

CSVr Project on the Community Work Programme and Violence Prevention

Reintegration of Ex-Offenders: Opportunities for the Community Work Programme to assist in the community reintegration of ex-offenders

by Malose Langa

The Community Work Programme and ex-offender reintegration

The Community Work Programme (CWP) has recruited ex-offenders as participants in some of their sites across the country. Because CWP provides income opportunities, engages participants in community upliftment, and builds new relationships among participants, it presents a key opportunity for reintegration of ex-offenders.

The CWP's focus on crime and violence prevention initiatives also provides an opportunity for ex-offenders to make a unique contribution and facilitate their reintegration back into communities, but it also comes with serious challenges.

Brief context of Correctional Services in South Africa

At the end of 2015/2016, the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) had a total inmate population of 244 919ⁱ. Out of this number, 45257 are un-sentenced inmates. 4193 inmates were females and 157791 were males. It is evident that the DCS is still faced with the challenge of overcrowding, which undermines its attempts at rehabilitationⁱⁱ. As a result, some inmates leave correctional service centres with few skills that equip them for social and community reintegration.

Unemployment is said to be one of the biggest challenges faced by ex-offenders because of their criminal records and the stigma associated with being an ex-offenderⁱⁱⁱ. Research conducted by CSVr found that the CWP has the potential to facilitate social and community reintegration of ex-offenders into their communities.

CSVr's study on the Community Work Programme

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) has been involved in research on the CWP and its impact on violence and crime prevention since 2013.

In this policy brief we look at the role that the CWP plays in facilitating the social and community reintegration of ex-offenders back into their communities.

This is a policy brief 4.

Previous Policy Briefs cover:

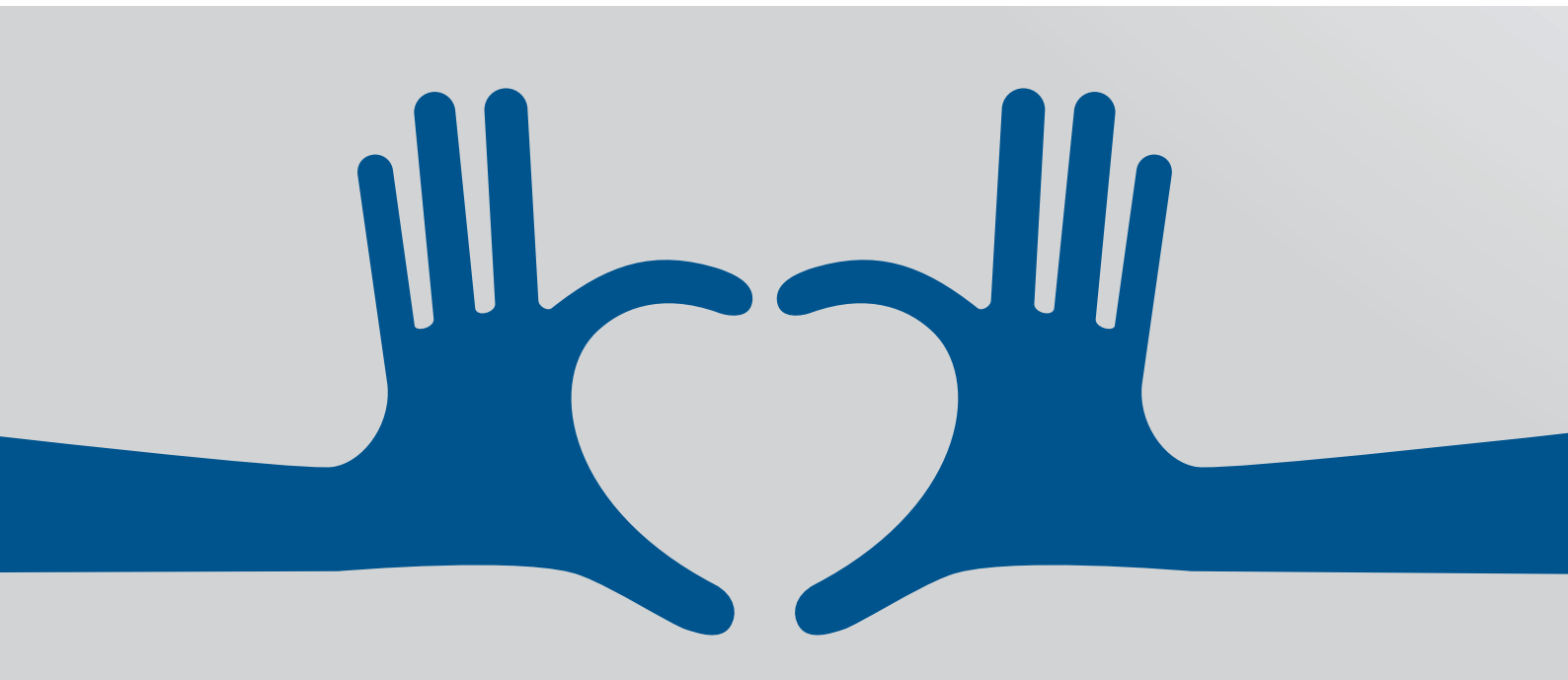
- Working for Safety: The Community Work Programme as a tool for preventing violence and building safer communities
- The good, the better and the best: How the CWP can reach its full potential as an instrument of community development in SA
- Women's contribution to social cohesion and violence prevention through CWP

