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DENIS HURLEY CENTRE

UPDATE

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COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS OF NAILS

ETHEKWINI Living Legends

October 2026

Diwali wishes for all who are celebrating

Homeless challenge local politicians
'Hear my Voice' but also 'See my Face'
Focus on Mental Health issues
Handover to new Director continues



Homeless captured by local artists



Partners join us to promote mental health



Sending greetings to our Nobel Laureate

100 HOMELESS GATHER TO MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD

Three weeks before the Local Government Elections (which will be this Weds, 4 November), our Gandhi-Luthuli Peace Hall was filled with about 100 homeless people to listen to - and be heard by - local political party representatives. The five political parties invited were chosen by the homeless themselves. The ANC, DA, EFF, and MK parties all sent senior representatives; the IFP had confirmed attendance but did not pitch on the day and so was represented by an empty chair.

Each party was first given an opportunity to address the audience, outlining their election commitments. The National Homeless Manifesto, together with the local version for eThekwini, was then presented by Mszizi Buthelezi and Ayanda Mbatha, two

members of a larger group of homeless people who have been working on the manifesto and preparing for the elections.

Facilitator Sphamandla Mhlongo from DDP (Democracy Development Programme) then opened up the floor to members of the homeless community. The discussion was robust, and politicians were challenged to move beyond vague or superficial promises.

Even though the Homeless Manifesto specifically questioned the value of this solution, the Sakhithemba shelter (37km outside the city centre) was defended by the ANC delegate, the current Municipal Speaker Thabani Nyawose. He did not explain why it is over one year late in opening, nor how the Municipality was planning to provide the many services promised, but he did confirm (contrary to promises to the local Lower Illovo community) that it would accommodate 1200 people. Curiously, he also made an apology that homeless people have been beaten up by eThekwini's private security and seemed to distance himself from the current ANC mayor. However, he shocked the audience when he exclaimed: "I did not come here to be told what to do; I am not accountable to you."; one homeless person pointed out that elections were exactly an exercise in holding politicians accountable!

The DA representative was Councillor Zoe Solomon who has been on the 'Safer Cities' committee that engages with homeless issues. She said that politicians should be measured not by how they treat those who have everything, but by how they treat those who have the least. She described the Sakhithemba project as 'an apartheid style removal' taking homeless people to where they did not want to be. She also stressed that replacing ID documents for the homeless and unemployed should be free. (It is ironic that the current Minister responsible for IDs is actually from the DA; yet he has ignored repeated requests from the National Homeless Network for just this waiver of costs.)

The EFF delegate, Cllr Thabani Miya, started with an apology: he felt that as part of the ruling coalition in eThekwini they had let down the homeless. He and the MK delegate (Prof Thamsanqa Mkhize) whole-heartedly endorsed the eThekwini Homeless Manifesto and particularly the idea of employing homeless people to keep the public toilets open 24/7 to improve employment and hygiene. The two of them, with the DA, all promised that they would identify Government-owned buildings in the CBD to be used as shelters, and regretted that this had been repeatedly rejected by the out-going council.

One particularly memorable image from the morning was of someone from the women's shelter passionately engaging with the politicians while a cluster of journalists and media representatives focused their cell phones and cameras on her. It was a powerful illustration of a shift in focus within our cities, placing the voices of homeless and marginalised people at the centre of public attention. We were delighted by the extensive coverage of our event in the press, on-line, via social media, on radio and on television.

At the end of the meeting, a special prayer was led by Oblate priest Fr Callistus Khathali from Umbilo, and Anglican priest Rev Emilio Kasaba from the Bluff. The image of homeless people reaching out in prayer for the politicians, and praying for justice and peace in the elections, was deeply moving. (*Attached is a copy of the Manifesto and also of the prayer in English and Zulu – we are encouraging people to pray this through the elections and for 100 days afterwards which would run up to +Hurley's anniversary on 13 February*).

