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## July 2024

**How close are we to our target of 10,000 books?**  
**More Mandela Month generosity**  
**Durban International Film Festival**  
**A visitor reflects on her time at the DHC**



**How many blankets??**



**The Arts at the DHC**



**Volunteering and reflecting**

### **¾ OF THE WAY TO OUR BOOK COLLECTION TARGET**

Everyone at the DHC has put their weight behind a Mandela-themed campaign with a difference – a month-long call-out to our supporters, churches, schools and the public, to collect 10,052 quality second-hand books for the **Street Lit booksellers**, one for every day Madiba spent in prison.

To make it easier for people to drop off books, we partnered with about 20 churches and organisations throughout greater Durban, who generously agreed to be collection points for us. Some of them have been so awash with donations that we have been doing weekly pick ups from them throughout July. Musgrave Methodist and St Cyprians Church have been particularly popular with literally hundreds of books being dropped off weekly. One committed 11-year-old supporter, Milan Edwards, even ran his own book drive at school and was featured in the paper!

At time of going to press, we had counted 7,516 books that have made their way to our bookstore so far. But our driver, Lindani Ngubane, in our smart red book-branded Duster, continues to collect from drop-off points throughout the city and will carry on doing so during the first week of August.

The campaign has captured the imagination of the media – we have had some great coverage for the project: front page of various newspapers, features on SABC TV news (click here to watch), Late Edition on DSTV; Lotus FM; SAFM and Caxton newspapers. Moreover, Independent Newspapers have been our supportive media partner, and also a venue partner – collecting books from staff and readers for us.

This very ambitious project would not have been possible without the incredible help of Mette Bunyan and Peter Hattingh – the two amazing book shop volunteers who have spent most of their July carrying, counting, cleaning, sorting and filing books; St John Ambulance and Eye Care who have given us a training room and infrastructure for the month so we can process the donations; and Street Lit vendor Thami Shangu who has helped us repurpose non-viable books.

Thank you too to all those who have donated books, and to the venue host partners who have generous enough to assist in making it convenient for people to drop off books across the city. The vendors are absolutely overwhelmed by the generosity of the Durban public in supporting their project. We have had some awesome and generous donations. By next month we will give you the final figure but we are feeling confident we will reach 10,000!

*(Photo: this picture of our vendors and volunteers was taken by Shelley Kjonstad and appeared on the front page of the Independent on Saturday – our media partner in this campaign.)*



## GENEROSITY ON MANDELA DAY AND BEYOND

One of the focuses of Mandela Day around the world each year is volunteering. Whilst we appreciate the special things that people do on 18 July, we are really grateful for the assistance we get at the DHC from volunteers all year round so now is a good opportunity to honour all of them.

Our volunteers include specialists such as Dr Stephen Carpenter and Dr Don O'Mahoney who help out in our clinic every week. We are always keen to hear from other medical professionals who are willing to give their time. Our empowerment and Street Lit programmes also rely on regular specialist volunteers who help, week in and week out.

But our largest area of volunteering is of course the kitchen: without volunteers we would not have been able to serve over 91,000 meals in the first 6 months of 2024, already 9% ahead of 2023. We are grateful to regular groups like the ladies from Seva, Saroj and Ugene, and school groups like Holy Family College and St Henry's Marist College. In July, we saw the return of Fatima Dominican Convent School and also corporates like Norton Rose Fulbright and Dream Property Holdings. We also received sandwiches from groups such as Clifton School and Maris Stella – always useful, but do please [contact us in advance](#). And we have also had wonderful donations of ingredients which is especially important because we have needed to buy more food this year than ever before.

A wholly unexpected and overwhelming donation was over 200 blankets that were collected by the Early Learning School at Reddam House encouraged by Nicky Cummings (*see photo at the top*).

On Mandela Day itself, we were pleased to welcome a group that uses our venue for training. This was the Young Leaders Academy sponsored by Islamic Relief and they wanted to encourage their participants to contribute through volunteering. About forty young people spent time in teams with black bin bags working in areas of the city near the DHC and around the Cathedral, carrying out a much needed clean up (*see photo below*).

We also had some overseas volunteers in the form of students from St Joseph's Jesuit University in Philadelphia. They are involved in a programme of learning how to listen attentively and then use different media to tell stories. A lovely summary article of the work of the DHC and the Napier Centre was captured in an article posted on their university e-zine. [Click here to read more](#).

Meanwhile Thusa, who are our long-standing and supportive IT consultants, showed their commitment to volunteering by conducting a training session with all our staff and interns advising us on how to use our cellphones more efficiently.

On Mandela Day, in Mandela Month and throughout the year, we really appreciate the generosity with which people give their time and their talents to help organisations like the DHC support those in need in our country. [Contact us](#) if you want to know more about volunteering or donating.



## PARTICIPATING IN THE DURBAN FILM FESTIVAL

We are honoured to partner with the Centre for Creative Arts of UKZN for a number of their festivals. So one morning in July, about 50 people gathered in the Gandhi-Luthuli Peace Hall at the DHC to watch films as part of the Durban International Film Festival's community outreach programme. The DHC has always hosted this to make films accessible to our homeless community – and anyone else who wants to join in. And this year was no exception.

