

Vuka S'hambe: Young prisoners' awakening

by

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To the reader, you are about to experience our Vuka S'hambe journey with perpetrators of violent crime. The question I get asked often by many people is, "Are you not scared of working with prisoners? Do you feel safe in there?" Amazingly, the prisoners have the same perception of themselves others have about them. They have a knowing of themselves as dangerous and feared, as one of them once asked, "Sis Lindi, you are so relaxed and friendly with us, are you not scared of us sometimes?" The truth is, not once have I felt unsafe in the company of the prisoners I have interacted with. Yes, there have been tears, tears of joy and fulfillment when a breakthrough occurs and sometimes tears of frustration and pain. The ultimate challenge for me was to enable these youth to realise their humanity, and to learn new skills that will enable them to no longer use violence as a defense against feeling their fears and overwhelming pain.

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Vuka S'hambe means 'wake up and move on'. We owe this name to one group member who came up with it as a mission statement during one of the group activities. He said that he felt that he had been sleep-walking for most of his adolescent years without a direction or purpose. The group activity was a wake up call for him to have hope and a vision for a better future in which he can take charge.

To wake up and move on, is a powerful challenge indeed. With each group that begins, the name Vuka S'hambe has been assumed by many prisoners who have re-defined it, personalised it, and owned it for themselves. For some members it meant changing a life path; changing and transforming; growing to maturity; moving from darkness to light; making the wrong right; taking responsibility; accepting God; having hope and optimism; focusing on the present and the future; finding own skills, abilities and strengths; finding one's own wings and flying high like a bird; achieving greatness; self-acceptance, etc. This name challenges both participants and facilitators to engage in a healing process that encompasses all these meanings. This programme imparts courage, hope and resilience to those who participate, providing purpose and meaning for everyone, meeting them where they are and taking them where they want to go, giving them courage to pursue their goals.

Introduction

Over the last four years the Criminal Justice Programme of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVV) has been involved in engagement and therapeutic interventions in an attempt to understand the nature and causes of youth criminal behaviour. This involvement with young offenders stems from the programme's fundamental belief that while youth are a group vulnerable to peer pressure and antisocial behaviors, they are

also at a critical period of development that makes them open to interventions and change.

In 1999 CSVr undertook a project called 'The Voices of Young Offenders' which involved 24 offenders incarcerated at Leeuwkop prison. This research study investigated some of the reasons these youth ended up in jail, their ideas about crime and violence. Vuka S'hambe, facilitated by Lindiwe Mkhondo and Kindiza Ngubeni, arose out of this project. It began as a life skills project aimed at reintegration of young prisoners at the Johannesburg Prison. Three groups have been facilitated since March 2001. The first group was facilitated for males between March and June 2001 and the second group was facilitated for young females between August 2001 and June 2002. The third group was facilitated for males between August 2002 and May 2003. Although the work of Vuka S'hambe has continued into 2004, this report focuses on these three group interventions.

Vuka S'hambe attempted both to understand the origins and phenomenon of youth violence from the perspective of the participants, and to utilize this understanding to develop a programme that would assist the reintegration of offenders, reduce recidivism, and contribute towards the breaking the cycle of violence in youth. We aimed to do this through a life skills and therapeutic intervention for young sentenced prisoners. Specific objectives of this programme were:

- Promotion of self-awareness and personal insight into reasons for engaging in criminal violence, by taking youth through a journey of discovering who they are and where they come from.
- Teaching new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving and transforming old self-defeating patterns.
- Development of effective coping skills and enhancement of personal strengths and resources.
- Promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem.
- Building positive and stable emotional relationships.
- Promotion of accountability and control of one's destiny by taking ownership of one's actions and not blaming others or circumstances.

Overall, the Vuka S'hambe programme hoped to empower and build resilience in young offenders so that firstly, they could cope better in prison and secondly, so that they could learn skills that will enable them to contribute positively to their communities when they ultimately leave prison.

This reports aims to present the CSVr framework and model and in this way hopes to be of use to others working with young offenders in similar institutions. The report is presented in three sections:

- Part one: *Understanding youth criminal violence*, provides a background overview of the theories and assumptions that inform our interventions. It contextualises the problem of youth offending in South Africa. It outlines the information about the project and the methodology used in the interventions. Based on the three interventions undertaken with young offenders, this report hopes to provide a comprehensive consolidation of all learnings. The section concludes by looking at the risk factors for violent behaviour as identified by the young offenders, including what's in their minds and hearts, and is illustrated through two case studies.

- Part two: *The Vuka S'hambe Model*, outlines the Vuka S'hambe intervention model. It discusses some of basic premises on which the programme objectives are based. It will also provide a brief discussion of the activities/ exercises conducted as well as the expected outcomes.
- Part three: *Project Evaluation*, outlines the methodology utilized to conduct the internal evaluation of the programme, reports on the findings and concludes by outlining lessons learned, and highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the model. In conclusion, some recommendations for future work with young prisoners will be made.

