

## **The Metro Health Club: Grassroots Action for Improved Community Health in the Western Cape.**

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For the past four years Africa AHEAD has been trying to introduce the concept of the Community Health Club Methodology into the informal settlements of the Western Cape. This has presented quite a challenge and it was open to debate whether the CHC approach, so effective in the rural areas, could really have the same appeal in the squatter camps of the Mother City, where there is little community cohesion, and where alienation of marginalized communities and political infighting by gate keepers has undermined so much development.

In 2005 the CHC idea was introduced into Khayelitsha through the University of Western Cape who sponsored a workshop facilitated by Africa AHEAD, where the first 25 facilitators were trained. The training was poorly received by existing stakeholders, and only one facilitator managed to establish a CHC the first time round which did at least demonstrate that a health club could work with the right facilitator.

Later that year working with Africa AHEAD, Hygiene Promotion Partnership, a research wing of BYU University adopted many of the concepts of the Community Health Club approach to start over 75 health clusters (groups of ten families) in the informal settlements of Du Noon, Phillipi Sweet Home and Kwa Five. The main trainers in this project were Charlotte Adams and Joyce Ntombomzi, who have been leading lights since then working voluntarily to support Community Health Clubs in their own areas.

In 2007, the City Health Department sponsored Africa AHEAD in the development of training materials to scale up the CHC training, and with the new Tool kit of visual aids and the manual, two workshops have been held in the past two years, with another 50 participants trained in the CHC Approach. City Health Department has been working hard to integrate all development in the informal settlements through CHCs but with over 240 informal settlements this is a real challenge. Ngcwele Dyani was appointed as liason between the CHCs and Health Department and in June 2009, a large graduation ceremony was held for the CHCs in Phillipi. Mr. Armien Petersen of Environmental Health in City of Cape Town Health Department was amazed by the response, as it has shown that Health clubs are as attractive to women in town, who just like their counterparts in the villages love to come together for self improvement. It is also clear that although the CHCs are well received in informal settlements to make any impact on preventing diseases like diarrhea there has to be a thicker diffusion of health clubs throughout the Western Cape.

**There are now 96 active Community Health Clubs in the Western Cape** and even more impressive, in July 2009 they formed an umbrella group to coordinate their activities – the Metro Health Club (MHC).

The Metro Health Club is the ideal mechanism for replication as it has been started by CHC leaders themselves, and is a genuine bottom up initiative. Charlotte Adams, the new C.E.O gave us a vision with great enthusiasm of how MHC plans to expand the activities of the health clubs through an holistic approach. Currently drafting their constitution in order to get registered, the MHC will focus on coordinating CHCs in five different fields: Water and Sanitation, Health, Special Projects, Education, Recruitment, Finance. Each health club will have a representative for each field and these will meet

regularly to facilitate development initiatives throughout the informal settlements, acting as grass roots instruments for change within their community. The MHC is encouraging those living in the informal settlements to take ownership of their problems and the ethos of the CHCs is to stimulate self- help. The Metro Health Club is the best proof yet of the viability of the Community Health Club approach in informal settlements, as a vehicle of change to uplift communities using health promotion to galvanise the energy of women.

Africa AHEAD has pledged to support the Metro Health Club through a new project designed to raise funds for the underprivileged through popular music in an innovative project developed in partnership with Overtone, the leading music website in South Africa.

The campaign of **Ethical Entertainment** is being launched in time for 2010, when those who party hard during the World Cup, will also be inadvertently giving back to the community as a percentage of every gig booked through Overtone will go towards Community Health Club projects.

The first event planned by Metro Health Club is on National Hand Washing Day on the 15<sup>th</sup> October where health clubs will gather to promote handwashing with soap in the informal settlements of Cape Town.

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