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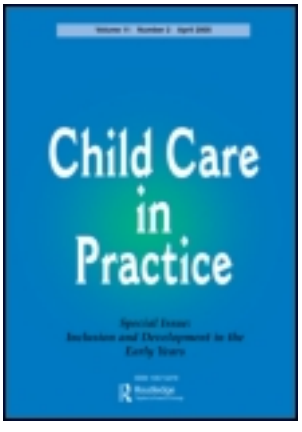

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Project Lungisela: Supporting Young People Leaving State Care in South Africa

Carly Tanur

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This paper focuses on appropriate responses to the unique challenges faced by young people at risk who are transitioning out of state care in South Africa. Specific lessons are drawn from Project Lungisela, a youth leaving care programme created to assist young people leaving state care in Khayelitsha, Cape Town. Project Lungisela was initiated by Mamelani Projects, a local non-governmental organisation, in response to the need for support services for youth transitioning out of care, particularly from State children's homes. Support for this target group is neither a well-established nor adequately funded service in South Africa. Most of the children who have participated in the programme have at some stage in their life lived on the street, and many have survived through petty crime with accompanying substance abuse and little or no traditional family support structures. All have exited state care at age 18, as mandated by state regulations for minors attaining the legal age of majority. This paper examines the particular needs of these young people at risk, the interventions implemented to adequately prepare them for leaving state care, the type of support services offered in moving towards independence, the challenges experienced, as well as relevant programme components. The skill of interdependent living is specifically highlighted in preference to independent living skills. This shifts the focus away from young people meeting all of their own needs, to being able to connect them with other young people, to develop networks of support, and to access resources in their community to meet their various needs. This approach has recently been adapted for work with youth who have grown up in foster care. Lessons learnt from working with both target groups are shared in this paper.

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Overview of Youth in Transition and the Need for Programmes for Youth Leaving Care

Young people transitioning out of state care require specialised support in order to cope with the pressures of adult life. This transition is a major life event for young people moving on, usually at the age of 18 as legal adults. Care leavers are expected to move from depending on a range of support structures to being self sufficient (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006). Mendes (2009) points out that young people leaving state care are possibly one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society in that they face unique challenges in accessing opportunities necessary for this transition and development.

International research shows that transition from placement to independent living can place increasing pressure on young people who are already at high risk or vulnerable (Williams, 2011). Such individuals face the prospect of losing most of the economic, social, and emotional support previously provided, given that they are now viewed legally as adults and, therefore, presumed capable of caring for themselves. However, many young people at the age of 18 do not yet possess the necessary skills to survive without the support of the welfare system. The abrupt termination of state support at age 18 results in poor outcomes for youth leaving care, who still require the safety net of ongoing financial, social and emotional support and nurturing traditionally offered by families of origin at this time (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006). They are often unprepared for the realities of life's challenges (Atkinson, 2008; Tweddle, 2007; Williams, 2011). Mike Stein (2005) speaks of how young people leaving care are forced to become 'instant adults', who in many cases struggle to cope with life's challenges once they have left care. Stein (2005) also points out that care-leavers have to deal with major changes in their lives at a far younger age than other young people, such as setting up home and starting to work. Gelling (2009) adds that young people who have grown up in care may not cope with the pressures of everyday life as well as their peers.

Youth transitioning out of care face significant health, social and educational challenges including homelessness, involvement in juvenile crime and prostitution, mental and physical health problems, poor educational outcomes, and inadequate social support systems (Cashmore & Paxman, 2006; Maunders et al., 1999; Mendes, 2009; Stein, 2008). Youth who have grown up in care, many of whom have experienced multiple traumas and have lived on the street, lack the skills necessary for independent living such as time management, money management, grocery shopping, managing a bank account and cooking (Atkinson, 2008).