Part One: Understanding Youth Criminal Violence

Theoretical Framework

South Africa is currently in the grip of high levels of crime where the recorded instances of violent crime (with the exception of murder) have increased over the last 9 years. It is difficult to establish exactly who is responsible for all this crime, but young people are responsible for a large proportion of crime. Although not an accurate indicator of the extent of crime, prison statistics indicate that at least 43% of the total prison population are 25 years or younger with some 24 669 being under the age of 21(DCS Annual Report, 2004:26).¹ Males tend to commit more crime than females, who make up only 1,65% of the prisoners up to the age of 25 years.² This points to the important need to understand the extent to which young South Africans are at risk of becoming involved in crime, and the factors that lead them to this path, hopefully with a view of intervening before the criminal life path becomes well-established. But it is also important to inform the development and implementation of intervention programmes for young people who come into conflict with the law, and those who are imprisoned as a result of their crimes. This section of the report will present a review of the literature that seeks to explain violent offending among young people.

James Gilligan (2000) defines violence as the infliction of physical injury and trauma on a human being by another person, committed by deliberate intention or careless disregard for the safety of the self or others. The trauma could be lethal, life threatening or disabling. The category of 'violent crime' is a broad one and can often be expanded to include a range of crimes. In South Africa, violent crimes tend to include homicides, robbery, kidnapping, grievous bodily harm, and more common assault, as well as sexual offences. But it may also include a range of emotional behaviours, such as those defined in the Domestic Violence Act (No 116 of 1998).

There are as many explanations to the causes of violent crime as there are to the different manifestations of violence, often depending on the discipline from which the violence is being analysed (Levi and Maguire, 2002:810). Gilligan (2000) sees the violent act as an understandable response to an identifiable set of conditions, an end-product in a series of irrational, self-destructive and unconscious motives. He argues however, that there is a lack of theory adequate to explain, predict and prevent violent behaviour. For a theory to constitute an adequate explanation of violence, he argues it would need to provide an account of an observable phenomenon that is able to show the relation between cause and effect as well as be able to impart knowledge on how to prevent violence. He adds that such

a theory would have to be comprehensive, taking into consideration that violence is a biological-psychological-social phenomenon (Gilligan, 2000: 98-102).

A biological perspective of crime focuses on the physiological triggers and brain function, or even how under certain circumstances external factors such as eating chocolate, hormones, or the weather, can lead to loss of control. The impact of hormonal factors such as the adolescent 'testosterone rush' has been associated with the rise in aggression and low frustration level in boys (Levi & Maguire, 2002: 814). Female hormones like estrogen and progesterone and a neurotransmitter known as serotonin, on the other hand, serve as inhibitors of aggressive responses. Farrington in [Palmary \(2003\)](#) identifies gender as a risk factor, with more boys involved in crime than girls. In contrast, Gilligan (2000) argues that this has more to do with a cultural construction of manhood (learned masculinity) than hormonal explanations. He argues that psychological and social factors are more powerful determinants of violence than biological ones.

Gilligan (2000) offers a psycho-analytical explanation of violence, identifying motives for violent behaviour as well as the social, cultural and economic determinants of violence. He views emotions as the cause of psychopathology. In his opinion the emotion of shame is the ultimate cause of violence. He defines shame as 'loss of face', of feeling vulnerable, feeling inferior, losing prestige, respect and status. Most often men hide shame behind a defensive mask of bravado, arrogance and machismo. Humiliation, embarrassment, abuse, abandonment, etc, result in shame, or in death of the soul, which is far greater than death of body. Therefore, he argues, they will fight and prevent death and disintegration of self, to avoid losing their souls. When individuals experience humiliation and shame they will use violence to replace shame with pride, dignity and self-esteem.

Gilligan (2000) adds that not everyone who experiences shame becomes violent. He sets out three preconditions for shame to manifest into violence. The first is when the individual has no non-violent means of diminishing feelings of shame or restoring the wounded self-esteem. A second precondition is when the individual has no social rewards, status, prestige, or no economic or cultural achievement; and thirdly, if the individual lacks the emotional capacity for love, empathy and guilt toward others. Gilligan thus concludes 'no-one feels as innocent as the criminals. If they had the capacity to feel guilt they would not have the emotional capacity to hurt others.'(Gilligan, 2000: 111-113). Violence therefore serves an adaptive function, acting in the service of survival for the individual.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory also makes a contribution towards the understanding of violent behaviour. This theory postulates that from birth a child develops working models and assumptions of the world and of himself based on the nature of the attachment relationships he has with significant caregivers. The infant internalizes these experiences based on whether the caregiver is available to provide security, to respond to the needs of the child, or whether the caregiver views the child as acceptable or unacceptable. 'The unwanted child is likely not only to feel unwanted by his parents but to believe that he is essentially unwanted by anyone' (Bowlby,1973: 238).

