

## OUR VALUES

An alarming number of students are at high-risk of school drop-out, evidenced in the up to 60% of students who originally enrolled in Grade 1 in 2007 not passing matric by 2018 (Spaull, N, 2019). In response to the under-education of students, a large contributor to the drop-out rate, many people in poor communities have created safe spaces for students to supplement their learning after school. These after-school programs provide valuable opportunities for students to develop a love for learning as they improve their academic performance and are more likely to progress to the next grade (Motos, S., 2016).

However, these programs have limited capacity to provide good academic support since the coordinators and tutors are often not trained educators, and with limited resources, they struggle to operate a sustainable program. Furthermore, the lack of access to social capital limits the ability of these after-school programs to adequately mobilize resources, training and social connections to further sustain their programs.

Outliers provides support to these after-school programs to help build their capacity to create these safe spaces for learning and to equip these spaces to provide good academic support for learners.

### VALUES THAT GUIDE OUR SUPPORT OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Since May 2014, Outliers has grown from a network of 12 after-school programs providing support to 655 students to supporting more than 320 programs since. By hosting training and mobilizing resources to build capacity in these programs to create safe spaces for learning, we have recognized the following as essential elements for building capacity in low-resourced after-school programs.

#### 1. Keep it relevant

The focus of the training sessions are determined by analyzing the expressed needs of the partners to ensure that what is offered is in response to what has been requested. Ensuring relevance of content in this way helps to ensure that we are responding to their needs, rather than our own well-intentioned desires, as cautioned by Freire (1970, pg 67). To do this well, it is important that time is invested in relationship-building and nurturing trust so that people feel empowered to express themselves and in so doing, help determine content. Ensuring a flexibility in program

design allows for real-time adapting of content presented as participants are often not a homogenous group of singular experiences and expertise. This creates opportunities for all participants to acquire new knowledge.

## **2. Use the wisdom of the crowd**

The practitioners who attend have a deep understanding of the real obstacles to program implementation in their unique contexts, and as a result, have developed creative ways of running programs in low-resourced settings. Rather than position ourselves as experts, acknowledging the wisdom in the room facilitates a sharing of knowledge. Not only does this increase participation, but those who attend feel seen, supported, and valued for their contributions.

## **3. Keep the cost down**

Recognizing that our partners work in very poor communities and have little to no financial support, we endeavour to keep the cost of access to any training and resources to a minimum. This is possible because we creatively mobilize our social network to provide training and resources. This value-add to our partners enables them to build capacity to run their programs more sustainably.

## **4. Keep the pace up**

Given that people have to travel to the training event and then get back to their sites to run their programs, as well as navigate the complexities of living in poor communities, it is important to honour and respect their time commitment. To this end, sessions encourage experiential learning, ensuring maximum participation and that people leave with skills that they can immediately implement when returning to their sites.

## **5. Not just another training session**

Recognizing that new knowledge is ineffective when people lack the necessary tools for implementation, we always provide tools and templates that correspond to the content covered in training sessions. In addition, we mobilize relevant resources such as equipment, games, stationery, and workbooks that supplement the training content to enable implementation. Our training sessions also allow time for partners to build social connections with each other and with other significant support-providers.

## **6. It's not them and us, it's we**

Building true collaboration requires communion with the people we work with (Freire 1970, pg 35). This directly impacts how we refer to who we work with and has a bearing on the nature of the relationship. There is no membership to be part of Outliers; affiliation is voluntary. This ensures that our aligned values and vision for

our communities shapes our collaborations and others can easily be invited to share in the knowledge and resources that we have access to.

### **Challenge: Participation in training sessions**

Despite our best efforts to cover content that is relevant and equipping, to acknowledge the wisdom of the crowd, to keep cost down, to schedule events at times that are suitable for partners, in a venue that is accessible, and that packs in content ensuring time is well used, we cannot fully mitigate against the contexts within which these programs operate. Many are not able to attend sessions due to travel costs, poor health, civil unrest and strike action, ultimately reducing the rate at which capacity is built in these after-school programs.