International research on youth leaving care has indicated a disturbing pattern of poor outcomes for youth who are no longer in the formal care system. Transience was common; more than one-third required social income assistance; nearly one-third were parents; one-half were concerned about their physical health; and one-half reported they suffered from depression (Tweddle, 2007). Youth indicated that aside from the loss of relationships, the most challenging aspect of leaving care was the financial difficulty that they faced. After-care programmes are therefore vital to

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ensure improved outcomes for youth leaving care, both in preparing youth to exit care and in providing support post care (Atkinson, 2008; Barth, 1990; Mallon, 1998). Pinkerton (2011) suggests that a planned and properly managed preparation process for leaving care is needed. He also suggests that the process is introduced as early on in care as possible, with direct involvement of the young person in the process.

The Context for Youth in the Western Cape, South Africa

South African legislation, in particular the Children's Act of South Africa 1983, calls on Child and Youth Care Centres and Cluster Foster Schemes to offer transitional support to youth leaving care as noted in the following sections:

(a) Section 191(3)(e) states that, in addition to residential care programmes, a child and youth care centre may also offer programmes either for children in their care or children living at home that include "transitional programmes to assist children leaving the facility after they reach the age of 18".
(b) Regulations 69–71 regarding cluster foster schemes states that "the best interests of the children in cluster foster care must be promoted through the provision of prescribed types of services", specifically services that "assist a young person with the transition when leaving cluster foster care after reaching the age of 18".

It is important to note that the Children's Act mentions preparation and support for transition from care but does not mention the specific services that provide adequate after-care support once youth have exited state care. Although preparation for transition and after-care support is mentioned in the legislation, these are new areas of work in South Africa, and are largely underdeveloped. In the Western Cape, there are less than five post-18 transition to independent living programmes and very few child and youth care centres focus on preparation for leaving care. Child and youth care workers nationwide are not trained to facilitate programmes that meet the specific needs of young people transitioning out of care. Training for this specific need does not exist, although efforts are underway to develop more focused training materials.

Although the focus of Mamelani's Youth Leaving Care Programme has been on developing independent living skills, one of our core findings from the last five years is that complete independence is not a reality for marginalised young people in South Africa. While these programmes should impart independent living skills, the skill of interdependent living is more relevant and culturally appropriate in this context. By interdependent living skills, the organisation refers to skills for building healthy relationships and for building the capacity to access resources from within a resource-poor setting. This ties into the notion of *Ubuntu*, an African philosophy of realising the personal through the communal. This shifts the focus away from young people meeting all of their own needs to enabling them to develop networks of support, made up of connections with other young people and members of the broader community and in this way to better access the resources that exist around them to meet their various needs. This affirms Ungar's (2005) understanding of

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resilience, which states "children's resilience is as dependent on what is built inside them as what is built around them" (p. 429).

Mamelani believes that resilience is dependent on both individual capacities, as well as access to structural resources, relationships and key networks of support. A strong feature of the work therefore focuses on helping youth find ways to actively develop resources and support networks within their own communities, to understand how to access support and care, and to help create cohesion amongst themselves as young people, as well as their communities.

A Developmental Framework for Youth Leaving Care in South Africa

Background Information on Mamelani Projects and Youth Leaving Care

Project Lungisela is a programme developed by Mamelani Projects over the last five years in response to the needs of young people leaving Elukhuselweni Children's Home, a residential home for boys who have lived on the street in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, South Africa. Elukhuselweni caters for boys in need of care and protection who are between the ages of eight and 18. The child and youth care centre falls under the umbrella of the Homestead, Projects for Street Children, one of the largest organisations in South Africa working with street children. Prior to the initiation of Project Lungisela, many of the youth leaving care did not have access to the support they required to survive and many returned to the street. Since the inception of Mamelani's programme in 2006, less than 10% of the youth in the programme have landed back on the street.

The Youth Leaving Care Programme has been informed mostly by ongoing action and reflection, responding to the needs of the young people in the programme. Mamelani Projects has drawn on research from international sources largely because South African research on the topics of youth leaving care programmes and of transitioning out of state care is severely limited. These areas of study and work are still developing in South Africa and, as a result, very little local research exists. To date, it seems that very limited research has been published about youth leaving care in South Africa (Van Breda, Marx, & Kader, 2012).