If the child experiences secure attachments and the containing effect of a relationship, Bowlby argues that she can develop autonomy and a sense of being an independent actor. The child also then learns about 'shared awareness' as she realises that the 'other' can be aware of what the child is aware of inside herself. This sense of oneness with the other, the

ability to tune into the needs and feelings of the others, in addition to a positive sense of self, helps to form a basis for empathy. Empathy is an important source of altruism and is viewed as a possible inhibitor of aggressive behaviour. On the other hand, the mother or parent who is abusive and rejecting to the child, and shows little empathy, cannot identify with the child's feelings and needs. The child, in turn, learns to be hostile in interactions with others, develops poor sense of self-esteem, is egocentric, and shows little empathy and a lot of aggression towards others. Empathy has been found to be negatively associated with aggression and offending (Kaukiainen *et al*, 1999; and Luengo *et al*, 1994, in Farrington, 2002:666)

In the book, *From Pain to Violence*, De Zulueta revisits Bowlby's theory and views violent behavior as 'attachment gone wrong.' She makes a link between early developmental failures and subsequent violent behaviour. She identified several factors that have a potential to create a vulnerability for social incompetence, fear, hyper-aggressiveness, suicidal behaviour; depression and violence. Among these factors she identifies maternal deprivation (defined as lack of a nurturing social environment); neglect (described as lack of appropriate supervision or provision of basic needs of the child; inadequate mothering (described as mothering devoid of love and affection for the infants, based on ignoring, abuse and rejection); traumatic loss and death; parental divorce or separation; abandonment in childhood; and poverty (De Zulueta, 1993: 66-76).

As a consequence of these negative experiences children tend to internalise helplessness, vulnerability, failed dependency, extreme fear (annihilation anxiety) and pain. A feeling of weakness and littleness is experienced in the face of an environment which either fails to give the support the child needs, or is perceived as threatening. The need to matter to someone is also noted by De Zulueta as being at the core of human existence. For those individuals who cannot be valued for being 'good', being 'bad' is preferable to not being at all. Hidden rage throbs beneath their defenses, while reminders of inner weakness and pain are banished. Guntrip, in De Zulueta (1993) adds that 'human beings all prefer to be bad and strong rather than weak'. When subject to deprivation, loss or abuse, the pain and rage that the child experiences can become cut off or denied in order for the child to remain close to those he depends on. These destructive feelings become unconscious, only to be transformed into violence later on. It becomes clear that violence thus becomes a 'moral' defense against terrifying feelings of helplessness. (De Zulueta, 1993: 22-126).

De Zulueta explains that the repeated tendency of people abused in childhood to later become aggressors or victimizers, is a process of re-enactment of earlier experiences. Through a process of projective identification, the abused victim identifies with the aggressor, a role that ensures some control of events and a possibility of revenge. As Welldon in De Zulueta (1993) writes, 'From being victims, such people become the victimizers. In their actions they are the perpetrators of the victimization and humiliation previously inflicted on them. They treat their victims in the same way they felt treated themselves, as part objects ...' (De Zulueta, 1993: 195).

He further adds that the cause of human violence and ability to dehumanize the other is based on the perception of the 'other' as a non-human being. This is based on a human tendency to divide the world into 'us' versus 'them.' Through processes of denial and splitting perpetrators project onto the victim the repressed parts of themselves, such as helplessness. The perpetrator, in his re-enactment of an earlier experience, dehumanises the

victim. Through a process of projective identification men and women split off characteristics of themselves they perceive as belonging to the opposite sex. As a result of this phenomenon men denigrate their femininity and thus project it onto a woman in order to dominate her, to affirm their masculinity and power. On the other hand, the women projects her fighting spirit and her potency onto the male, hence the possibility to be victimized. (De Zulueta, 226-237).

In her book *The Reproduction of Evil*, Sue Grand (2000) offers a psychoanalytic explanation of violence. She conceptualizes violence as an unconscious sharing of loneliness and pain. Traumatic experiences like starvation, cold, heat, and abuse inflict pain and suffering on the individual. There is intense fear on the victim and his agency is extinguished. The mind dissociates, the body succumbs to death by entering into a coma (anesthetized). Such a victim is alone during the trauma and dies without dying, bearing only hate, fear, shame, sorrow and despair. He survives the trauma and may have no language to share what he has experienced. However, the loneliness and the pain cannot be silent.

According to Grand (2000), the victim (survivor of trauma) then becomes the perpetrator, enacting the violence in an attempt to escape the loneliness and emptiness, an attempt to share his loneliness with the victim, an attempt to be in a relationship, to be recognised. It is the perpetrator's way of registering his own longing for an absent other who should have been there. The perpetrator thus recreates the missing other who is never there. He reenacts his trauma to master it and also to transform it. So violence has the seductive element to it in that through the recreation of his own pain, it promises to comfort the perpetrator, hence the repetition of violence (Grand, 2000, 6-29).

Herman (1997) also cites childhood psychological trauma as being the powerful cause of human violence. She adds that these experiences destroy fundamental assumptions about one's safety in the world. There is a betrayal of trust and a loss of control for the victim, thus resulting in a loss of autonomy, humiliation, helplessness, doubt and shame. A sense of alienation pervades as the traumatised person feels utterly abandoned, without care and protection. One feels that one belongs more to the dead than to the living. Victims of childhood sexual abuse for example, become resentful, angry, and feel contaminated by the abuse. Unable to make sense of their experiences, these victims experience self-blame, feelings of rage, aggressiveness and murderous revenge fantasies, depression and anxiety, suicidal thoughts, all being normal responses to trauma.

