

# ALEXANDRA FOSTER CARE MODEL – AN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY- BASED MODEL OF CARE

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# Alexandra township - background

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Alexandra - 1912 before the 1913 Land Act

Densely populated 6000 old bonded houses

- 500 new houses
- 52 000 backyard structures
- 1 800 hostel rooms, 1 490 flats
- 19 000 public space shacks

JDA, 2014

# Activism in Alexandra township

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1943/1957 bus boycotts (Sarakinsky, 1984)

1986 Alex 6 days war - uprising was a violent protest to stop the Alex master plan (Sinwell, 2009)

Political violence prior to the 1994 elections

- 200+ people died, thousands injured and homeless - displaced from their homes (Mayekiso, 1996)

# Alex model background

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Model was developed among a community in turmoil (1992)

Local non-profit organisations (NPOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) offered social services

violence and crime - inaccessible area

Lack of resources and few service providers

Department of social development new office with one social worker (gradually increased from 1994 onwards)

# Background of social work services

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Department of Social Development to serve the community

Generic social work

Domestic violence, substance abuse, applications for social grants, unemployment and poverty, OVC (abandoned babies) and HIV/AIDS

High caseloads and overstretched/burnt-out staff

Projects under-funded (limited community work)

Ministerial enquiries

# Development of the Alex model

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Dire need to move away from traditional labour-intensive clinical approach

Towards a more collaborative approach with the community

Before the white paper on social welfare (1997)

Social worker faced with crises

- abandoned babies
- Youth in conflict with the law

Each social worker focused on one of these two broad issues

# Develop met of the Alex model

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Model founded on principle of Ubuntu using ilima approach.

Ilima (Nguni groups), and letsema in the seSotho groups which means voluntarily working together (Lebeloane & Quan-Baffour, 2008; Ramagoshi, 2013).

Important indigenous practice which was well-established

Community - need to enhance Ubuntu and working collaboratively together

Resources (human/material) - had to be developed by social worker



# Asset-based community development

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Focus on the resources (not the needs) - Mathie & Cunningham  
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The community responsible for own development

Critical social work

Power/oppression/marginalisation in the community

Use of untapped resources

Value local skills, resources and processes

# Intake and selection of prospective foster parents (group)

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Application process by clients (screened selves in/out)

Supporting documents (no more files with incomplete docs)

Waiting times reduced significantly

Using ilima the team (Social worker, students and volunteers) was the selection committee:

- In line with Child Care Act 74 (1983) and later the Children's Act 38 (2005)
- Knowledge of the community
- Home visits
- All files allocated and prepared for court

# Welcome pack

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All who qualified - orientation (group)

Each foster parent and child matched (age, religion, geographic location, etc)

Individual plan for each child/foster parent pair

Each envelope: copies of foster children's birth certificates, parents' death certificates, clinic cards, foster care placement court order, etc

standard referral letter: local schools, state psychologist, government departments - Home Affairs, Health and Housing

Ongoing selection, training and orientation of foster parents

# Foster parent groups

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All were expected to attend monthly meetings (venue of their choice)

Agenda to be prepared by the foster parents

All to take primary responsibility for their children

All appointments and follow-up visits with service providers

All to ensure that foster care **placements did not lapse**

Records kept (section 159)

Liaise with social worker in cases of emergency

# Foster parent groups



Develop programmes for the children (school holidays, talks)

Ongoing training - parenting

Guest speakers (govt and local NPOs)

other issues - raising teenagers/  
toddlers

Prayer sessions

Own issues (bereavement, income generation, etc)

Support group and task group

# Groups with foster children

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Children seen in groups at school

Focus on own development and foster placement

Usually run by students with supervision of social worker (qualified)

Logistics challenge

Some children presented with different issues

Schools sent all children with behaviour problems

Some children not interested

# Groups with foster children

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Focus on life skills

peer pressure

communication skills

decision-making and choices

anger management

reproductive health

Behavioural problems

Academic challenges



# Untapped resources – from clients to partners

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In addition to the two social workers:

Student social workers (practicals)

Graduate social workers (work experience)

Unemployed community members

Volunteers, foster parents, and community leaders

NPOs and CBOs

Interested community members



## Responsibilities: social worker



Identification and selection of foster parents

Open cases: children needing foster care

Training and orientation to the foster care programme

Preparation of welcome pack

Liaison with other service providers

Counselling and group sessions (both parents and children)

Social grant applications

# Responsibilities: student social worker

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Assist with opening files

Home visits and interviews (selection committee)

Collating files

Follow-up appointments/phone calls

Liaison with social worker

Running groups and some counselling

Community projects: income generation, vegetable gardens, etc

All logistics



# Volunteers, foster parents, community leaders

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People who wanted to help

Some formed part of the selection committee

Liaison with social worker and the community

“Navigators” and entry into the community

Logistics and support (venue, food, materials, etc)



# I am because we are - partnerships

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Alex service providers forum made up of different stakeholders

Likened to a war-room

Bush telegram - word-of-mouth (communication with social worker)

Bartering system developed (social workers and local community based organisations/ non-profit organisations)

Community members took the initiative and also invited the social worker (domestic violence, child abuse, etc)

Children's court (Randburg) - formal placements

# Resources

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SAPS - transport, escort, tracing, deliveries

Home Affairs - birth registration, IDs, social grant applications

Health care facilities - immunisation, reproductive health, HIV testing and support, etc

Local NPOs - referrals to specialised services

- material resources (printing, use of telephone, etc)

SAPO - delivery in no-go areas, call-in notes, etc (no postage fee)

Institutions of higher learning (student social workers, training)

# Resources

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Institutions of basic education (venue, telephone, groups, etc)

Municipality - venue for free (meetings, and programmes)

DSD - food basket (tinned foods, Vaseline, soap, milk, towel nappies)

# Replication of the model?

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Through trial and error

Tsakane township, East Rand (2011) and DSD Vereeniging (2013-2014)

Areas with high levels of poverty and limited services

Social worker links with local service providers

Foster parents to be turned from beneficiaries into partners

Welcome pack (memory box concept)

Use of graduate social workers (or students)

# Lessons learnt

Important to profile the community

Physical visit of local service providers

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Practice all methods of social work

Face to face interaction (areas of mutual interest/referral)

Identify priority issues together with the community (PAR)

Look for untapped resources prior to asking for external funding

Build relationships, host parents, etc (children over 18 years of age)

Challenge - turnover of staff

Work yourself out - community responsibility



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