Principles Underlying Mamelani Projects' Development Practice

An action learning approach is central to the practice. Action learning implies learning from one's actions. Many of the lessons gathered by the organisation have been developed through reflection on experiences in the programme. This methodology is utilised by programme staff to develop the programme, but also by youth in the programme to reflect on their own progress. At the end of each quarter, project staff sit together and reflect on the previous months, assess what has worked and what has been challenging, attempt to understand the underlying causes of the challenges and adjust programme plans for the next quarter based on these reflections.

In the last year, Mamelani's Programme has made a significant shift from being programme-centred to being *youth-centred*. Mamelani continues to see the

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components of the programme as vehicles for change, but has intentionally chosen to work with young people in a way that places the young person at the centre of the work, and not the outcomes of each intervention. Each young person is seen as a unique individual with different needs and capabilities, each requiring a tailored intervention to address these specific needs. In order to best support these young people, the focus is placed on strengthening relationships, developing a positive identity and building resilience. Mamelani strengthens resilience through increasing self-worth, developing stronger inter-personal relationships and networks of support.

Youth workers are encouraged to work from a strengths-based approach; to pitch interventions appropriately; to ensure sufficient one-on-one time; and to encourage young people to learn from one other. This development practice enables youth workers to reflect critically on themselves and their work in an ongoing way and thus strengthen their ability to creatively adapt to the changing needs of the programme. The Mamelani Youth Leaving Care Programme has been developed through reflecting on the experience of working directly with these young people.

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Youth Leaving Care Programme—Project Lungisela

The purpose of Mamelani's Programme is to enable young people who have left care to have a stronger sense of identity. This is done by building on existing strengths, reconnecting to community and encouraging healthy inter-dependence. In this way, the lives and experiences of young people leaving care can be transformed.

Programme Development

In 2006 Mamelani Projects began to offer support to young people exiting care in Khayelitsha. At this time, on a very small budget, the organisation offered weekly life-skills sessions preparing youth for leaving care and minimal financial support for education for those who had left care. Initial outcomes were extremely poor as the young people who left care could not face the challenges once they were living back in the community. Many had not completed school, and lacked skills to access employment. Through action reflection processes over the following two years, Mamelani developed a range of programme components to ensure youth had access to adequate support and were not made more vulnerable upon exiting care.

The organisation has, in recent years, examined and applied the recommendations of international research relating to successful youth leaving care programmes, including those that provide access to continuity of care through transition, educational and employment support, independent living skills, mentoring and building resilience (Van Breda et al., 2012). As much as is possible, these components have been included as part of the programme, although limited resources are available to offer the same level of financial support as is offered in the United Kingdom, for example.

A key lesson learned in the first three years of the programme was that while preparation for leaving care is important, without adequate after-care support, in the

South African context, youth are unable to cope with the challenges they face. Another lesson was when youth experience too many transitions too close together, the accumulated pressures were often too high for them to cope. This became evident when youth were expected to transition from care to community, from school to skills training, and from dependence to independence all within the first year of exiting care. As a result, the programme now works with youth in two phases:

- *Phase 1: preparation for transitioning out of care* (for youth still living in a children's home). This phase focuses on life skills necessary to prepare children for the transition from care. This is provided for one year before the young person exits care. This takes the form of weekly group sessions, focusing on experiential learning, as well as individual sessions focusing on preparing emotionally and practically for the transition.
- *Phase 2: after-care support* (for youth who have transitioned out of care and are still attending school/skills training). This phase supports youth in transition, through one-on-one mentoring and group support. The focus is on supporting the young people in completing their education or skills training and on creating sustainable livelihoods. This process includes educational support, career guidance, job-seeking support, internship and job placement. During this phase, emphasis is placed on developing a network of support, accessing employment and on strengthening the young people's ability to offer support to one another.