Other theorists tend to focus on risk and resilience factors to understand violent behaviour. Risk factors are prior factors that increase the risk of occurrence of the onset, frequency, persistence, or duration of offending (Farrington, 2002:664). These include social interactions, community, family and individual factors. Resilience, or protective, factors are those factors that promote an individual's capacity to withstand adverse environmental circumstances.

Predictors of delinquency include impulsivity, attention problems, low school attainment, poor parental supervision, and parental conflict. Individual risk factors that tend to increase vulnerability to violence are poor impulse control, and hyperactivity (Farrington, 2002: 666). At a cognitive level, Ross and Ross (1995, in Farrington, 2002: 669) found that offenders tended to be impulsive, concrete rather than abstract in their thinking, and poor at

interpersonal problem solving. Luther (in [Palmary, 2003](#)) found that difficult temperament, low IQ, external locus of control, and low self-efficacy (the power and master oneself to produce intended results) was also related to offending. Farrington (2002) also argues that violent offenders tend to be high on the hyper-activity-attention deficit scale, tend to be restless and lacking in concentration, lack empathy (the ability to identify with other's feelings) and find it difficult to deter gratification.

The nature of a young person's interactions with his/her peers has also been an indicator of later involvement in crime and violence. Eron and Scott, in [Palmary \(2003\)](#), found that aggressive behaviours tended to be fairly consistent over time. They found that children who showed high levels of aggression at an early age, and who had evidence of conduct disorder as a child, were more likely to be convicted of crimes, to be abusive to their partners, and to have underachieved educationally. As adults these youth were also more likely to have problems with alcoholism, drug dependence, theft, and violent behaviours. [Palmary \(2003\)](#), however cautions that early levels of aggressive behaviour may not be good predictors of involvement in violence later in life as not all children take this route.

Family vulnerabilities that predict aggression in young people include harsh and inconsistent discipline, whilst protective factors include an emotionally responsive and caring family. Scott in [Palmary \(2003\)](#) also identified five aspects of parenting that were associated with anti-social behaviour in youth: poor supervision; erratic and harsh punishment; parental disharmony; rejection of the child; and a lack of involvement in the child's activities. Living in a single parent household has been identified as a risk factor, resulting in children who are prone to anxiety-depression symptoms, oppositional behaviour, immaturity and difficulties with peers. Poverty has also been associated with poorer academic outcomes, behavioural problems and emotional distress. Children that have been exposed to community violence have also been found to exhibit decreased school performance, substance abuse, behavioural problems, and emotional disturbance.

In a South African study by [Segal, Pelo and Pampa \(1999\)](#) broken homes and poverty are the two main issues identified by young offenders that most influence their decision to commit crime. In their study they uncovered that youngsters were often abandoned or kicked out of their homes. Many experienced their parents getting divorced at an early age and having to live with a step-father or mother who rejected them. They described their family life as riddled with tensions and conflict and remember feeling unloved. The youths spoke of a childhood marked with extreme poverty and of crime being the only way to address their feelings of need. Segal et al's study identified 10 themes emerging from the youth's narratives of their involvement in crime: Family life, Poverty, Masculinity, Consumerism, Violence, Gangs, Guns, Gender relations/ women as victims, Corruption, and Race (CSVR, 1998).

Other family, environmental and traumatic factors also play a role. A South African study based on interviews with 25 young male prisoners convicted of violent offences ranging from theft to murder found that 68% had experienced emotional, sexual or physical abuse, or a combination of abuse during their childhood. In addition, 84% had experienced significant loss through bereavement or cessation of contact with close family members (Wedge, Boswell and Dissel, 2000:31-38). The research participants drew links between these early experiences and their later offending. This study also indicated that there are many individual and social factors which also impact on the subsequent offending of young

people, such as the experience of the effects of poverty on their lives – shortages of food and clothing, inadequate accommodation, as well as in some cases being witness to political violence.

In conclusion, Dobash, et al. (in Levi & Maguire (2002)) found that among the offenders currently serving sentences for homicide in Great Britain, over a third came from broken families, a quarter had a father who was violent to their mother; almost three-quarters had problems in school, one sixth had abused drugs, a quarter had mental health problems, a sixth abused drugs, and two-thirds were unemployed. These figures indicate that although these commonalities existed, the majority of these offenders did not share these risk factors. Thus it appears that although the prevalence of risk factors may be one indicator of criminality, it is by no means a conclusive one. Violence is a multi-determined and complex phenomenon that challenges us to take into consideration individual motives, the crime context, as well as social, economic and individual background in order to understand it. While to a great extent violent offending may be triggered by the social environment, the individual's personality and character also play a critical role. Situational factors, such as substance abuse, and opportunities for crime also play a role in offending.

Having discussed the theories and assumptions that lay the foundation to our understanding of youth criminal violence, the next two sections, 'On the road to violence' and 'In the hearts and minds of the offenders,' further provide some insight into the risk factors for violent behaviour from the perspective of the offenders participating in the Vuka S'hambe programme themselves. First let us provide a brief outline of the demographic information of the youths that participated in the three Vuka S'hambe interventions.

