

Violence Prevention through Community Development: The Centre for Peace Action Model

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Overt political violence in this country gets extensive coverage in local and international media and obscures the interpersonal violence which pervades our society. According to police statistics, there were many more cases of rape, assault, homicide and child abuse than cases of public violence in 1991. While police may have motivations for underplaying political violence, it remains true that the high profile of political violence occurs against the backdrop of largely invisible, yet endemic, interpersonal violence.

Furthermore, the origins of political violence are often understood to lie in political and socio-economic inequities, whereas interpersonal violence is explained in psychological or narrow legalistic terms, such as "criminality". This conceals the important point that, ultimately, each "type" of violence shades into and feeds upon the other - violence is always violent.

Prevention

A curative approach to the effects of interpersonal violence can strengthen the resilience of those who must return to the homes and communities in which the violence took place. But it could also entrench the myth that interpersonal violence is an individual phenomenon. It is, in fact, a social issue that should concern state and public bodies. The only good cure is cure offered in a social context in which prevention is emphasised.

For this reason, the Health Psychology Unit (UNISA) established the Eldorado Park Violence Prevention Programme in 1990. Eldorado Park is about 20km south west of Johannesburg, with an estimated population of 200 000, many of whom are unemployed or factory workers. The area is a product of apartheid, having been created 27 years ago, when so-called "coloured" people were removed from various areas around Johannesburg such as Sophiatown and Vrededorp. The programme is now called the Centre for Peace Action (CPA).

It was founded on the premise that it was necessary to introduce a combination of actions that flow from the top down and from the bottom up. Top down inter

ventions must address structural issues such as provision and monitoring of community friendly, accountable policing, improvement of living conditions and better access to good education.

Working From Below

However, because violence has become so common, many South Africans have coped with it by desensitising themselves to its occurrence and psychologically insulating themselves from its bloody horrors and its pervasive influence upon self-esteem, family life and social expectations. These effects can only be addressed by working from below and creating opportunities for ordinary people of all ages to explore and transform those facets of their own lives and environments that may have been distorted by the experience of apartheid and violence. Given the scope of the problem being addressed, an intervention such as the CPA can only be expected to have a measurable impact on violence levels in the medium to long term. This paper outlines our attempts to create a model which describes the CPA as it develops. The model is structured as a five-tier pyramid (see the table). In levels I and II (Achieving a Presence and Community Involvement), the CPA establishes itself in the community and initiates a process which results in Community Development (level III), which is a prerequisite for Attitude Change (IV) and ultimately a reduction in violence levels (V).

A Detailed View of the Centre for Peace Action Development Model:

↑ V. Violence Reduction

- Reported violence should increase, then peak and decline.
- Actual incidents of violence should become fewer relative to baseline measures and statistics from surrounding areas.
- There should be an increased perception of personal safety.
- Individuals should indulge in risky behaviour less often.
- Particular kinds of violence (for example, women abuse, corporal punishment, gang violence) should each decrease.

↑ IV. Attitude Change

- Feelings of hopelessness and disempowerment which may exist should subside; people should have stronger feelings of self-esteem and dignity.
- There should be greater awareness of and willingness to discuss women abuse; the stigma attached to rape and battery should disappear;
- women should be able to define the kind of oppression to which they are subjected.

- Gang violence should lose its glamour; violence should no longer be "cool".

III Community Development

- There should be a growing sense of community pride and power.
- The community should develop shared objectives, with tolerance for diversity.
- There should be numerous civic structures and groups (for example, support groups, income groups, child care groups, youth groups and small businesses) functioning autonomously from the programme.
- Existing structures should function more effectively, or (in the case of gangs) become involved in more beneficial activities.
- The programme should develop a separate identity from UNISA, becoming fully community controlled, and possibly state-funded.
- The programme should play a leading role with other community structures in developing a comprehensive health, social welfare and public safety policy for Eldorado Park; it should lobby the state for facilities.

II. Community Involvement

- The programme should offer numerous seminars, workshops, etc, geared towards community involvement.
- There should be numerous volunteer committees or groups, meeting regularly, receiving training and showing enthusiasm for their work.
- Individual counselling should become less important and group work more important.
- There should be a high through-flow of people from the community at the programme offices; people should feel comfortable about coming to the programme.
- Staff should spend much of their time outside the office.
- The programme should be seen to be offering facilities, particularly recreational facilities for youth.

I. Achieving a presence

- The programme should achieve a higher profile in the community.
- The Eldorado Park public should understand the types of services offered.
- More clients should report for counselling and other services and should express satisfaction with the service.

The CPA is currently operating mainly at levels I and II. Particular emphasis is being placed on the Centre's visibility and the degree and quality of community involvement in its activities. A movement into the arena of community development will now be under way. Activities targeted at the bottom three levels should also be expected to start having carry-over effects into levels IV and V. In other words, the pyramid should change shape over time. Some years from now, it should be roughly diamond-shaped, with the middle levels receiving most attention. Finally, it should assume an inverted pyramid shape (see the figure overleaf).