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The Particular Needs of Young People Leaving Care

Young people leaving care in South Africa are essentially offered no state support when transitioning out of care. From Mamelani Projects' experience, the challenges faced by care-leavers globally are similar to youth leaving care in South Africa, namely homelessness, involvement in juvenile crime and prostitution, mental and physical health problems, poor educational outcomes, and inadequate social support systems (Cashmore & Paxman 2006; Maunders et al., 1999; Mendes 2009; Stein, 2008).

Over and above the challenges associated with transitioning from care, many care-leavers face widespread challenges endemic to South Africa. Youth unemployment is as high as 70%, with almost three million youth between 18 and 24 years unemployed and not in education or training (National Youth Development Agency, 2011). Khayelitsha, where the children's home is based, is made up of a very young population, with 75% under the age of 35 and 29% younger than 14 years. One-third of all young people between 15 and 34 years old live in a youth headed household (National Youth Development Agency, 2011). Unsurprisingly, this reality is accompanied by high levels of tobacco, drug and alcohol abuse in and out of school. Young people also face mental illness and suicide, violence and trauma. Youth aged 14–25 represented 35.4% of the total prison population in 2008/09 with reports of high rates of recidivism—offenders are mostly young men (National Youth Development Agency, 2011). South Africa has one of the highest HIV infection

rates in the world, with an HIV infection rate for people between the ages of 15 and 49 as high as 17.8% (UNAIDS, 2010).

While Cape Town is seen as a world-class city, South Africa still has millions of shack dwellers in need of shelter, resulting in severe structural violence disproportionately aimed at people who are poor, black, and female. There are close to one million people living in shacks or sub-standard housing in the city. In Cape Town, there are more than 400,000 families on the official waiting list in a city that builds 11,000 units per year (Williams, 2007). Although enshrined as a right in the South African constitution, which in 1994 promised access to housing for all, the waiting list is more than 50 years long (Benson, 2012).

These socio-economic conditions plague the communities young people transition to when they leave care. In the Mamelani Projects' programme, as a result of widespread poverty, many care-leavers are not only under pressure to meet their own needs upon leaving care, but in some cases are expected to meet the needs of their extended families. Many have lost parents to HIV, or have been placed in care as a result of substance abuse and sexual violence, factors that have not been resolved when exiting from care. Issues of gang violence and substance abuse remain part of their daily life experience.

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Programme Components and Implications for Practice

Mamelani's approach to supporting care-leavers

Mendes and Moslehuddin (2006) echo Mamelani's belief that transition from care needs to be a more gradual and flexible process based on levels of maturity and skill development, rather than simply age. Youth in Mamelani's programme engage with the organisation one year before leaving care, to prepare emotionally and practically for the transition out of care. The transition from care is characterised by increased behavioural problems, almost always associated with their fears around leaving care. As more and more young people in the programme have made a success of their lives, the programme has been able to draw on their stories and provide hope to those who are struggling. Mamelani invites youth who have left care in the last five years to come back and speak to the group who are about to exit, sharing how they have coped with challenges and what they are doing with their lives. Hearing the stories of peers from the same background has helped to shift negative perceptions about the future, offering hope of success. One participant shared: "This is the only space where my voice is heard and my experiences have value, being able to support and mentor somebody else makes me feel good and gives me dignity" (Mamelani Programme Feedback, 2010). While parts of the programme take the format of group work, Mamelani Projects is aware young people leaving care often have different developmental needs and therefore require individual support.

Individual work

For Mamelani, the outcome of successful individual work is a shared understanding of the young person's journey in his/her life; a healthy relationship between the young

person and the facilitator and a stronger sense of agency in the young person relating to his/her experiences. If this space is created, the young person is able to move through challenges and milestones with support, affirmation and guidance; he/she is able to learn from his/her mistakes and celebrate his/her victories. Through this process, the young person is able to build a more positive sense of self and move positively towards self-actualisation.

