



Scalabrini
Centre of Cape Town

LAWRENCE HOUSE

IMPACT REPORT 2020

by Giulia Treves, Lawrence House Manager



OVERVIEW

Needless to say that we didn't anticipate that 2020 would turn out the way it did. What happened the few months before the lockdown is a vague memory. What we do know is that we were set and ready with great programmes and partners to implement a holistic therapeutic and developmental programme pack, inclusive of a gala event to celebrate our 15th anniversary.

Lockdown at Lawrence House essentially meant for staff to deliver the same work load without any external support, hence no interns, no cooking volunteers, no tutors, no mentors but with the addition of the most arduous task, namely that of home-schooling 25 young people from Grade R to matric. For the young people lockdown meant continue daily living with less support (no sports clubs, no external programmes, no tutor, no mentor, etc.) and no physical contact with friends and family.

Once you strip a child and youth care centre and its residents of all its social connections, you are left with a very small world. We needed collectively to rethink how to live everyday while not neglecting the many known needs of the young people in care and carefully observing possible new difficulties emerging. We produced numerous daily routine and schedules as we moved from the various lockdown levels. Safety and containment were the staff's priorities, and proved challenging as children went back to school, and rules and risk level changed. Our residents found this especially difficult.

Albeit many daily challenges, staff members were impressed with the young people's ability to ultimately cope so well under the circumstances and it made us reflect about the life journeys of the children and youth in our care: having their lives turned upside down from one day to the next... having no control about what happens next...not being touch with the people they care about... Migrant and refugee children have experienced this before and maybe it was those survival skills which had brought them to to their present resilience.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The safety and well-being of all was a prerogative throughout 2020. Much effort and energy was applied to creating procedures to ensure that Lawrence House put all that was possible in place in terms of prevention. We are grateful that we have so far managed to keep everybody safe and have not experienced any positive COVID-19 cases at the facility. This was possible thanks to the relentless work of our staff team who also adapted their private lives, given their deep sense of service and commitment to Lawrence House. Being an essential worker brings about additional responsibilities and all responded to the call.

A common phrase in child and youth care work is that “every crisis is an opportunity”, with the obvious crisis being the lockdown and the opportunity being to focus on the people within Lawrence House. Relationships and hence our daily interactions became the centre of action through which each young person’s developmental goals needed to be achieved. Especially during the hard lockdown our child and youth care workers could focus on their lifespace work and dedicate time to be with all residents. It allowed us to spend more quality time and therefore to observe behaviours and interactions among all children and youth more consistently. While we are impressed with the overall adaptability of all to the new-normal, at the same time we gained greater insight in the difficulties many of our beneficiaries have in interacting with each other, resisting negative peer pressure, self-motivating and keeping oneself busy.

We identified the need to strengthen our practice to be more efficient in our daily interventions in terms of containment and support. We identified a trauma-informed approach as the most suitable methodology to address this and have already laid the groundwork to train and introduce this care practice in the new year.

With the progressive easing of the lockdown levels Lawrence House adopted a cautious approach to resume activities that became available and allowing support staff and volunteers to resume their presence and service at Lawrence House. What remained restricted was the possibility of children and youth being placed out, with the main limitation being mandatory quarantine upon return to the facility. In essence this meant that if the previous year nobody spent Christmas at Lawrence House, 2020 saw 18 of the 25 residents not seeing their families or host families over the festive season. While this was difficult for all, it was once again an opportunity for staff to make the difference. All shift staff worked through the festivities to ensure Christmas became a memorable and joyful time.



LOOKING FORWARD

Each new year brings the hope to apply the learnings from the previous year and continue grow. We look forward to enriching our care methodology and take time as a team to reflect, reset and regroup after the roller-coaster of 2020. We have some exciting processes and activities planned for our young people to further their individual growth journeys... lastly, given that we cancelled our 15th anniversary, we hope to at least have a sweet 16 party in 2021!

A WORD OF THANKS

A special word of thanks to all our sponsors and friends for supporting us throughout these difficult times as well as to our generous board members for their guidance and care.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Department of Social Development, the National Lottery Commission, the Holy Childhood Commission, the HCI Foundation, Refinitiv Charities, the Bern Catholic Church and all International Scalabrini networks for their financial support.



The centre is registered with the South African Department of Social Development as a non-profit organisation (021-079 NPO), as a youth and child care centre (C7569) and as a Public Benefit Organisation with the South African Revenue Services (930012808) and governed by a Trust (IT2746/2006).
Auditors: CAP Chartered Accountants.

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