Demographic Information of Participants in the Vuka S'hambe Groups

The information presented in this section does not purport to be an empirical representation of youth offending, but it does provide an indication of the dynamics related to offending behaviour. The names of all individuals have been changed to protect their identity. The first Vuka Shambe male group had 12 members. The second one was a female group with 14 girls. The third group was a male group with 16 members. At the time of the intervention the average age of the male prisoners was 20 years, the youngest being 17 years and the oldest being 25 years. The average age of the female prisoners was 18 years - the youngest being 16 and the oldest 24. Considering that most of these prisoners served some months awaiting trial before they were sentenced, and indeed many had served part of their sentences prior to joining the programme, it becomes clear that they were younger at the time of committing their offences and when they were formally removed from their communities or families. At the time of their conviction several participants were no longer living at home, and most were no longer attending school.

At the time of their imprisonment all the prisoners were living in Gauteng, with their families, relatives or friends. Most had their origins from Gauteng townships like Soweto, Daveyton, and Katlehong, but a few originated from rural areas of more distant provinces such as the Eastern and Western Cape, Mpumalanga and KwaZulu Natal. They had either run away from home, or came to Johannesburg to study or to seek jobs. This information has serious implications in terms of the development of these youth. Not only did imprisonment result in loss of the family structure and stability, but it also led to a loss of schooling opportunity or acquisition of job skills. The level of education for the prisoners

ranged from grade 4 to grade 11. Most had low levels of formal education. Forty two percent of the participants had primary school education (up to grade 7); 40 percent had junior secondary education (up to grade 9); while only 18 percent had senior secondary education (up to grade 11).

Although the groups had been targeted at violent offenders, it did sometimes accommodate non-violent offenders as well and consequently represented a diverse group of offenders. Participants had been convicted of a range of offences from property crimes such as theft, shoplifting, and possession of drugs to serious violations against the person, including rape, hijack, armed robbery and murder. Many offenders were convicted of more than one crime. Among a total of 28 boys, 4 were sentenced for rape, 22 were sentenced for a combination of either armed robbery, robbery with assault or house breaking with attempted murder; 6 were sentenced for murder. Their sentences ranged from 11 years to 34 years. Among the 14 girls, 3 were sentenced for armed robbery and murder, 7 for attempted murder and either robbery or possession of firearm or possession of drugs; 4 for crimes like arson, assault, theft, or housebreaking. Their sentences ranged from 12 months to 25 years.

It must also be borne in mind that most of these youth were not serving sentences for all the crimes they had committed. For instance, although 4 out of 28 boys (14 percent) were serving a sentence for rape, thirty percent of the boys in the Vuka S'hambe programme admitted during the course of discussions about their crime path that they had committed a rape at some point in their lives (even though they had not necessarily understood it as rape at the time). They also reported that their path of crime usually started with petty crimes like bag snatching, theft and shoplifting and with time with escalated to more serious crime. Some of the participants admitted that they were often under the influence of drugs or alcohol when they committed these offences, or were often motivated by the need to obtain money to sustain their addictions or to obtain material things.

On the Road to Violence: Prisoners' Perspectives on Risk Factors for Criminal Behaviour

The Vuka S'hambe Programme addressed many themes to guide offenders in gaining self-awareness. During the early phases a lot of time was dedicated towards allowing participants to share their life experiences with the group. Several themes tended to weave together the life stories of the 14 females and 28 males that participated in the three interventions. These provided prisoners' perspectives of the reasons for their engagement in criminal violence. These themes can be viewed as indicators of risk factors that created a vulnerability to violent behaviour, rather than as causal factors. None of these factors on their own can provide an explanation for violence among youth, rather it is the interaction of many factors, including environmental factors and individual characteristics, that seems to be critical.

Parenting

About 55 percent of the Vuka S'hambe participants were raised from an early age by relatives other than their parents such as grandmothers, uncles, or aunts. Although many have good memories and experiences of their childhood with their caregivers, they longed for their absent mothers and or fathers. The absence or unavailability of the mother (who was either working somewhere or unemployed and unable to look after the child, or sometimes deceased or ill), had a negative impact on some of these youths. The nature of

the relationship with some of the parents/ caregivers was described as distant, conflictual, strict, uncommunicative and lacking in warmth. One participant reported that her mother did not show any interest or pride in her as a child. While growing up she said she was a recipient of constant criticisms and shouting. The participants described such experiences as a form of rejection or abandonment that resulted in feeling 'unlovable', 'unworthy' of their parents' love, or 'angry and bitter'. The need for acceptance and for love by a parental figure was voiced by many of these youth. This was summed up by one of the boys who was serving a 20 year sentence for armed robbery and murder. He said,

'I'm like a dead flower. Like a flower I needed water, but my parents did not take care of me. They never loved me. I cannot love myself now. I feel rotten with anger inside.'

Another participant reported,

'My mother was ill when I was born. She gave me away to her sister who did not have a son. I grew up knowing that my aunt was my mother. When I was told the truth about my real mother, I became angry. My mother expected me to accept her but I became angry as I could not make meaning of her behaviour. I still feel I am a reject and not fit of her love. This created a lot of confusion for me at a time when I was trying to know myself. My anger led me to take risks with my life.'

