

The #ThemToo Project: Addressing Sexual and Domestic Violence
University of Florida | Mamelodi, South Africa | May 23th-June 24th, 2018
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The Need:

2017—The year we broke the Silence. The #MeToo movement, creating a wave of public awareness on a crisis we had turned a blind eye to, men and women affected by sexual abuse found solidarity in speaking out. But what about those without the power to say “Me too”? For millions of South Africans, it's a daily reality. There were 51,895 sexual offenses reported in 2016, representing about 10% of actual cases as a result of survivors living in silence. In reality, well over half a million rapes occurred. Around one every minute. The silence, amongst many reasons, is due to the absence of organized support and the nurturing of gender intimidation. Despite having some of the most progressive legislation in Africa, South Africa (ZA) has normalized sexual violence within its most vulnerable communities—denoting the crisis as an inevitable female experience.

Mamelodi is characterized by informal settlements known as ‘shacks’, tin or wooden homes, usually made up of a single room. As a result, violence in homes aren't just experienced by those directly involved, but entire households— including children. The #ThemToo Project wants to fight this threat against Peace by helping the women of Mamelodi find the power to say “Me too” and most importantly, “No more.”

The Means:

We've partnered with The Viva Foundation of South Africa, an NGO addressing this crisis through the South African People's Response Initiative (SAPRI) System. Our partnership will expand, and add elements of sustainability to their previously implemented project to communities in Mamelodi. To help further our team's understanding and monitor the progress of the project, we've reached out to individuals whose expertise in the region can provide us with valuable input throughout the process. Dr. Catherine Burns, professor of History and Heritage at the University of Pretoria (UP) and senior member of the Centre for Sexualities, Aids and Gender. As well as Dr. Todd Leedy, professor of African Studies here at UF. Along with Viva, this project will continue to transform how the township of Mamelodi prevents and responds to violence. During our stay, we'll be living in the Viva Sharehouse working directly with Meleney and Leon Kriel, founders of Viva, to implement the project.

Project Objectives and Implementation:

Primary Objective: Prevention of sexual and domestic violence in the communities of Mamelodi

Secondary Objective: Responding to, and empowering survivors of sexual and domestic violence

The project consists of a two-tier approach. 1) The Rape Response Protocol Initiative and 2) The SAPRI System of Personal Safety & Community Response. The first consists of deploying info-posters and accompanying booklets that address, and most importantly, demystify the litigation process from incident to guilty verdict to public places and survivors. Their goal: educate and empower survivors to carry out the full extent of the prosecution process against their assailants, and at the very least, begin to change the way every citizen sees the crisis on a day-to-day basis.

The SAPRI System is where most of the funds and work will be directed. Consisting of deploying safety buttons to at-risk shacks with community response training, it's goal is to prevent sexual and domestic violence before it happens by putting community members at the center of planning. At-risk households are given a safety button geolocated to their shack. They're also given a home SAPRI sticker that warns potential assailants that the residents are able to call for help. Each button is linked to a community response system, consisting of SAPRI Operator and trained Community Responders. When activated, a SAPRI Operator is notified and navigates a signal to the nearest Community Responder. The Responder then goes to the scene and a pre-established response procedure aimed to prevent and/or stop the attack is followed. During this process, a public alarm will go off to notify the community and stop the attack. After the fact, a SAPRI Care Worker follows up with the survivor. A case is opened, and they assist the survivor through the litigation process per the Rape Response Protocol. The SAPRI System,

first implemented by Viva in 2015, has shown to be successful in the prevention of cases on a small scale. Our goal is to expand, and add elements of sustainability and efficiency to the System, in hopes of attracting future funding.

Community Involvement:

During our stay, we will host training workshops for Community Responders and the broader community on their roles in response and prevention. Sessions will promote an understanding of the SAPRI System and litigation process. Community Responders will receive procedure training to properly handle when they're deployed to a case, including rape-specific first aid and recording of incident details. Since the (current) lack of cooperation from local officials is what at many times incentivizes this public crisis, our goal is to ground the SAPRI System in community involvement through a 'training of trainers' approach. We plan to invest part of the funds towards a qualified instructor who will lead the workshops and train community members not only to be equipped with the proper knowledge to maintain the project's goals but to also be inclined to teach others. Although the local police is currently not involved, we'd like to explore ways in which they might be willing to become active in the SAPRI System. We'd also like to extend the sense of solidarity to the people of Mamelodi by creating a bridge between their community and ours. By using some of the funds for a "Picture Them Too" event here in Gainesville with the support from local artist, Daniel Veléz, we'll ask people of Gainesville to symbolize their answer to a question relating to sexual and domestic abuse through small paintings. These paintings will be taken to Viva to be integrated into the workshops, and eventually joined together to stay in the community. We hope these paintings will not only strengthen the moral of the people of Mamelodi, but also inform the Gainesville community about the #ThemToo message, Mamelodi, and Viva.

Project Timeline:

Feb-May: Continue contact with Viva and UP's Centre for Sexualities. Continue fundraiser via #ThemToo awareness. Involve Gainesville local community through the "Picture Them Too" event.

Week 1: Meet with community: SAPS (South African Police Service). Distribute info-posters and booklet. Identify at-risk households and button recipients. Promote community response-training.

Week 2: Train local community: host workshops. Conduct training sessions for Response Team and trial runs as needed. Collect data.

Week 3: Distribute SAPRI safety buttons, home stickers, and begin full expansion of the project. Conduct trial runs and make adequate improvements. Youth Day event: workshops and training. Continue data collection.

Week 4: Write report per data collected. Meet with Dr. Burns at the Centre for Sexualities, Aids and Gender to discuss the project's merits and shortcomings. Speak at UP about the work done.

Sustainability:

Working with an organization that has distinguished themselves as an integral part of their community like Viva will be paramount to the success and sustainability of the project. Despite this, we understand that with any development comes unforeseen consequences and new challenges. Introducing a project with such big goals to a new community will involve trial and error sure to continue beyond our stay. We expect the biggest challenge will be uniting the people of Mamelodi to become active members of the project and that's why we've planned with Viva to make community involvement the focus during our stay. To account for this, we're considering a follow-up experience with the support from Dr. Leedy, director of the bi-yearly study abroad program in ZA. With Dr. Leedy's help, we will acquire insight into the project's future developments and also have future opportunities to connect UF students. We believe that achieving sustainability within a project involves making decisions that reflect an understanding of the interdependence in which everything exists. Good intentions aren't enough when measuring our success, and we want to promote similar thinking within the training workshops— encouraging locals to think globally but act locally.