### **Response: Increasing access to training to build capacity**

To increase access to the content covered at training sessions so that more can benefit and build capacity, we are sending out session notes, tools, and templates to all partners, not only those who attend sessions. This includes an offer to host recap sessions one-on-one at local sites. We are also exploring decentralizing training sessions by running hubs in local spaces located within a cluster of sites, for ease of access. Formation of these geographical hubs will increase the presence of Outliers, enhancing our capacity to support our partners through training and resourcing.

### **Case study: Decentralized training hub in Langa**

Unogwaja joined our network, like many other new partners, through referral by an existing partner. After meeting with the coordinator of Unogwaja, we determined that hosting a training session in Langa would benefit a number of organizations, including sports clubs, who were supporting youth development. Rather than wait for an upcoming session in Claremont, we hosted a session in a location with easy access for all the organizations in Langa.

Together, the organizations felt that what they needed most was assistance with basic tutor orientation. A number students were excelling in sport, but were not able to access the scholarships on offer to them to attend Quintile 5 senior schools because of their poor academic performance. It was clear to these sport coaches that they needed to offer tutoring support to ensure academic success so that their students could progress in their sporting careers.

A total of 4 new partner organizations attended the training session, sharing their vision and passion for the development of their students and learning together how best to support them. We continue to build capacity at these sites to run safe spaces for learning for their students.

## **BUILDING COLLABORATIONS FOR GOOD**

The power of social capital is apparent when connecting civil society for the greater good. Those who connect their social capital across an array of social circles, have a special gift for bringing the world together (Gladwell, M., 2000). Using this ability to mobilize resources and training, Outliers invites others to invest their social capital in the form of time, money, expertise and stuff to build capacity in low-resourced after-school programs. Three principles inform the mobilization of this social capital towards building collaborations for long-term capacity development of after-school programs.

### **1. Building trust**

In any investment relationship, a key factor in garnering trust that leads to investment is confidence in the knowledge of the beneficiary of the investment. In Outliers, the beneficiaries are the coordinators of the community-based after-school programs.

It is important for us to personally know the coordinators of these programs and to invest time in building relationships with them. We are working together towards addressing the issue of under-education in our communities. We respect and admire their commitment and hard work. We acknowledge and refer to their wisdom and insight on community practice and education. This becomes the foundation of any conversation with external stakeholders and builds confidence in their interactions with us.

The integrity of our partner relationships drives our engagement with others rather than the other way around. Should a potential investor not value the relationships we have with our partners, and by extension, not value our partners, we will not interact with them further. Though in the immediate, this comes at a cost, it is only through integrous relationships that we can build a sustainable investment in our people. In a recent survey of our partners, more than 80% referred to us as a support partner rather than service provider, affirming the nature of our relationship with them.

“True solidarity with the oppressed means fighting at their side to transform the objective reality” (Freire, pg 23)

### **2. Seeking alignment**

Motivations for investing social capital can vary, with not all outcomes being positive and in the best interest of the recipient. If an organisation, donor or individual does not share common values and principles, the negative effect of their contribution to the network may far outweigh the positive impact.

Expressing these values is essential to aid discernment when determining further collaborations. Working together for greater good requires that we value building relationships in communities and working with people rather than implementing models. It is key to align with people who share these values, as this ensures a more sustainable collaboration to build capacity in after-school programs.

### **3. Matching passion with purpose**

Using your social connections in a sustainable way requires understanding the personal motivations and passions of those who are looking to contribute. It follows that someone is more likely to stay involved if the interaction is based on something that is significant to the contributor. Understanding the passion of the people in your social network requires getting to know these individuals and finding out what they are skilled at or passionate about, helping them to find an intervention that is accessible to them.

Growing these relationships for further involvement means honouring and appreciating each person, investing time and energy in each step of engagement, regardless of the size or resulting impact. As their contribution is acknowledged for creating change in the lives of others, they begin to see a role for themselves in tackling various issues. This is something that cannot be coerced, but needs to be reached, over time, unlocking sustainable involvement in creating change and bringing hope.

#### **Challenge: Lack of awareness on using social capital for greater good**

With the degradation of communal structures, accessing our social network has become more difficult, despite technological advancements that seemingly connect us more. A recent study on the value of social connections ([understandingsociety.ac.uk](http://understandingsociety.ac.uk)) concluded that in the absence of connections that encourage people to exchange resources, society could not function. Added to this, many do not see that they can leverage their social network for greater good and instead see the work of responding to social justice issues as the responsibility of government and NGOs.