The CPA currently consists of eight core projects, namely women's services, violence intervention based at schools, family services, youth services, volunteer counselling training, small business development services, a history project and an outreach campaign. Three of these projects are briefly described below to illustrate the first three levels of the model and highlight the extent to which the CPA has succeeded in moving beyond cure and towards prevention.

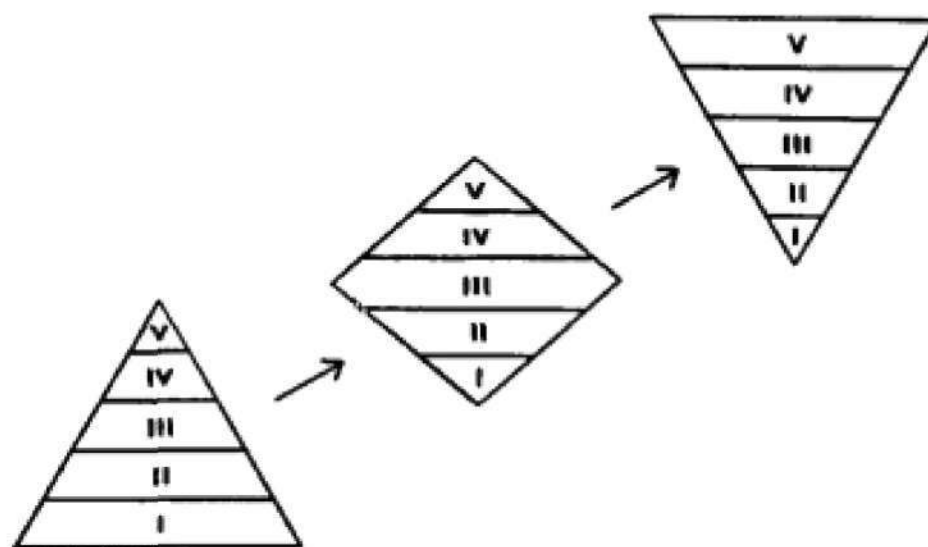
Achieving a presence: The Peace Action Campaign

A survey showed that only 10% of a sample of 100 Eldorado Park residents knew of the CPA's existence at the end of the first year of operation. A Peace Action Campaign was launched to increase the Centre's visibility and promote a culture of peace in the community. Presentations on topics relating to violence prevention were made at all 24 schools in Eldorado Park and Klipspruit West, some churches and nearby factories. Posters, banners and handbills were produced and distributed by schoolchildren. There were press releases to local and national media, radio talk shows and television appearances.

The campaign culminated in a Peace Action Week in October 1992. Individuals trained by the CPA, including volunteer counsellors and parent effectiveness trainees, graduated at an Honours Evening. Local artists, photographers and craftspeople displayed their work and dancers and rap artists performed. There was a Fun Day which included flea market stalls and various youth and family orientated activities. We have not evaluated the Campaign's impact by means of a survey, but there have been increased referrals and requests for workshops and presentations and it is clear that the Centre is considerably better known in the community.

Community Involvement: The History Project

The Eldorado Park History Project was set up so that residents can reclaim their history and culture and forge a constructive identity. The project is guided by a core



Changing Emphasis over Time. *Graphic: George Dor*

group from the community who meet weekly at the Centre to collate and edit information which has been gathered. Most information is collected through interviews with residents. The project is starting to feed information back to the community in the form of newsletters and exhibitions. It is setting in motion a process whereby knowledge is developed in and by the community, so as to reflect not only the "average" citizen's experience, but also that of individuals who are all too often side-lined in such initiatives, such as small-time gangsters, school drop-outs and shanty dwellers.

Community Development: The Small Business Project

The incidence of interpersonal violence is closely related to the availability of employment and the level of income. Therefore, the creation of income generating activities is central to a violence prevention programme. The CPA established a small business project for unemployed people. There is an intensive four week course in basic business skills and the Centre assists in raising capital to start up small businesses. It provides a consultancy and mentorship service to pre-empt crises in the new enterprises.

We have outlined a model to guide the continuing development and growth of the CPA, referring to three core projects in order to illustrate the first three developmental levels of the model - achieving a presence, engaging the community in the Centre's activities and working towards community development. It should not, however, be thought that the projects described fit neatly into different development levels, since each also has an impact at other levels. Thus the Peace Action Campaign, which was primarily intended to address level I, also resulted in a significantly increased degree of community participation (level II) and most probably had some impact at higher levels. However, the model helped to highlight



People need to reclaim their history and culture and forge a constructive identity. *Photo: Ismail Vawda*

the importance of attaining increased visibility first if the other aims of the CPA, including violence reduction, are to be met.

Broad-based and long-term interventions such as the CPA can easily lose focus, and both salaried and volunteer staff may find it difficult to relate current activities to the eventual goals of intervention. A developmental model such as that described here, provided it remains open to change and is not used prescriptively, can serve an invaluable function in orienting and structuring activities in terms of ultimate goals.

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