Family breakdown was also observed to be a common trend among most of these youth. Many of the participants experienced divorce or separation of parents when they were growing up. They believed this to be the reason for their unhappy childhood and pain. The impact of divorce/ separation was one of devastation, self-blame and anger, and the realisation of being different from children who had both parents, and constantly asking questions 'why me'. Although it is common in their communities to be raised by a single parent, they felt that life could be different if they had both parents. They felt that their situation made them vulnerable to involvement in crime, citing the negative psychological impact of divorce/ separation (painful loss); loss of stability and cohesion which manifested in lack of parental supervision, reduced nurturance and disruption in economic status.

For both the girls and the boys, an absent father became a cause of pain and anger. One of the boys shared his fantasy to kill his father as revenge for having left his mother before he was even born. He linked his feelings of abandonment with his family's experience of poverty. He said, 'I think I would not be where I am if my father was present in my life. He abandoned us, my mother became alcoholic and I ended up in the streets fending for myself.' One of the boys who had never met his father even described himself as a 'fatherless child' and expressed the void he felt in his life as a result. Even while in prison he had made countless attempts to write to his father requesting to meet with him. Some of the boys had been told that they looked or behaved like their fathers, hence the curiosity to know them. This strong identification with the absent father created much anxiety and conflict for most of these young boys. Above all, they had limited male role-models while growing up, or had negative role models, some reporting that their brothers were criminals or alcoholics.

The nature of the relationship with the available parent/caregiver seemed to be important. Although some of the prisoners had been brought up by mothers, they blamed their mothers for being ill-equipped for mothering and reported as follows: 'she could not care for me like

a mother should'; 'she could not love me'; or 'she was alcoholic and was not available'. Mother-only families did not all offer the stability, family cohesion, parental supervision these children seemed to need when growing up. Often they reported that the mothers were overwhelmed, offered little nurturance or discipline, and often relied on coercive and punitive techniques to foster submission in them.

Step-parenthood was recognised by some of the group participants as a critical factor that resulted in running away behaviour and aggressiveness. The mothers of four of the girls had other men living with them. These girls reported difficulties in living with step-fathers who were either abusive or emotionally distant. One of the girls was serving a sentence for having burnt her step-father with boiling water. He was an alcoholic and was physically abusive to her and her mother. She reported that she needed to protect herself and her mother. One of the boys ran away from home to escape the harsh treatment from his step-father. It appears as if several of the step-parents that came into the lives of these youths were either not committed to their families or had no skills for dealing with step-children, thus creating a lot of stress in the families.

On the other hand, about 33 percent of the group participants described loving relationships with single parent, or reported that they came from stable two-parent families or extended families who provided sufficient support. They blamed themselves for their 'failure to listen to parental advice'. They tended to blame peer pressure for their criminal behaviour. Their path of offending behaviour graduated from losing interest in school, selling and using drugs, drifting away from family values and family supports, increasing greed to acquire material things they could not afford, and ultimately to being pulled to the life of criminality to fulfill their needs. While in prison, many participants expressed guilt from having disappointed their families.

Traumatic Experiences

There was a high incidence of reported traumatic experiences among these youths. **Sexual abuse:** Forty-two percent of the girls reported that they had experienced sexual violation in childhood or early adolescence. They related traumatic experiences of feeling insecure and unsafe as they were growing up, of being raped or gang raped, and sexually abused in childhood, and they talked of the negative impact these have had in their lives. Sonto related how she was raped at the age of 12 by an elderly man that she knew in her neighborhood, and was threatened not to tell anyone. The following year she was gang raped by three boys at school. She regretted that she maintained the secrecy, always blaming herself for what happened. She reported that her life had been a rollercoaster ride as a result of these violations, including failure at school, sexual promiscuity and drug use.

Xoli, who was sexually abused by a mentally retarded brother at the age of 10, said 'I have become angry and rebellious. I can hurt a person purposely and not feel anything. I even wonder if I know what love is. What made things worse is that when I told my mother about the abuse, she failed to believe me. She had also failed to protect me.' She said that she is not the same person that she used to be and made a connection between her violent behaviour and the 'turmoil' and 'emptiness' she felt inside her. None of the boys revealed incidences of sexual abuse, although it is possible they may have had such experiences and did not talk about it in the group.

Physical and emotional abuse was also reported by a significant number of the participants. Their caregivers/ parents had often used coercive techniques to force submission in their children, often resulting in physical injury. The parents were unpredictable and had instilled fear and helplessness. One of the girls recalled how her mother often assaulted her until she bled. She would hide the bruises in her body under her clothes, ashamed to be seen by her peers at school. She finally escaped the beatings and went to live with a boyfriend, who unfortunately was also abusive. She said that even at the time of the programme she could not differentiate between a loving and an unhealthy relationship. Other youths experienced emotional abuse from parents who consistently criticised and degraded them by calling them names, thus destroying their sense of worth. The pervasive terror in their environments often created mistrust of the world for these boys and girls and resulted in run-away attempts. Some of the girls reported escaping to live with boyfriends who forced them into criminal acts like theft, house breaking or selling drugs.