The intention behind the individual work is two-fold. Firstly, it is a reflective space, where the young person is able to explore and make visible the young person's experiences. The one-on-one time provides a safe space, with the necessary focus and attention for the young person to reflect on his/her own development. Secondly, it is the space where the collaborative relationship between the young person and the facilitator is developed and strengthened.

Within the individual work, identity is built and reconstructed by making connections between the young person's day-to-day experience and their sense of self. This is done by identifying, affirming and building on the young person's strengths. During the individual sessions, facilitators reflect on progress or challenges relating to issues identified in a way that makes visible achievements, mistakes and lessons learnt along the way. These interactions should also celebrate mastery developed and acknowledge victories along the way. The focus of the individual work is also to nurture the young person's resilience through relationship building.

The tool used in this individual work is the Individual Development Plan (IDP). In the children's home where the programme is run, an IDP has already been developed from when the child entered care, and Mamelani Projects builds on this IDP, addressing areas such as accommodation, further education, and in collaboration with the youth, identifying support structures within the community. Time is spent exploring the different options relating to education and housing as well as emotional support for the transition. In some cases, support in obtaining essential documents, such as identity documents, is also provided.

A vital part of the IDP is ensuring and helping youth access housing options before leaving care. Youth experience a great deal of anxiety and stress when faced with this challenge as they are susceptible to becoming homeless (Tweddle, 2007). Given the lack of social housing, the responsibility of supporting care-leavers lies with a few under-resourced non-governmental organisations. The children's home is responsible for family reunification work, but in most cases, when the child is still in care at 18, it strongly indicates there is no family support or the family situation is untenable and access to housing is seen as one of the most pressing challenges by the young people.

Once the youth have left care, they are each allocated a mentor from within the staff of the organisation, responsible for managing individual plans. This plan sets goals for the period of after care and monitors progress in reaching these goals. The youth worker and young person work collaboratively towards achieving these goals within the time available and taking into account the developmental capabilities of the young person (Kroner, 2007). This process is time consuming but is essential in increasing self-awareness, agency and developing the skills for coping beyond care.

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The IDP is divided into accommodation, further education, skills training, employment, health management and *the circle of courage*, a tool developed out of Native American philosophy to assess the young person's sense of self. Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) state that, in order to develop a secure sense of self in the world, the child must feel held within a "circle of courage", experiencing a sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Mamelani Projects uses the "circle of courage" model to assess what may need to be healed in terms of the young person's circle, and ensures they participate in programme activities, which increases their circle. Nelson, who has participated in the programme, shared: "I feel that things are moving forward in a good direction for me and I'm starting to see my future more clearly" (Mamelani Programme Feedback, 2010).

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Group work

The intention of the group work is two-fold. Firstly, to make visible and strengthen the skills and knowledge that young people already have through experiential learning. Secondly, to develop and strengthen relationships within the group. In the group sessions, identity is built through activities that provide the young people with an opportunity to experiment and participate in a way that they can increase their self-awareness and learn new things. The group work should encourage them to engage in their own life space in a different way and to reflect on difficulties, skills gained and lessons learnt from this engagement. The group sessions offer a space where young people can take leadership and develop a sense of responsibility, as well as master skills needed for coping better in the world. The group is also a space for celebrating victories and marking growth. Given that Mamelani sees resilience as relational, the way the youth interact with each other within the group is an indicator of shifts in their identity and growth in their resilience. These sessions also serve to keep the young people connected once they have left care and act as a support group space where they share their challenges and give one another advice. This strengthens the young people's sense of mastery and sense of belonging.

Life skills for independent living

Specific life skills are necessary for successful independent living (Massinga & Pecora, 2008). These include a focus on money management, time management and planning, use of community resources, housing, food preparation, use of public transportation, social skills, employment skills, finding and maintaining employment, problem-solving and decision-making, self-care, and building a support network (Kroner, 2007; Mallon, 1998).

Unfortunately, within the current structure of the children's home, opportunities for developing independent living skills while the children are still in care is limited. This is largely because the number of children in the home, as many as 75 boys at any given time, does not easily allow for this. In Mamelani's experience, the youth leave the children's home without having had the opportunity to learn basic skills like doing their own washing, cooking their own meals or managing their own money.