For more CSVr research on the CWP, including site-specific reports, see www.csvr.org.za.

CWP – LAUNCHED
2007

APRIL 2017
186
SITES

IN SEPTEMBER 2017
244 919
CWP PARTICIPANTS



DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS IN THE POLICY BRIEF:

Inmate – any person, whether convicted or awaiting trial, who is detained in a correctional centre or remanded in custody.

Ex-offender – any person who has been previously convicted of a crime and has been released after serving a sentence in a correctional centre.

Parole – an internationally accepted mechanism that allows for the conditional release of offenders from a correctional centre into the community prior to the expiration of their entire sentences of imprisonment, as imposed by a court of law.

Rehabilitation – a planned intervention which aims to bring about change in some aspect of the offender that is thought to have caused the offenders criminality, such as attitude, cognitive processes, personality or mental health.

Social reintegration – comprises all activities and processes that an offender engages in while incarcerated. These may include, for example, correctional education and behaviour modification programmes (Nunez-Neto, 2009).

Community reintegration – is the process by which a person is re-introduced into the community with the aim of living in a law-abiding manner.

Sources: Mdakane, M (2017). Defining of terms (Personal conversation, 18th May 2017)

Nunez-Neto, B. (2009). Offender re-entry: Correctional statistics, reintegration into the community, and recidivism. In Q. B. Mallenhoff (Ed.), *Criminal reform: Prisoner re-entry into the community* (pp. 179-208). New York: Nova Science Publishers

THE COMMUNITY WORK PROGRAMME

The CWP is a government initiative under the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs and was designed to provide “an employment safety net^{iv}” to eligible unemployed people by offering them regular work two days each week for an indefinite period. As of June 2017, general CWP participants were earning R81 per day and their coordinators were earning R2100 per month.

Any unemployed South African citizen over the age of 18 years is qualified to join the CWP. In April 2015, there were 186 sites operating in 140 municipalities across the country, with an average of 1000 participants per site^v. The total number of the CWP participants is 244 919^{vi}. The government plans to increase the CWP participants across the country.

The CWP is established in the poorest areas of South Africa where levels of unemployment are generally quite high.

The municipality and relevant key stakeholders, including community members are consulted before the CWP is implemented in each municipality. The work undertaken in the CWP is identified, prioritized and decided on by community members in collaboration with local councillors and other key stakeholders in the community. The Local Reference Committee (LRC) is formed to oversee the functioning of the CWP in each site. Typically, the CWP participants identify social problems in their communities and work towards addressing them. The work that participants in the CWP do should benefit the community. The most common community projects that are taken on by the CWP participants include cleaning of streets, cutting grasses of crime hot spots, patrolling of streets at night, growing of vegetable gardens, provision of early childhood services through crèches, home-based care, public campaigns against violence, crime and substance abuse.

EX-OFFENDERS AND THE CWP



The CWP participants marching against crime and gang violence in Mannenberg, Western Cape

In South Africa, it is estimated that close to 6000 offenders are released from various correctional facilities each month, either through parole or due to expiry of their sentence^{vii}. It is hoped that upon their release many will not re-engage in criminal activities^{viii}. However, due to lack of dedicated interventions aimed at facilitating their reintegration, many ex-offenders re-offend and return to correctional service centres. Currently, there are no reliable statistics on recidivism in South Africa, but it is estimated to be high^{ix}. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the National Institute of Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), Khulisa and others work hard to support ex-offenders to readjust and reintegrate into society, but their reach is limited. The major challenge facing ex-offenders in South Africa is a lack of employment opportunities due in part to the stigma of being ex-offenders. Creating job opportunities for ex-offenders may be an effective strategy to ensure that they do not reoffend^x.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVES

It is important to note that the CWP was not specifically developed as a project for ex-offenders. However, given its character and implementation methods, it does have the potential to prevent crime and violence, as has been shown in other studies^{xi}. As noted, the CWP is community oriented in its approach in that it requires community members to take a lead in deciding which projects to undertake in their communities amongst the many identified. Given that crime and violence are major concerns for many South African communities, it is not surprising that various anti-crime and violence initiatives have been undertaken by community members, particularly ex-offenders in Orange Farm and Ivory Park in Gauteng.

