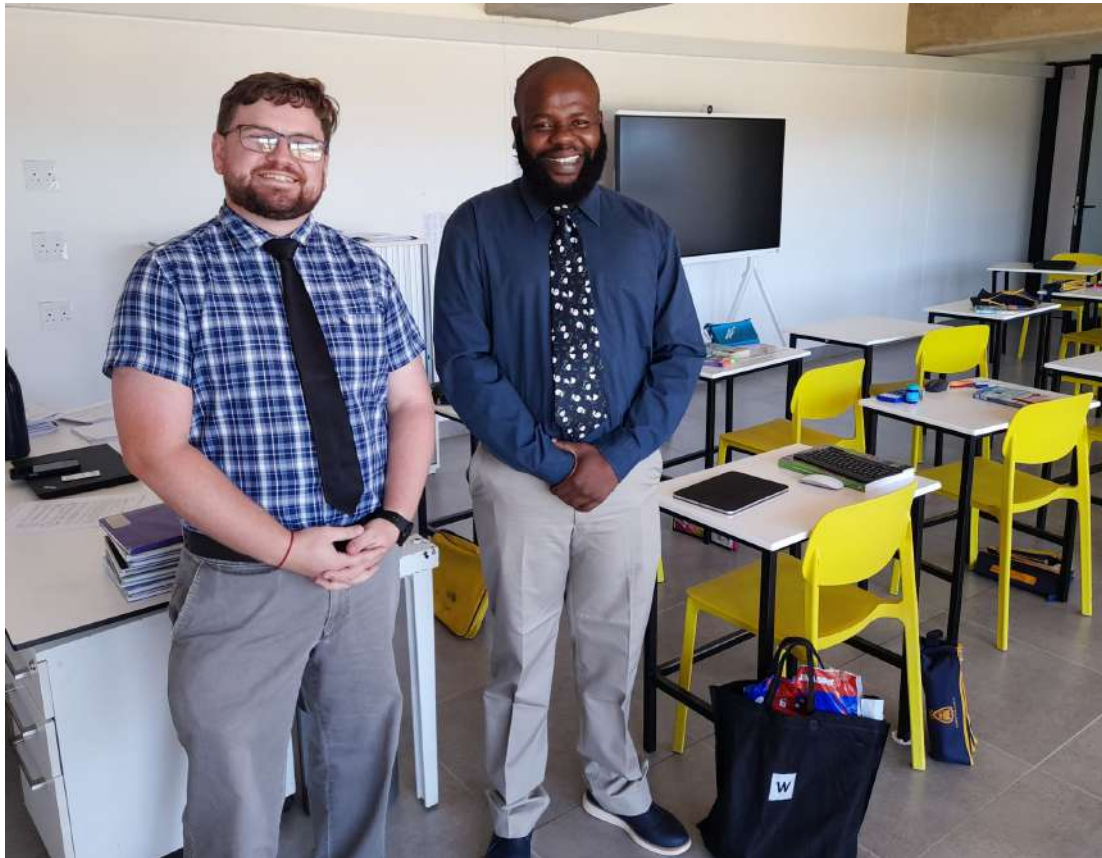
Thank you DHC, DHS and Musgrave Methodist Church! I owe you a debt of grace for the dignity you have restored in my life," he said.

Kagiso reminds us of the power of hope, resilience and faith. The Street Lit team is hugely proud of him, more so because Kagiso has chosen to still sell books after hours, on weekends and during school holidays. He continues to be part of the Street Lit team, wanting to still be an ambassador for the project and encourage more homeless people to hold on to their dreams.

He is also a quiet activist who has joined Illa Thompson, our Street Lit co-ordinator in the campaign to re-open municipal libraries in the Durban area. Illa's article in the

[‘Independent on Saturday’](#) and Kagiso’s in the [‘Daily News’](#) are yet further examples of good people not looking on silently but instead speaking out in the face of injustice.

Photo at the top (by Sandile Ndlovu for ‘The Sunday Times’): Illa, Street Lit bookseller Comfort Ngubane and Kagiso outside the Glenwood library that is being shut down; photo below: Kagiso in his DHS classroom with fellow teacher Josh Weimann.



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

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www.denishurleycentre.org

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