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You are receiving this information about the Denis Hurley Centre because you have shown an interest in the work done by us or one of our partners. We hope that you will enjoy receiving this monthly update. If you have any comments please email us.

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DENIS HURLEY CENTRE

UPDATE

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COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS OF NAILS

ETHEKWINI Living Legends

January 2026

Financial Results end of 2025
Engaging with the Mayor of Durban
Vacancy for a Clinic Co-ordinator
Update on the 'Homeless Garden'

Mayor's fond memories of Paddy

Are you inspired to lead our clinic?

A great harvest of vegetables but...

REPORT BACK ON OUR FINANCES FOR 2025

Many people breathed a sigh of relief when their January salary finally hit their bank account; so perhaps now is a good time to report back on our own financials for 2025. As we indicated in the December Update, they are a mixed result.

One very important positive is that we managed to keep our expenses within Budget – in fact at R6.1M ($386,000) for the year we were ***6% under budget***. We pride ourselves on ‘running a tight ship’ in terms of managing our costs, not spending money un-necessarily, and keeping salary costs under control. (The good overall result disguises the fact that we actually spent **60% more on medicines** than budgeted – see story below).

Keeping our costs low is partly thanks to our financial team of Thembeka and Leanne supported by the Trustees on the Finance Committee. And it is also because we get substantial donations of food, because we receive a large % of our general medication from the Department of Health (at least for now), because we have good suppliers who give us reduced prices, and because we have the huge benefit of kitchen volunteers, interns and three part-time volunteer doctors.

Of course, our costs have to be covered by our income: effectively we needed to **raise R16,674 per day ($1057)**, every day of 2025. As reported before, we did not quite achieve that. Our income at just under R5.6M ($355,000) was a commendable 9% increase over 2024. Given the economic straits in which many people find themselves, this is really impressive. But, as is clear, that meant a **shortfall of just over R½M ($31,700)**: a deficit which needed to be covered by drawing on our reserves. This is better than we had feared – but still not sustainable!

It might be helpful to look at where our income came from – and where it did not. 16% of our income came from renting out space in our building to permanent tenants and *ad hoc* rentals. Though wonderful, this was a bit below budget and we continue to look actively for renters for 2026 since our building is very well located for training programmes and extremely well run. We are grateful to all those whose payments have contributed in this way, especially to the Archdiocesan Refugee Pastoral Care project.

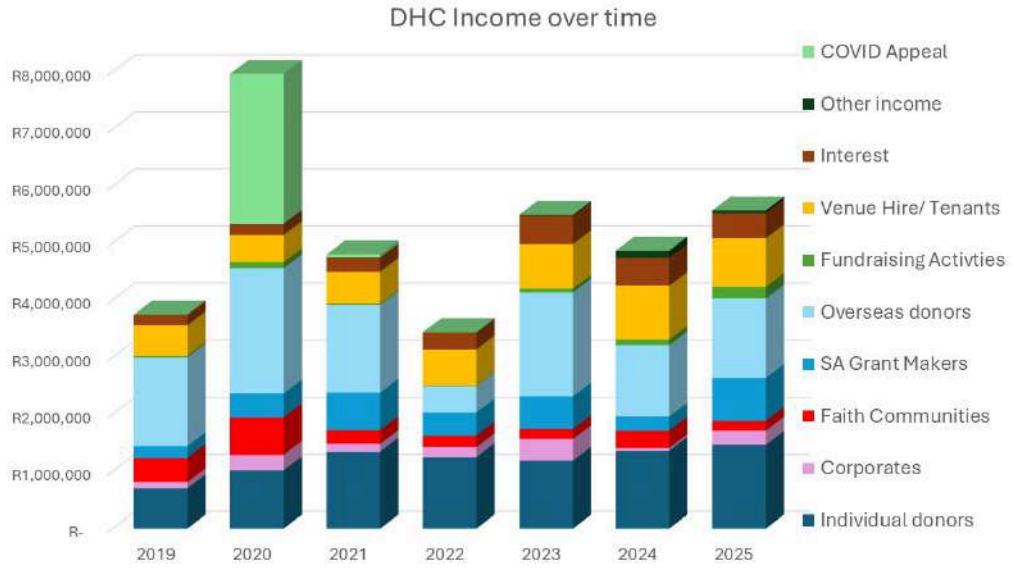
8% came from interest on reserves and also from legacies – please do contact us if you would like to consider leaving us something in your will. 13% was from South African grant-making trusts to whom we are very grateful. 22% came from our hard-working UK fundraising arm, with a further 3% from other overseas sources, though, sadly nothing from the US Government after our expectations (and those of many others) were dashed.