In the Western Cape, ex-offenders were recruited to join the programme and the site focused intensively on addressing problems of violence and gangsterism in some communities. An anti-crime march was also organized by the CWP participants in Mannenberg.

Brief history of the CWP in South Africa

The CWP was launched as a pilot initiative of the Presidency in 2007. In 2008 it was accepted as a new element within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), though it continued to operate as a pilot. In 2010 it was formally established as a full government programme within the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA). At each site the CWP is managed by an **implementing agent** (IA) that is appointed by COGTA.

Implementing agent - A non-profit entity appointed by DCOG to manage the implementation of the Community Work Programme in selected sites.

EX-OFFENDERS AND CAMPAIGNS AGAINST SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The existing literature identifies a strong link between substance abuse and crime both within South Africa and worldwide^{xiii}. It is for this reason that the ex-offenders in both Ivory Park and Orange Farm have been actively involved in public campaigns aimed at preventing substance abuse (especially nyaope) amongst the youth.

In addition to these public awareness campaigns about the risks of substance abuse, the ex-offenders, especially in Orange Farm, also work closely with SANCA to assist young people (mainly boys) who are addicted to nyaope to get assistance and rehabilitation. Parents of some of the nyaope-smoking boys have approached the ex-offenders to ask for assistance in getting their sons to the local SANCA offices as a first step to rehabilitation.

EX-OFFENDERS AND CAMPAIGNS AGAINST CRIME

In Mannenberg, Orange Farm and Ivory Park, ex-offenders were actively involved in anti-crime campaigns intended to raise awareness about the consequences of crime amongst the youth both in and out of school. The ex-offenders used their own life stories to tell others (especially the youth) that “crime is not good” and that “crime does not pay”. In Orange Farm, a group of ex-offenders who were part of the CWP organized a theatre group which involved going to local primary and high school to inform young people about the dangers of getting involved in criminal activities.

Ex-offenders used theatre and drama to convey their anti-crime messages. However, some studies have questioned the effectiveness of awareness raising campaigns about the risks associated with crime. These studies^{xiv} argue that campaigns such as Scared Straight in the USA have been ineffective in deterring young people from getting involved in criminal activities. Despite reviews questioning their effectiveness, these campaigns still remain popular and further studies are needed in South Africa about their effectiveness. Perhaps their value lies more in the impact they have on the ex-offenders who participate in them as demonstrated below.



Ex-offenders who are in the CWP playing a drama in front of school-going learners about the risks of crime and its related consequences:

¹ Nyaope is often a mixture of marijuana and heroin that is rolled in to cigarette paper and smoked by users. The increased supply of low grade heroin has contributed to epidemic proportions of heroin dependence.

Quotes from ex-offenders about their involvement in campaigns against substance abuse

This year alone we have been involved in two campaigns, including *Thiba Nyaope (Stop Nyaope)*. We went to raise awareness in school during assembly and spoke to school children about the dangers of using drugs and getting involved in sexual activities at an early age. We assisted with distributing pamphlets and putting up posters [about the dangers of *nyaope*] in schools and public places.

The biggest challenge we have now in fighting the abuse of drugs and alcohol is that these things are easily available and are cheap. I mean even school-going children can easily afford the *nyaope* or marijuana.

CHALLENGES EX-OFFENDERS FACE IN THIS WORK

1

On the whole, ex-offenders did well in facilitating crime and violence initiatives in their respective communities. However, many acknowledged that the process of gaining public trust was not easy, as some community members were still suspicious of them.

2

The ex-offenders asserted that a lack of acceptance by some community members (including relatives and parents) was one of the major challenges encountered in their community work. In his work, Albertus^{xvi} found that this lack of acceptance is one of the factors that push ex-offenders to reoffend. Ex-offenders in this study asserted that despite these challenges – such as being seen as the first suspect when a crime has been committed in the community – they still work hard to prevent crime and violence in their communities and to educate community members to accept ex-offenders.