To conclude the day, a meal was shared by homeless participants, politicians, and media, creating an opportunity for deeper conversation and continued dialogue beyond the formal proceedings.



WORLD HOMELESS DAY CELEBRATED IN ARTISTIC STYLE

World Homeless Day takes place each year on 10/10 and we marked it in vibrant fashion along Paddy Kearney Way, between the DHC and Emmanuel Cathedral.

The area was transformed into an open-air art space where members of the homeless community sat for portraits created by local artists, facilitated by artist Kenneth Shandu through his *Unlearn to Learn* programme. In total 13 artists were brought together: from his collective, students from DUT's Fine Art Department, and community artists. Between them, they produced 33 portraits over the course of the morning.

One participant, on receiving their portrait, remarked, "Am I really getting my picture? I've never had a picture of myself drawn before." This simple response captured the purpose of the event: to ensure that people experiencing homelessness are seen, valued, and heard. Their stories were also recorded by five journalism students from DUT.

The impact of the day was reflected in the responses of participating artists. Mhlonishwa Chiliza from DUT commented: "It was a great event. It went way beyond our expectations. Truly, art played a big role in renewing our lives, including those of the homeless." Community artist and long-time DHC supporter Pam Benporath added: "It was a deeply emotional day for me. The dignity and respect shown to invisible men and women is powerful. Thank you for the opportunity to connect with them."

The portraits will remain on display at the DHC until after the municipal elections. Through these images, we hope that political leaders and the wider public will see the faces behind the statistics, hear the voices of people experiencing homelessness, and support policies and housing solutions that affirm their dignity and humanity.

The initiative links with the meeting with politicians a few days later under the campaign banner: 'See my Face, Hear my Voice'. When homeless people are so often not seen and not heard, the DHC is trying to make sure that they cannot be ignored. Op-eds by our new Director and by our out-going Director reinforce this point. The initiative has continued (thanks to Tekweni Media) with short video interviews with homeless people and DHC staff, which have been getting great traction on our Facebook page.

Photo: While homeless men and women are being sketched others were reading and signing the National Homeless Manifesto.



MINDING THE MIND: A DAY OF CARE AT DHC

Our Gandhi-Luthuli Peace Hall was full for a recent Mental Health Awareness Day. Beneficiaries filled every seat, listening closely, joining in and clearly enjoying a full and engaging programme.

The DHC has for 12 years met many of the physical needs of Durban's homeless community; this day affirmed that mental well-being matters just as much. Recent unrest in the city has added a further layer of stress, and living without security or a plan for the future brings a deep strain that can slide into depression. Restoring hope remains central to our work.

The day was guided by Diane De Exclana of SACAP (the College of Applied Psychology), with UKZN students also sharing short “Mental Health Information Minutes” along the way. Various partners spoke on themes close to the lives of our beneficiaries. Lindokuhle Mathenjwa of SADAG (the Depression and Anxiety Group) explained stress, anxiety and depression, making the point that depression is far more than sadness; it is a treatable mood disorder, and symptoms lasting two to four weeks are a signal to seek professional help. Thobe Gwala, a social worker from iCare, spoke on youth and mental health, reminding young people that their worth is not measured by likes or followers.

Healing and trauma were also on the agenda. Fundi Mtolo from Lifeline urged everyone to create safe spaces and choose their words with care, since emotional scars take time to heal. Nonhlanhla Ntshangase of the Department of Social Development reminded the audience that healing does not mean forgetting; it means learning to live with painful experiences without being controlled by them. Staff from our own DHC Clinic spoke on HIV and TB, encouraging correct use of medication and prevention, which has obvious physical benefits but also promotes a positive mindset. Seluleko Sibiya of Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT) added a motivational address that was well received by the attentive audience.

The day was also full of life. A poem from UKZN's Amahle Mtolo and a performance by Siphe Zwane were highlights, alongside singing, dancing and lively Q&A sessions. The DHC choir was proud to stage their very first public performance which was excellent. Partner organisations also set up tables for more private conversations, which was a welcome opportunity for many.

