

## Presentation for the 'Socio-Economic Rights of Older Persons' Workshop

22<sup>nd</sup> Feb 2011

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### **STTOP:**

In October 2009, major issues facing organisations working within the Older Persons' Sector were discussed at a meeting of workers in the Sector, and suggestions were made for addressing them directly and effectively. The main outcome of the workshop was the creation of a Sector Task Team for the Older Person (**STTOP**), made up of workshop delegates, with a brief to investigate the possibilities in creating a sector-wide funding body with the necessary profile to attract large-scale funding from national and international sources to help address the financial challenges facing the Sector.

STTOP's active membership comprises representatives from the following Sector organisations - Abbeyfield South Africa, Cape Provincial Welfare Organisation for the Aged (CPOA), Communicare, Dementia SA, GH Starke and Rehoboth Centres, Grandmothers against Poverty and AIDS (GAPA), Ikamva Labantu, Neighbourhood Old Age Homes (NOAH), the Western Cape Older Person's Forum (WCOPF) and Nobuntu – who have come together for the common good. Since November 2009, monthly meetings have been held to identify the key sector issues and discuss ways in which they can be most appropriately addressed.

It soon became evident that in order for STTOP to have any measure of success in attracting such funding, a track record of engagement on key sector issues would be necessary to demonstrate commitment, experience, capacity and knowledge.

The recent promulgation of the regulations to the Older Person's Act of 2006 has provided a catalyst for STTOP to advance the interests of the sector through collective engagement with the Western Cape Provincial Government. The purpose in making this contact is to find out how best to establish a robust partnership between the Western Cape Provincial Government and STTOP while raising the profile of STTOP. The motivation for seeking such a partnership is to make 'active ageing in the community' a concrete reality for all older persons living in the Western Cape, as well as, promoting best practice, innovation and sustainability within the Older Persons' Sector.

STTOP's sector activities and the joint initiatives by its partner organisations are helping STTOP develop a credible track record of achievement.

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### **Abbeyfield SA and NOAH: community-based housing for independent older people**

1.) Marie has been a farm worker all her life. Her daughter died of AIDS and she spent the last 15 years bringing up her daughters two little boys who are now adult and have left home. Her husband Charlie, who worked on the farm, died of cancer last year and since then has had to share her bed with two of her cousin's teenage children. The farmer wants Marie out and we can understand his point of view; he

needs the house for another worker to take Charlie's place. She has absolutely nowhere to go and has never lived in a village, much less a town. She is a simple, good farm woman who is now terrified about how she will spend the rest of her life. So, what are we doing about our elderly farm workers whom no one wants but who need to stay connected to their own farm worker communities?

2.) Sannah is living in a rural village. She has been a grape picker all her life. She is now a widow living in a back yard shack with her daughter and two teenagers, one of whom is a tik addict. She has a terrible life. She is frightened and she sees no hope for the future. Yet twice a week in the afternoons she voluntarily goes round to the local community centre and mops the floors after the children have been there for homework supervision. She also makes sandwiches and hands them out to hungry children at some of the local schools. She's a good, good lady and she doesn't deserve to be so scared, to live like this. This is just one of hundreds of rural villages throughout our province where elderly people such as Sannah are facing the future fearfully, living in horrible conditions.

No one can seriously talk about the notions of active ageing in the community, the socio-economic right to decent housing and social security if older persons do not have access to safe and affordable housing that costs no more than a third of their pension and provides the basis for active ageing in the community.

This is where NOAH and Abbeyfield South Africa (ASA) come in...

For the past 22 years NOAH and ASA have been committed to promoting the quality of life of older people in South Africa. We act in response to homelessness, abuse and loneliness amongst the elderly, by working with community volunteers to set up small 'family-style' homes. These homes are safe, friendly spaces where elderly men and women can live in ordinary houses, in ordinary streets, and remain connected to, and involved in, their own communities for as long as possible.

It is a simple concept of companionable living, but it has had remarkable results. Older people living in our homes tend to stay healthy and productive much longer simply because they still feel valued, are still productive members of their communities, and most of all are not lonely.

Some of our guiding principles include:

- Affirming that older people have an important role to play amongst their families, friends and in the community.
- Overcoming homelessness, loneliness and insecurity can make all the difference to an older person's well-being and quality of life.
- Local people have an essential part to play in helping older people in their community.

Today ASA has 21 houses, 18 homes dotted around the Western Cape, 2 in Joburg and 1 in Durban. NOAH has 12 houses within the Cape Town metropolitan area. We have done well but there is much more that we can, and should, be doing.

We need to be present, not only in the suburbs but all over, and that includes urban shack settlements, peri-urban and rural towns and also amongst those very poor workers living on farms...all of them!

We will and must remain dedicated to opening doors wherever there are groups of people in the community who want to see older people accommodated and cared for in a dignified way. Pensioners living on R1080 a month can still afford dignified life.

Once an ASA or NOAH home, it's likely to remain an Abbeyfield / NOAH home, transforming lives for generations of older people who'll be able to use it as a refuge from being abandoned, lonely and poor. Our model is cost effective, sustainable and most importantly replicable. The spirit of the Act is Active Ageing – and here's your model - a community self-help idea that really works and it really does work for all communities, from the more affluent areas to the poorest urban and rural communities.

One of the creative ways in which to mobilise people in communities around the needs of a particular group of people such as the elderly, is through community **enumerations** - a conscious strategy of self-surveying that allows the community to be part of the process, to take ownership and strengthen unity.

Data from this profiling exercise is utilised to constructively engage with government for the benefit of the most marginalised and poorest. This research has little value if it does not contribute tangibly and directly to a material improvement in the lives of a certain group of people. In our case here accommodation and care for older people.

We have started to use this people-driven data gathering process to focus on addressing the needs of older persons by engaging with stakeholders and especially poor communities to find ways to work together to deal with issues such as health and homelessness. This is a powerful means of community mobilisation where we start to put older people on the map.

Today enumerations open space for dialogue and help the state to develop responses that are humane, participatory and inclusive.

How do we attempt to promote active ageing if older person's basic and most fundamental socio-economic right to decent housing is not met?

ASA and NOAH believe in community partnerships, engaging with government and other organisations and even adding value to already existing programmes. *We have a non-institutional cost effective model of community-based housing for independent older people that works*; now to replicate it, and in order to do that effectively, we believe that 4 crucial elements are needed:

- 1. Community by-in (community enumerations)**
- 2. Access to land**
- 3. Capital development**

#### 4. Endowment

In the province alone we have over 200 000 social pensioners with only 14 000 state subsidised housing opportunities, most of which go to assisted living and frail care facilities. If National, Provincial and local Government are not able to provide us with the necessary capital, okay then, but we should at least be able to put pressure on our Municipalities and the Province to allocate us land. We then need to appeal to the Corporate Social Investment Sector and Public Sector for the capital investment. And finally we turn to the pensioners themselves for the long term sustainability – giving them the dignity knowing that they’re participating in their own future.

We’re serious about this: we have a rapidly ageing population and a real accommodation crisis for social pensioners and this has no way of improving unless we’re assisted with the necessary resources.

So – the need for this kind of housing is enormous – from the top to the bottom of our country. We just need to have the courage and commitment to respond – and be open to change, in some instances, in the way we do things to suit the specific needs of different cultures. But most importantly meeting the very similar needs that all elderly people have for comfort, safety, friendship and community.

Thank you.

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