3

Some ex-offenders, while incarcerated, often gain specific practical skills, however for some ex-offenders in the CWP these skills are not used as there is then a gap between these skills and the work done in the CWP. As a result, some ex-offenders feel some activities are not suited for their skills as many initiatives tend to focus on social and health services such as home-based care, cleaning and vegetable gardening. Ex-offenders see many of these activities as better suited for women than men and this contributes to some leaving the programme.

PERSONAL STORIES OF EX-OFFENDERS WORKING IN THE CWP:

THE STORY OF BIGBOY IN ORANGE FARM

Bigboy is an ex-offender who served 7 years of imprisonment. Upon his release in 2007, he struggled to find employment. He narrated that he was tempted to go back and join his former associates to commit more serious crimes. In 2012, Bigboy was admitted to hospital after he tried to commit suicide. He said, "I was frustrated and angry at the world that I was trying to change but the world was not giving me the opportunity. I was not getting any job and felt the best decision was to die and not suffer. I was released from hospital and met Mr Paballo Mokoena, CWP Site manager in Orange Farm. Mr Mokoena was my saviour as he encouraged me to join the CWP. It is in the CWP where I joined the programme called Gateway, which is a programme aimed at assisting ex-offenders work in the community through the CWP. I worked in the CWP for 4 years until I decided to start my own community-based organisation in 2014 called STEPUP. This organisation (STEPUP) aims to assist other ex-offenders like myself to be recognised and accepted as humans rather than criminals once they have made amends and served their sentences. Our aim as the organisation is to assist community members to accept ex-offenders as productive members of society. Currently, the organisation works in schools to assist young people not to engage in criminal activities and other risk-taking behaviours such as drug use, bullying and so forth. We hope to work with other government departments as ex-offenders to assist our communities. It is through this work that I can say I'm different and rehabilitated as Bigboy. Thanks to the CWP for giving me the start to be where I am now... I wish to see my organisation STEPUP growing and helping the youth of Orange Farm. It is important that initiatives such as STEPUP are supported.



THE STORY OF VELI GOOD-ENOUGH MNAZANA IN IVORY PARK, THEMBSISA

Veli is an ex-offender who was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Upon his release on parole, he joined the CWP in 2012. In 2013, he was promoted in the CWP to work as a storeman. In 2014, he was promoted again to be a coordinator/supervisor. He narrated that joining the CWP changed his life as he got the opportunity to work with other community members for the upliftment of the people of Ivory Park. He said, "it is my work in the community that showed people that I have changed and I'm a different person. You see, this work of the CWP has helped me connect with my community". The work has also kept me busy. I feel good to be helping my community and clean the environment as the supervisor of the environmental team. I can say this project has helped not go back to a life of crime. You see all the ex-offenders who are in the programme have never committed any crime since they joined the programme. Yes the money is small but it is better than nothing. I use this little money to buy basic needs as a person. I have been getting skills and attending various workshops since I joined the CWP. My plan is to use some of these skills to get a better job in the future.





It is clear that the CWP positively influences in multiple ways the lives of ex-offenders in order to facilitate and allow for reintegration into the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE CWP TO FACILITATE SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION OF EX-OFFENDERS AND OTHER YOUTH AT RISK

CSVr’s research and collaboration with a number of CWP sites over the last 3 years provides strong indications that this programme provides opportunities for expanding its role in reintegration. It is suggested that:

- The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) should explore the feasibility of developing ex-offender reintegration as a more central feature of the CWP programme and put in place appropriate funding and support mechanisms to make this possible in a coordinated and carefully monitored manner.
- COGTA and DCS, in collaboration with local Implementing Agents, should examine the feasibility of each of its sites to recruit and support ex-offenders
- Key support structures should be put in place to ensure that the ex-offenders are supported while in these programmes and Implementing Agents are provided with dedicated support for this function.
- CWP programmes that have ex-offenders as participants should seek opportunities to help them utilise skills that they gained whilst incarcerated as part of their social and community reintegration through the CWP. Some of these skills such as carpentry, welding and painting are not presently incorporated in CWP projects.
- Technical skills and opportunities should be provided to ex-offenders to increase their employability beyond the CWP. Advancing these skills will facilitate ex-offenders’ exit from the CWP and become self-reliant and independent.
- Support small business enterprises initiated by ex-offenders through the CWP.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) is a multi-disciplinary non-governmental organisation (NGO) involved in research, community interventions, and training. CSVr's main goal is to build reconciliation, democracy and a human rights culture and to prevent violence in South Africa and Africa.

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PARTNERS



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