Loss and grief was prevalent in the childhood lives of all these youth. They experienced losses of significant people in their lives including breadwinners, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings. Many still experienced continuous losses while in prison. They related that the impact had been significant and said that 'my life changed', 'I was never the same person again', 'my future was destroyed', and 'I was very hurt'. One person recalled the traumatic death of her grandmother who was knocked down by a car just a few houses away from the house. She was called to the scene of the accident and arrived once her grandmother had died. One of the boys graphically portrayed his feelings of loss as a 'painful, rotten heart filled with worms'. In an activity, he painted it red to indicate blood and anger.

The testimonies of these prisoners about losses and the impact on them painted a clear picture of the importance of meaningful relationships. The destruction of these relationships during their early years of development was cited by these youths as a major cause for their aggressiveness, pain and confusion. This was exacerbated as their feelings remained unresolved due to a lack of opportunity to make sense of their experiences. They needed reassurance about safety, and genuine concern and support for their feelings.

Poverty and deprivation: About a quarter of participants came from economically disadvantaged families. They had experienced some degree of poverty and deprivation. They related stories of unemployed caregivers; going to bed without food and not knowing where the next meal would come from; and fathers who failed to provide essential needs. They reported that poverty was a source of frustration during their early years. One girl remembered how she always watched smartly dressed girls, knowing that she would not possess what she wished for. She said that she always felt 'empty and deprived' and 'envied' others who had more. One of the boys said, 'I dropped out of school because I could not tolerate watching other children eat when all I could have was water during breaks. I was constantly restless and could not concentrate in class.' The inability to obtain such basic necessities of survival created a shattering experience for these children. Apart from poverty (physical hunger), these youths expressed emotional hunger – a deep longing for love, nurturance, protection, innocence, warmth, joy, and harmony. They longed for warm houses, mothers preparing food, and for families without violence or conflict. For a lot of them these deprivations bred anger and resentment towards those who failed to provide, as well as towards those who had what they did not have. It bred feelings of pain, hopelessness and shame, low frustration tolerance, and a pattern of seeking instant

gratification to meet needs, hence some resorted to violence to obtain what they needed.

Parenthood

Early pregnancy was reported by the girls as another reason for some of their criminal involvement. About 50 percent of these girls fell pregnant in early adolescence. One had three children by the age of 19. They admitted that this resulted in missed opportunity for education as they had to drop out of school. It also made them dependent on boyfriends, who were often involved in crime. One of the girls said, 'I became pregnant for the second time at the age of 18 with a 55 year old man. I decided to marry him because he promised to build me a house of my own.' In some instances the girls admitted that they engaged in crime to take care of their children's needs. One of the girls was worried that her daughter would turn out to be like her. She was serving a sentence for arson for setting the boyfriend's shack on fire as well as a sentence for having neglected her three-year old daughter who is now in foster care. The girls expressed regrets about not having received an education about sexuality and contraceptives.

A number of the boys were parents as well. They reported that they assumed a care-giving role and had been driven to crime to support their children and girlfriends. They saw themselves as providers and reported that failure to assume that responsible role would also undermine their sense of masculinity. In some cases there was a conscious attempt 'to be what their fathers were not.' In their strong identification with their masculinity and the role associated with it, and denigration of helplessness (which they associated with femininity), they took risks with their lives by trying to prove themselves worthy.

Modeling of violence

Some of the prisoners related how their community and home environments modeled the use of force and violence. They became desensitized to violence as a result of being witness to stabbings, shootings, and murder in their communities. Such environments provided them limited opportunities for learning appropriate problem solving skills, social skills and conflict resolution. They spoke of fathers who physically abused their mothers. One of them related,

'I witnessed many times my dad beating up my mom with fists and he would often chase her away. I remember my mother running away from him naked one day. This violence used to trouble me. I started spending a lot of time with friends and started smoking dagga.'

Some participants even saw violence modeled by their older siblings and reported that they 'had known no better'. They reported that their upbringing taught them 'through fighting one can prove they are powerful', and 'once provoked, you heal once you see the blood.' One of the girls confirmed that she had tried to resolve differences by stabbing others and it is only when she saw blood that she felt calmer. One of the boys said that he noticed that the people who earned respect in his community did so by instilling fear in others through violence and threat of violence. He reported, 'I used violence to gain power and respect. Violence gave me the opportunity to be someone rather than no one'.

Cognitive Impairment

It also became apparent that some of these youths felt intellectually inadequate as they were growing up. One said,

'I come from a loving family with three brothers and two sisters. I never felt good about myself because I was stupid at school. I failed every standard at primary school and felt a misfit. By the age of ten I would pretend to be going to school and end up hanging out with older boys at the shops. That is when things started to go wrong'.

No formal assessment was undertaken to report on the intellectual capacity of these youth. Based on their self-reports indicating poor achievement at school and drop-out (some at primary level and others at secondary level), drug dependence, and anti-social behaviours, there could be evidence of low IQ and/or learning difficulties. This could have manifested in poor performance and low levels of acceptance by peers and teachers for some of these youth. Feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour resulted as some of these youths perceived themselves as 'social rejects' in the eyes of peers and teachers. Due to limited support received, they were often prone to peer pressure and aggressive behaviour as a way of trying to attract (negative) attention and to counter their feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem.