26% came from local individuals, sometimes in large amounts, sometimes small regular donations each month. This is an invaluable source of steady income – we are grateful to all who have donated; if you would like to join them as one of 'Hurley's Heroes' please email us. 4% came from fundraising activities: we are planning more of these in 2026 so watch this space.

Disappointingly only 4% came from local businesses and only 3% from faith communities (of all types). Whilst we appreciate that times are tough, the level of support from local corporates, churches, temples and mosques is not even close to what it was before COVID.

We hope that the fact that you are reading this means you are committed to supporting the DHC. We really need your help if we are to continue to serve our marginalised communities on the scale that we have been. The need is clear – we are confident that our supporters will help us to respond to that need. (A fuller financial report will be presented at the AGM on 14 February and sent with the February newsletter).

For those of you who like charts, you can see below how our income has evolved over time - which areas have grown and which have declined.



COMMITMENT TO A SHARED VISION FOR THE CITY

Readers will recall the surprise visit that we had from the **Hon Cyril Xaba, Executive Mayor** of eThekwini (the Metro that includes Durban), when he attended our Meal of Reconciliation in December. True to his promise, he followed this up in January with a formal visit and a chance to talk about the response to homelessness in Durban.

He was met by our Director, accompanied by Nomfundo Dlamini, one of our Trustees who has recently been appointed as Deputy Chair. From the outset it was clear that Mayor Xaba, who has been in post for only six months, was keen to learn. He was willing to acknowledge the expertise that we have from working with the homeless in Durban for 11 years as well as our Director's experience as Chair of the National Homeless Network and periods working in this field in both London and New York.

We were able to raise a number of issues with him. We have voiced before our concerns about the planned shelter in Lower Illovo where homeless people fear they will be dumped, 37km (23 miles) away from the city centre. He listened to us and was keen to hear if we had other ideas of how that site could be used in a constructive way so that homeless people would actually want to go there and stay there.

We raised again the deep anxieties about **Ensure Security** who are paid by the Municipality and have been beating up homeless people in the name of 'clearing the streets'. We showed the Mayor clear video evidence of their violent crimes, and he promised to investigate this, underscoring that he was committed to upholding the rule of law in the city.

We decried the resources wasted earlier that week in trying to clear the large group of homeless drug users from a major intersection above the railway line – they returned within a few days as we could have predicted. And we also stressed to the Mayor that, though very visible, that group was not typical of the majority of homeless people. He admitted himself that the homeless people he met at the Meal of Reconciliation challenged the usual negative stereotypes.

We also reported on the poor state of the city-run **Safe Open Sleeping Spaces** and explained how eThekwini had gone from leading the country during COVID to now lagging far behind other Metro areas. We offered suggestions of effective interventions we have seen in Jo'burg and Cape Town, and the Mayor's team seemed open to learning from those. For more details see the article in the *Sunday Tribune*.

We are delighted that, following this very positive engagement, the Mayor has agreed to be a guest of honour at our upcoming **Annual Stakeholders Meeting**. This is open to anyone to attend and will be held at the DHC on **Saturday 14 Feb at 2pm for 2.30pm** (for more information email). We hope he will share some of his personal memories of Archbishop Hurley and Paddy Kearney, both of whom he admired greatly. He actually suggested that the Municipality should erect a statue to Archbishop Hurley,

though this might have been a tease given the controversy he has inherited about expensive statues bought by eThekwini and imported from China.

We are grateful to the Mayor for his time and his commitment to working with us, and other well-informed NGO's. Whilst we did not agree about everything, we did establish that we shared a common vision for a city that should be welcoming of all its residents, housed and homeless.

Photo (Thuli Dlamini): The Mayor with our Director (right) and Deputy Chair (left) at the statue of Archbishop Hurley that did not cost R11 million, is not under wraps, and was actually made in South Africa!

THOBILE ENCOURAGES NURSES TO FOLLOW IN HER FOOTSTEPS

For the last two years, we have benefited from the thoughtful presence of **Thobile Mthembu** as co-ordinator of our clinic. We always knew that her time would not be open-ended and she has now asked us to look for a replacement. If you are a registered nurse (or a doctor), with primary health care experience – or you know someone who is – then please get in touch for more details about the position.