For this reason, Mamelani's After Care Programme provides opportunities to learn independent living skills through a variety of experiential activities. The youth attend cooking demonstrations, facilitated by Mamelani Projects staff, teaching them how to cook low-cost nutritional meals, and support them in preparing meal plans and grocery lists. They are given weekly food vouchers to purchase groceries, and rotate responsibilities for shopping and cooking with an allocated budget, according to a menu they themselves design. This introduces them to money management, grocery shopping and budgeting skills. Life-skills activities such as drama club, photography club, literacy class and film and media workshops offer opportunities to practice skills such as time management and communication, and allows for the development of positive relationships. Incidental learning takes place during these creative sessions, such as computer skills, organisational skills and teamwork.

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Wilderness therapy camps

Wilderness therapy camps are utilised to mark and support transitions at two points through Rites of Passage camps. These processes mark the beginning and the end of the journey with Mamelani. They provide an opportunity for the youth to deal with experiences and emotions relating to this shift, and is an opportunity for those who have been journeying together to witness each other taking these big steps.

The Wilderness is used as a tool to explore and reconstruct self, to consolidate the impact of a series of interventions and make growth visible to the youth themselves and to each other. There is a strong ceremonial component, marking the initiation into the next phase of their life. The outcome of successful Rites of Passage processes will enable the young people to move through these transitions with an awareness of what is being left behind, as well as what has been achieved and gained—that will serve them in what lies ahead. Each young person should leave the process with a renewed sense of self and a readiness for the next step they are taking.

This is evident from one participant's feedback: "At the camp I learned if you believe in yourself, you can do anything. I never climbed a mountain before, so I felt like it was another world". Another shared: "I learned if you want to survive as a person, you need to believe in yourself" (Mamelani Programme Feedback, 2010).

Work readiness, job maintenance and self sustainability

Atkinson (2008) pointed out that at-risk youth lack adequate education, which is the most important requirement in finding employment. Given their time spent surviving on the street, many young people in Mamelani's Programme have low education levels. This hinders obtaining further education after leaving the children's home. Atkinson (2008) has shown earning a low salary exposes the youth to the risk of seeking extra money through illegal means such as drug dealing and petty theft. Although research indicates transition out of care without a basic education makes entry into post-secondary education extremely difficult (Collins, 2004), Mamelani has needed to be creative in ensuring young people can find work. Mamelani has

developed its work readiness and internship programme specifically to ensure youth are able to find stable work and earn a liveable salary.

The work readiness programme includes career guidance, to identify career choices matching individual strengths and capacities. Youth workers assist in identifying career paths and relevant education and skill requirements. Youth are sent on skills training programmes to gain necessary technical experience and become more marketable and employable. For participants who cannot attend skills training programmes, as a result of low levels of education, apprenticeships and work-shadow opportunities are arranged to learn skills on the job. Once they have gained the necessary skills, they are offered internship placements in host companies. At this point they are assisted in developing résumés and attend sessions to develop interview skills. Many youth are eager to work but lack the skills to find work themselves. The organisation supports them in identifying the area where they would like to work and the required steps to enter that field of work.

During internship placements, youth gain workplace skills and work experience needed to sustain employment. Successful completion of internships helps to develop work experience and seek out future job opportunities. The ultimate goal is that host companies offer interns full-time work at the end of internships, and in some cases this has happened. Where not possible, host companies supply the interns with a positive reference letter to assist in finding work. One participant shared:

> What I enjoy the most is the people that I work with and the friendships that they have for me. I have learnt to cook and to make a lot of stuff. I have learnt that I can stand up for myself. I can be with people that I am not used to being with as equals and I can make friendships with them. The internship has given me more confidence and it has helped me to look after myself and my family. It has also improved my relationship with my family as I am able to contribute and my girlfriend's parents respect me now and are always nice to me because I am working. (Mamelani Programme Feedback, 2010)

Job retention is also a challenge. Some youth lose work for unavoidable reasons such as feeling isolated at work, not coping with relationship dynamics with fellow workmates or supervisors and not coping with personal challenges at home. Mamelani initiated a work-support space where youth meet once a month to talk about work issues, employment opportunities, coping skills and attitude in the work place.