The package consisted of five short films by emerging South African film makers: 'Marie', 'Take a seat', 'The Wait', 'Keba Interrupted' and 'Middle of Somewhere'. Plus, there was an extra treat in the presence of an Iranian director, Aryasb Feiz, who has been making movies for 15 years. He has spent the last six years making an animation feature that he was showing at DIFF 2024 called 'Tomorrow'. After the screening, he engaged in a great Q&A with the group. Many people asked him what was his motivation for making movies and he explained that he wanted to deal with the moral dilemmas of life in Tehran but using animation to make it more accessible. His motivation came from his own personal experience in his home town.

This was the second showing of this movie in South Africa and it was the first time that he, as director, had been able to watch the movie with an audience which had not been pre-planned and prepared. Feiz commented on how he enjoyed watching the audience's engagement, demonstrating that the movie can make connections across cultural lines and language differences.

At the DHC we remain committed to working with artists and curators who understand how effective the arts can be communicating with people from all walks of life, when given the opportunity. A simple comment from one member of the audience: "Thank you for coming to share this movie with us: we really appreciate it."

*Photo: Aryasb Feiz, Iranian film-maker, enjoys watching his film in an unusual venue and with a very different audience.*



## STREET LIVING EXPOSURE

*Nomaswazi Kanyile is a member of Grace Family Church who volunteered during Street Store in June. She came back in July to visit the area and wrote this thoughtful reflection.*

I am conscious of how often I drive past the street-living brothers and sisters around the city in my vehicle with an automated locking system. My first instinct is usually to re-check if my doors are locked rather than to smile or pray. But what if I shifted my prayers from my own safety to their refuge? I could pray for God to secure the air they breathe, for relief from their past and present pains, for security in their hope, sanctuary for their peace, a haven for their dignity, safety for their hearts, and the safekeeping of their gentle spirits. I could pray that they have access to life's essentials—food, clothing, a

home, identification, medication, and a smile.

A few Saturdays ago, I took my kids to the Denis Hurley Centre for a street living exposure event organised by Grace Family Church and led by Dave Ritcher. This was my second visit to the centre, following last month's event where the needy were given a Street Store experience.

Giving often comes naturally to many, but last month was particularly special for me. It wasn't just the continuous devotion of the church management team to touching lives, or the selfless congregation who emptied their closets to almost fill a massive steel container with beautiful, clean clothes, some brand new. It was the dignity of the cause and the reaffirmation of God's true love that made the experience extraordinary. The entire experience left me in a state of amazement. It was the grace to have accepted God's invitation to be part of this venture and this church. The rest was just love and joy as people's dignity was restored.

This return Saturday had a different complexion when I decided to help in the kitchen while we waited. Paul Radebe, the caretaker, asked who was there for the first time, and when I said I was, he invited me to walk outside to pray for the people. As I followed him and looked at the crowd, I prayed for God to take over. In those few seconds, I realized I had been surrounded by abundance. My morning prayer often started with gratitude for waking up in a warm bed with lights, water, and shelter. This time, I felt a powerful calling, and I trusted God to take over. It became apparent that my day would be very different.

Around 8:30, we joined the Grace group and began the schedule, learning about the centre's history and the amazing work done to uplift spirits. What stood out most was the staff's determination to make the centre feel welcoming, free, and warm for those it serves. In the kitchen, as Stuart Talbot and Ma'Ndlovu spoke about the centre's operations pre- and post-COVID, my eyes were drawn to three brothers from the streets, in dirty clothes, waiting quietly for their clothes to be washed. They looked comfortable and at home, showing that the centre is a true haven for them.

Later, we were put into smaller groups each hosted by a centre volunteer. Our host, who remains in my mind, had run away from home in 2019, hitchhiking from one vehicle to the next until he reached Durban. He shared the reason for leaving his home, who he had left behind, and his desire to return. "But my past does not yet justify it. It is too soon," he said. His eyes showed hurt and pain as he described the child and parents he deeply loves and had left behind, indicating it was too soon to face the reason he left.

I was challenged to revisit my own forgiveness folder and ask myself if I have forgiven those who wronged me. Are they feeling trapped and homeless in their bodies, thinking I have not forgiven them? Surely his family must wonder of his whereabouts. What pain could he be going through to assume that street living is better than it all? Another call to you and me to keep forgiving and letting people know we have, not just earthly forgiveness but that of God.

We then enjoyed a walk around the Warwick Markets under the bridge leading into the city. We were told it is as successful as the Pavilion Centre, and I believe it in its well-organised chaos. We walked through the bead selling foyer, and then followed a tunnel into an area that opened into different sections, including an African chemist with traditional doctors, a shweshwe clothing section, restaurant tables, a church clothing section, a train station, and finally a view of the graveyard before returning to the centre for a debrief.

The energy of the whole visit was warm, full of life and hope, perhaps from the prayers of the many. What was missing was more from us, with bigger and better generosity or just a hug to give people the assurance that God's love has no boundary!

I am profoundly grateful for the experience of helping the most vulnerable in society: the homeless and the poor. Restoring their dignity and making their load a little lighter, particularly as they face the colder winter nights, has been a humbling and rewarding journey. Our responsibility as Christians is to give hope to the hopeless, to restore smiles instead of shedding tears, and to bring warmth where there is cold. It is our duty to extend compassion and love, ensuring that no one feels abandoned or forgotten. May we always play our part in making the world a better place, one act of kindness at a time.

What an experience—I need to go back!

(We are happy to organise visits to the DHC, the market, the Cathedral and the Mosque with our partners IPCI, for groups large and small. Feel free to contact us by email.)



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