Thobile's own reflections will, we hope, inspire people to consider this challenging but fulfilling role. Working with homeless people, drug users and refugees was new to her and she admits: "I had worked for 19 years as a nurse but with 'normal people'. At first, I thought the DHC patients were abnormal. But then I realised that they are normal people but in abnormal situations."

She has learnt a lot not just about healthcare but about the world and about herself. "Being at the DHC has improved my humanity and helped to see things differently. Initially it was frustrating; but then I realised that I had to find ways to work things out. I learnt to accept the abnormal and make it normal."

As Clinic Co-ordinator she has been supervising the largest staff team at the DHC – fellow nurses, community health workers and social workers – as well as managing volunteer doctors, interns, and partnerships with health science departments at UKZN and DUT. The scale makes it possible for us to deliver more than 2,000 patient interactions each month. "Managing a diverse team taught me a lot about other people's cultures and behaviours. When faced with a difficulty, I turned to prayer: 'Lord you have put me in this place for a reason, help me to see why.' And I also learnt the value of introducing prayer time as part of our morning team meetings."

Thobile also had to learn new ways of working with Government. "Since the DHC is independent of Government you cannot take things for granted. It is harder for us to work with them, but it can also be harder for them to work with us."

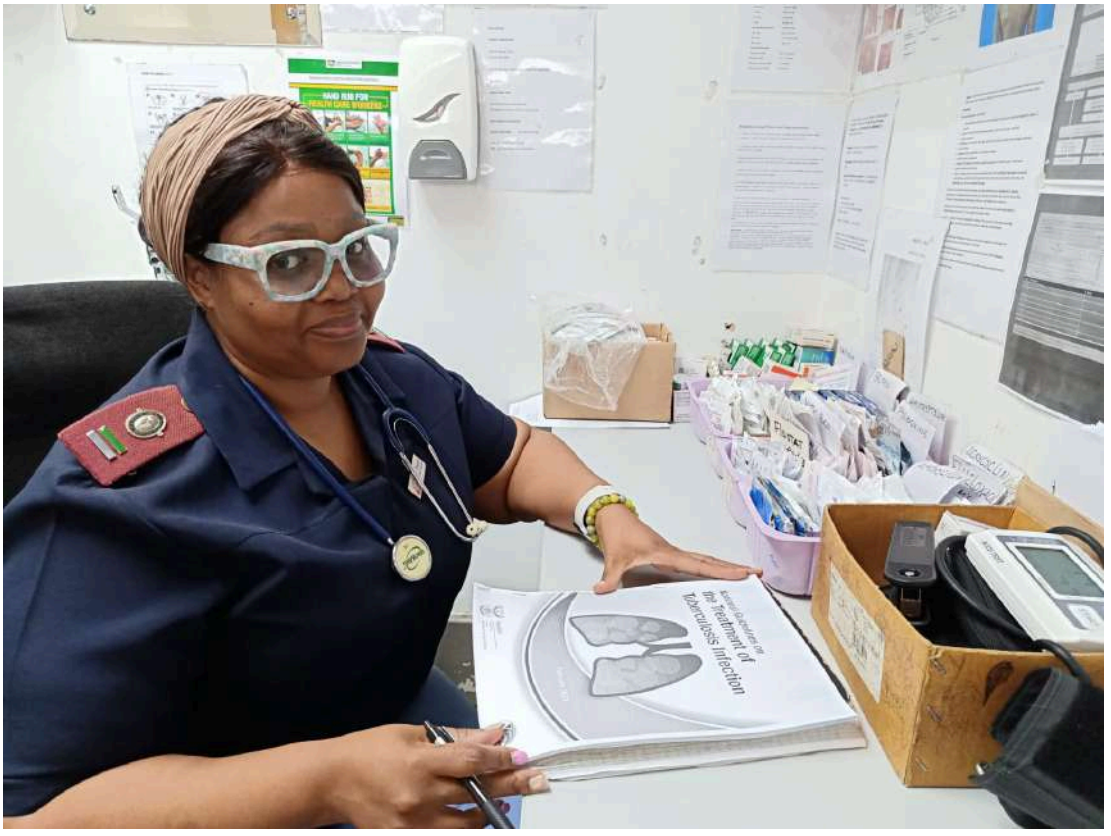
Looking back, she has found the experience hugely fulfilling. "I get such satisfaction when a TB patient completes their 6-months of medication or when a homeless guy actually keeps his follow-up appointment. I can proudly say that, with our HIV+ positive patients, we have achieved a 92% level of viral suppression – very impressive!"