Through these sessions, youth are supported in maintaining their jobs and a positive work ethic. Throughout internship placements, programme staff monitor progress and support the youths to stay in work. Key findings from this component of the programme are as follows. Young people need to work in an area they feel excited about. They need to be taken through a step-by-step process for activities they have not done before, to lower anxieties around these steps. It is important to allow young people to make mistakes during this phase. With each mistake, reflection is facilitated to ensure that learning and experience is gained and applied to the task in hand. Vusumzi is one of the graduates who has come through the full programme and is now employed in the hospitality industry as a chef. As he notes: "Project Lungisela is a

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powerful project, which helped me and helps others who are part of the programme to grow and be responsible for our lives. With all their support, I am now responsible for my life". Another participant shared: "I have enjoyed making new friendships at work. I have learnt that I am able to adapt easily to new situations. This internship has helped me become more confident. Now I am able to work anywhere" (Mamelani Programme Feedback, 2010).

Community service projects

Lakin and Mahoney (2006) suggest that youth who participate in community service projects have a more positive sense of self than young people who have not participated in such protects. Mamelani Projects facilitates community development projects such as painting local crèches, visiting the elderly and offering general assistance with local projects. Research has shown community involvement fosters a sense of empowerment and community, and provides social support structures other than the youths' immediate family (Atkinson, 2008). Creating these networks of support and increasing a sense of belonging are vital to a healthy sense of self and increased resilience. Participating in community service also strengthens a sense of generosity, in terms of extending the circle of courage.

The importance of partnerships and a network of support

As a small organisation, Mamelani Projects is unable to meet the wide variety of needs of all the young people in the programme and therefore prioritises partnerships with other organisations. Mamelani Projects has been involved in establishing a forum of youth-focused organisations, to harness the collective energy and resources of these organisations, and increase collaboration in the youth sector. The organisations involved employ joint case management practices, to ensure that wherever possible networks of support are built.

Mamelani Projects' partners include the Department of Social Development, The Homestead Projects for Street Children (care for children under 18), Beth Uriel (care and support to youth aged 18–25), The Montrose Foundation (equine-assisted therapy), Yabonga and the Treatment Action Campaign (HIV/Aids support), Famsa (Family and Marriage Association of South Africa), Lifeline and Nonceba (psychosocial support), Cape Town Drug Centre and The Matrix Centre (drug rehabilitation), Educo Africa (wilderness therapy), Project Pakama and South African Homeless Street Soccer (drama and sport).

Tailoring Interventions to Meet the Needs of Youth Leaving Care in the South African Context

Housing

Research has shown finding suitable accommodation for participants transitioning out of care remains a major challenge for most youth development programmes (Atkinson, 2008; Lenz-Rashid, 2006). In a country where housing is acutely scarce, Mamelani

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Projects continues to struggle to meet the housing needs young people face. Lack of housing, unemployment and substance abuse are common in South Africa, so it is no surprise these issues are key challenges. Housing support varies in the programme, from providing a rented room, facilitating accommodation at another organisation to building a shack. To date, those who were housed by a post-18 youth home, where most of them were accommodated for up to three years, have shown the most success because the home offers a structured educational programme and high levels of support. A number of participants were assisted in building informal housing structures in the form of shacks in informal settlements, and some returned to their family homes, with this being a less successful option. Moving to informal housing or returning to the family home from which the youths were originally removed are not ideal choices, but given the woeful housing options in South Africa this was often unavoidable.