Beneficiaries offered the strongest endorsement. Zilungile Ngubelanga, who lives on Mansel Road, called the programme essential for people living on the street and asked for more activities next time. Siyabonga Cele of Cato Manor said he now understands stress and depression far better. Goodness Dlamini said the presentations helped clear the mind and brought a sense of ease. All three hope the programme will continue.

The day was organised by our senior Social Worker Nonhlanhla Nhlangulela, who works tirelessly, supported by a small team and an amazing group of volunteers. Their work is meaningful and of great value. Thanks also go to every partner who gave their time and expertise, and to Bongani Madida for delivering the vote of thanks. We remain committed to caring for the whole person, body and mind.

Photo: 'The Hurley Voices' is a choir made up of homeless people and staff, being trained by Zibuyile Shabane, a UKZN music student volunteering through the UKUSA Arts Programme. Making music and listening to music are both great tools in improving mental well-being.



A LIGHTHOUSE, A BEACH AND A CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

Early in October, the DHC managers swapped the hustle and bustle of the centre for the quiet of St Dominic's Retreat Centre on the Bluff. They arrived curious; they left galvanised, refreshed and encouraged.

Ten people took part: the managers, out-going Director Raymond Perrier, in-coming Director Bridget Ward and Trustee Farida Patel, who facilitated with skill and empathy. Prayer opened each day, beginning with a reflection from Esther (chapter 4), which encouraged each participant to understand more deeply their own hearts and motivations. During the first session it took vulnerability and courage to share on questions such as: What makes me come alive? What is worth doing even if I fail? Where do I find restoration?

A key focus area of discussion was the centre's Ethos and Values statement, asking phrase by phrase what this means in daily practice: e.g. "community serving humanity", "challenging injustice", "equal respect for all". All parts were explored in detail and the team agreed on what they want to be: a Centre of integrity - a lighthouse that shines out in our particular part of Durban.

Managers were not afraid to talk about feeling the weight of our work and also the realities of leadership transitioning from Raymond to Bridget. The group shared warm and honest sentiments with Raymond, and each one thanked him for his leadership and the impact he has had; he, in turn, expressed personalised gratitude to each of them.

While the team was there, the big news was received that DHC Patron Judge Navi Pillay had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (*the photo at the top was a spontaneous message sent from the DHC to her*). This accolade was a great encouragement for the team reflecting on how to continue to fight for human rights even when the odds are stacked against us.

On day two, the team focused on our four key stakeholder groups: donors, partners and volunteers, staff, and beneficiaries. We looked at how we can work better with each group building on established strengths. The energy was tangible, commitment was reignited and the planning began!

Some of the best moments came between sessions: beach walks, shared meals and time in prayer together. The retreat ended in the chapel with prayer and meditation led jointly by Raymond and Bridget. It was also a chance to bid farewell to the Dominican sisters who are closing the retreat house and thank them for their years of service on the Bluff.

The Retreat was one further element in the steady handover process. Raymond has also been introducing Bridget to various partners. She enjoyed an in-depth meeting with both Archbishop Jwara and Cardinal Napier. And a series of meet-and-greet sessions for different sectors (the arts, corporates, education, faith organisations and donors) has enabled Bridget to personally meet over 40 key stakeholders. She has also attended external events, such as the Gandhi Celebration at the Phoenix settlement and the AGMs of Ubuntu Community Chest and the Napier Centre for Healing, where she has had opportunity to meet other partners.

It has been encouraging for her to connect with so many supporters and friends of the DHC. She commented: “Your cheering, resources, time and talents make this work possible, and every effort is deeply appreciated.”

Thank you to everyone who has come to meet our incoming Director. If you could not make it to a session but would like to meet her, please get in touch or join us for our fundraising Sing-along of "Grease" on 15 November.

Photo: At the Gandhi Birthday celebrations on 2 Oct, Bridget (3rd from left) had the chance to meet with a number of religious leaders who are long-standing partners of the DHC.



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