Abdicating this responsibility to others means that a huge amount of social capital is retained in wealthier private individuals and corporate structures, and does not enter or impact the development sector. Recalibrating the way people view their social capital and unlocking the myriad responses that may result in improving the lives of others, particularly with respect to the under-education of students in South Africa, is a vital step towards investment of social capital for greater good.

### **Response: Raising awareness of value of social capital**

To help raise awareness of the value of social capital and how it can be leveraged for greater good, we will more systematically tell the stories of social connections that have impacted the lives of students across the network.

Storytelling is a powerful way to share information in an accessible format. We will gather success stories and highlight these in regular 1-minute videos across our various social media platforms. These stories will show the varied responses, some simple, some complex, of individuals and organizations that have worked together to impact positive change, and in so doing, invite others to invest in seemingly small acts of kindness. This collection of stories will be curated on our YouTube channel as a reminder to others of the power of social connections for building capacity in after-school programs.

### **Case Study 1: The power of social connections with Dikakapa**

In 2016, we hosted an advocacy event, ChangeCT, to raise awareness and invite participation in the many different ways people are responding to the under-education of students in our network. To host the event, we drew on our social capital to cover costs of catering, venue, speakers, photography and communications. We also hosted an art competition for students in the network to depict how they would like to change Cape Town. Prizes for the art competition were sponsored by Table Mountain Cable Station, Canal walk, the Two Oceans Aquarium and a number of private individuals.

Together with Dikakapa, an organization running an after-school program in Gugulethu, we launched a tertiary study scholarship in honour of the founder of Dikakapa who had unexpectedly passed earlier that year. We helped establish criteria and guide a selection committee on a process to identify a suitable candidate from within the program. Leveraging our social capital, we were able to raise a R10000 award, which Dikakapa presented to Senzo (not real name), the successful candidate, at the event.

Following the event, we were contacted by an engineering company looking to sponsor tertiary tuition for an engineering student. They had been referred to us by someone who had attended the event. We proposed Senzo, who, after a review process in which he met all the requirements, was awarded a full scholarship to cover three years of tuition, travel, books and subsistence. Senzo, an alumnus of the Dikakapa after-school program in Gugulethu, is set to graduate as an engineer at the end of 2019. In his mind, Dikakapa has made this dream a reality for him.

## **Case Study 2: The power of social connections with Sakhubuntu**

Sakhubuntu Family Preservation Society, amongst many other social development projects, runs an after-school program in Nyanga. A former colleague of ours, who was working with them on developing group counselling for women, connected us as they were concerned about the many children in their community who were not at school and were at high-risk, particularly during school holidays. After meeting with them, we helped them negotiate use of a community hall and to rally volunteers to assist with feeding of the students who attend the program.

Since May 2014, they have attended most of the Outliers training sessions, slowly building their skills to provide good academic support and making the most of the resources that we have access to, including furniture and equipment. In feedback after a session on goal setting, they identified literacy support as one of the key skills that they require to remediate learning for their junior school students. This was echoed amongst a number of programs present at the training session.

Through our social network, we identified organizations who offered literacy remediation and decided to meet with Help2Read, who have an excellent track record for training adults to assist children with reading. Not only did Help2Read agree to host a training session at no cost, enabling all our after-school programs to benefit from this vital skills training, they also donated 8 boxes of library books to equip these programs with libraries. We added these to the books received from Edgemead Primary during the Book Drive that we ran prior to the training session.

Those who were unable to attend continued to request literacy support training, and a follow-up session was planned. Again, turning to our social network, we identified a UCT lecturer and expert in Foundation Phase Literacy Development who was happy to host a session at no cost. We connected with BookDash, who kindly donated 1000 books, which we were able to give to each program, and which the facilitator was able to use during her sessions as reading material to use when supporting literacy development.

Participants left with practical tips on how to assess a learner's reading ability, to identify stumbling blocks, to use any reading material for remediating reading, and most importantly, with the confidence that they are equipped to help students progress with literacy development. We also used a donation from PEP stores for stationery to purchase dictionaries, which we were able to add to stationery packs for all participants.

## References

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