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Networks of support

Building positive relationships with people from the young people's community of origin has been facilitated, where possible. Mamelani's experience, however, is that most of the young people, upon leaving care, have very poor networks of support in place. A sense of social connectedness may be developed through mentoring or through consistent connections with caring adults and at-risk youths (Munson & McMillen, 2009). As part of the after-care support, youth workers assist young people in identifying and building a network of support. This is often made up of extended family, friends, other organisations and churches.

Income generation and financial stability

Many youth return to communities and families already living well below the poverty line. They require financial support to meet basic needs, as well as support for school, skills training courses and finding work opportunities. In the first year after leaving care, many youth are still completing education, attending skills training, or are not yet ready to work. Financial support is provided as a weekly allowance to cover basic food, transport, clothing, minor and miscellaneous expenses. Mamelani provides food stamps and transport money for youth still in education or attending the life-skills programme. For those in internships, the food and transport allocation has been put into their newly created bank accounts as an allowance. The allocation of resources has probably been one of the most challenging components of the programme. While the organisation sees it as necessary, the tendency for youth to who have been institutionalised to become dependent on others is high, and how the resources are allocated needs to be done in a way that increases resourcefulness and decreases dependency.

Substance abuse and gangsterism

Many of the youth in Project Lungisela have had substance abuse issues in the past, and under extreme stress may return to these habits. When youth live in communities where drugs and crime are rampant they may become involved in drug-related

activities or local gang activities. Mamelani prioritises building relationships of trust between youth and youth workers where youth can feel comfortable to seek help. In applicable cases and where youth are willing, they are referred to rehabilitation services. Youth seem to turn to drugs, alcohol and gangsterism when their sense of purpose is lost or when their stress is high. In many cases, this presents when family or relationships break down. Project Lungisela seeks to build a sense of self-worth through the individual and group work in a way that empowers youth to face these challenges without substance dependency.

Mental health issues

Some of the youth in the programme present behavioural problems. Some result from their background and repeated sexual and physical trauma. Some cases, coupled with low levels of education, have led to ongoing mental health issues such as depression. In cases where mental health issues are present, Mamelani works with service providers to assist youth in accessing suitable care, noting that mental health services in South Africa are severely under-resourced. It has also been particularly challenging when youth presenting mental health issues do not want to access care, often due to the stigma of being labelled or ostracised.

Pilot Programme Findings: Working with Youth in Foster Care

Between March 2010 and September 2011 Mamelani implemented a pilot programme, which adapted the Youth Leaving Care model (for youth leaving residential care) and applied it to a group of young people who had grown up in foster care in Khayelitsha. All of the young people who turned 18 during the 18-month pilot were able to continue staying with their foster family, even when the state foster care grant ended. Many of the foster families cited education support and career guidance as the components that gave them the most hope. Because these children had grown up in a family setting, many possessed independent living skills, which children growing up in state institutions lack.

Drawing on the Mamelani Programme's experience, a strategic shift in focus is recommended for youth in this transitional phase. The focus needs to shift away from a completely independent living model to enabling interdependent living. Mamelani's experience reflects that although independent living skills are essential for functioning as a young adult in society, it is more relevant to encourage interdependence for young people at this transitional stage. For this reason, highest priority is placed on developing a robust network of support as a way of building resilience and self-reliance in young people.

Conclusion

It is unreasonable to expect that care leavers can become successful young adults without adequate assistance. From Mamelani's experience with Project Lungisela, it is evident that care-leavers find it difficult to access secure stable housing, complete

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their education, access resources to support further education and skills training, access suitable employment and, for some, face the challenges of being a young parent, all simultaneously. Mamelani proposes these transitions need to be moved through sequentially and with ongoing support. Transition from care must include preparation for leaving care and support after care once youth have been discharged. Although legislation entitles young people leaving care to adequate preparation and support for this transition, the reality in South Africa is that very few are actually receiving it. Mamelani's Youth Leaving Care Programme has over the past five years developed a robust programme, focused on imparting skills for interdependent living, which can realistically address the needs of South Africa's young people. A focus must be placed on constructing positive identity, strengthening relationships and building resilience.

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