The challenging work became harder in recent months with the **illegal xenophobic protests** which are still blocking patients from accessing Government facilities. "They cannot collect their medicines and so instead they turn to us. These are chronic medications – such as for diabetes, hypertension, epilepsy – so we have really had to dig deep to pay for them. The alternative would've been to let patients fall sick, or even die, and we are not prepared to do that."

The protesters are usually Zulu and she confesses, as a fellow-Zulu, to a certain sadness at their actions. "Even if they do not care about our patients, can't they see that, by leaving people untreated, they are making infection more likely for everyone?" But sometimes we can get through to their better natures. "We have a patient from Mozambique who has throat cancer – he is foreign and homeless, a 'double threat' – and he has been repeatedly blocked from getting his chemotherapy. But Siya and Zama [from the DHC team] pleaded with the protesters and finally they let him in. He is now recovering at the Hillcrest AIDS clinic, putting on weight and getting stronger."

She would encourage any nurse to apply for the role who wants to grow professionally and who wants to know what the world is like from a different perspective. "The DHC has reminded me that life does not only revolve around me and the people I know."

We asked her what she will miss most. "Everything," she laughed, "including the unexpected!"



NEWS FROM AN OLD FRIEND AND A PAST PROJECT

We had the great joy recently of reconnecting with one young man who had been very involved in our work during COVID. **Sandile Mthembu**, known to everyone as 'Rasta' because of his distinctive dreadlocks, was living with several hundred others in the emergency tented camp set up behind the Jewish Club in North Beach.

His positive attitude, keenness to work, and ability to mobilise his fellow residents meant he was soon spotted to be Assistant Site Manager, working alongside Bongani Madida. (Bongani won last year's **Barry Wood Award for Outstanding Service** – if you want to nominate a volunteer or a staff member for this year's awards, see the attached).

After COVID, 'Jewish' (as the homeless community style the site) continued as a Safe Open Sleeping Space and Sandile carried on staying there. He was one of the pioneers that first created a vegetable garden on the edge of the site which, with a bit of help from the DHC, caught the eye of Boxer Stores and local hotels and even catapulted him onto national television.

Despite these positive steps forwards, Sandile's life has not been steady progress since then. He regrettably – like many other people, not all of whom were poor – got caught up in the riots and looting in 2021 and ended up serving two years in prison. But even when there, a prison warder learnt about his gardening expertise, and he was soon setting up small vegetable plots and training other prisoners.

After that, he returned to his mother and siblings in Mariannhill where, he says, life is very tough since there is no steady income for the household. But rather than be idle, he spent time gardening on the small piece of land the family has and also helping others in the area to get more out of their plots. "Even if they could not pay me," he says, "I was pleased to be able to give something back to my community." '

Sandile is once again sleeping at the Jewish Club site and is saddened to see how over-crowding and neglect by the Municipality has seen it deteriorate. "It is smelly and run down. And just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, they removed the toilets to use them on the beachfront for Christmas and they still haven't brought them back!"

The garden that he started continues under Sicelo Maphanga who, with others, has been growing and selling vegetables, herbs, micro-greens and paw-paws (*see photo at the top*). You can read more on their Instagram page or send a what's app to 065 905 1381 if you want to buy produce. This project has been greatly assisted over the years by Sarah Alsen. Her new organisation is working with the homeless gardeners to collect green waste from local hotels and turn it into compost. To read more about this admirable project click here.

One of our main interlocutors at the Municipality over the years has been **Nomusa Shembe** from the Safer Cities department: we thank her for what she has been able to achieve and wish her well as she retires at the end of this month.

Sandile is back in the CBD in the hope of finding piece jobs. At one level, it looks as if he has just joined the mass of other homeless men in central Durban with no steady work, no qualifications and no ID. But he feels that, six years on, he has grown and matured and has learnt some important life lessons. He continues to smile because, as his uncle advised him when he was young: "You might have been through a lot, but you don't have to show it on your face!" And his real dream of being a farmer still remains. If you can help him achieve that dream, please get in touch.

Photo: Sandile Mthembu reunited with his 23-year-old Rasta persona from six years ago. His photo was one of a number taken by Samora Chapman which featured in a photo-essay in the Daily Maverick.

Director: Raymond Perrier (raymond@denishurleycentre.org)
Bookings: Leanne Banks (leanne@denishurleycentre.org)
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