In summary, the range of factors cited by youths as the most important reasons for engagement in violent crime appears to correlate strongly with the risk factors outlined in our earlier theoretical section. Despite the participants' ability to identify these factors there is still an apparent lack of insight into their own agency in their behaviour. While they tend to focus more on social and family factors, there was very little awareness of the individual motivators that could have increased their vulnerability to violent behaviour. This manifests as not taking responsibility for one's own problems and an inclination toward externalising their locus of control, or blaming others, or circumstances, for their criminal activities. The next section, 'In the hearts and Minds of the Offenders', attempts to expand this understanding of the causes of violence, based on an analysis of prisoners' stories and art shared during the sessions.

In the Hearts and Minds of the Offenders

During the Vuka S'hambe programme, participants engaged in a number of activities that resulted in different outcomes. From these outcomes some information was elicited about the participants' thoughts and feelings, beyond what they related in words. Many of the participants' stories were rich in content, so the therapeutic approach focused on getting them to connect to their emotions as well. While they captured their memories artistically in drawings, emotions emerged, allowing them to gain perspective, meaning and better self-awareness. Some of this input has resulted in our understanding that the offenders' capacity for perpetration of violence is rooted in the nature of their relationships with others. As the Xhosa saying goes, 'Umntu Ngumntu Ngabantu' which means a person is human because of those around him/her. This saying is based on a value system of unity and togetherness, a spirit of community, sharing and giving. From birth to death, during painful as well as joyous moments, the individual is expected to share his burdens with others. When a child is born he/she is received by family and friends and belongs to the extended family. When

someone dies, masses attend the funeral, offering pillars of support. Indeed, 'No man is an island.' One gets to know who one really is in relation to others around him/her. However, traumatic experiences can dismantle these powerful connections and attachments, leaving room for loneliness, emptiness, deadness, and loss of empathy to develop in the hearts and the minds of the deprived individual. These themes are discussed below:

Loneliness and Emptiness

Loneliness and emptiness were prevalent emotions in the lives of the offenders we worked with. Most of them related having relationships that were not warm and loving, but where there was instead rejection, abandonment and neglect. They described these experiences as contributing to their loneliness and a sense of emptiness. In their loneliness they felt powerless, they had no identity and no experience of being recognised as important. This was revealed by some of the youth in their stories and pictures. One of them said,

'I realise that I am a bad person. I feel black and empty inside. Actually I feel dead. My secret is that I am lonely and I don't trust anyone. I cannot feel anything but I always smile so that I can pretend to be okay. I have never lived a happy loving life.' He added as he pointed to a picture he had drawn, 'Can you see my hands in my picture? They are pushing everyone away. I am a loner by nature and nobody cares about me. I have converted to Muslim faith but this is just a change on the outside – inside there is emptiness. I am like a dog which does not know right and wrong. A dog can bite its owner because it does not think.'

This theme of loneliness also arose during a relaxation activity with the third group when one of the participants found he was unable to relax. Instead of visualizing a peaceful place, he found his visualization taking him to a desert where he was all alone, naked, and being chased by wild dogs. He cried as he shared his realisation that there was nobody to rescue him. This pointed to a hunger for protection, for belonging, and for security- feelings that were shared by many of the participants.

Feelings of deadness and yearning for life

This theme came up several times in the self-portraits and reports of both girls and boys. They portrayed themselves as having no self, as lifeless, as animal-like, as led by evil/ the devil, as ghosts, and as inhuman. When these issues were explored it became clear that this sense of deadness was related to the absence of meaningful attachments and relationships. This also manifested in not feeling lovable, a low self esteem and worthlessness, absence of happiness, to poor achievement and a lack of a sense of accomplishment. One of them even asked the question, 'how can I give love when I do not know what it is?' He was supported by others in the group who felt the same way. Another boy constructed his feelings about himself as a ghost. He shared that he felt lifeless, devoid of emotions and belonging more to the dead than with the living. He said that he felt haunted by his own view of himself. There is a correlation between this feeling of being inhuman and acting in ways that also dehumanize the other. These youths did not know that others have feelings because they did not experience any positive feelings for themselves. They have become devoid of love and filled with hate.

Lack of Empathy and Remorse

Interactions with the young offenders also revealed that their feelings of being inhuman were strongly related to lack of empathy and remorse. The way that they related their experiences was usually devoid of feeling. They laughed about how they violated others. It was as if they were telling a horror movie and they were not part of it. They related how they shot, injured or killed their victims in cold blood but never spoke about the pain or suffering inflicted on their victims. When asked to think about the impact of his actions on his hijack victim, one prisoner said, 'I shot him several times, but I am not sure he died. If he survived he must have claimed for his car from insurance.' In their preoccupation with survival of self, narcissism (a lack of empathic concern for the other) dominated. The level of dissociation (defense mechanism whereby thoughts are divorced from emotions appropriate to them) was significant. Hence they tended to minimize the impact of their behaviours. Generally, they experienced no guilt or remorse and an inability to think about the consequences of their actions.

It was also apparent that these youths displayed a lack of capacity for personal accountability and agency. They tended to be rigid and inflexible in their ways of thinking, and blamed others or circumstances for their behaviours. They did not have the sense of personal agency – it was as if they lacked control of their own destiny. Their understanding of their aggressiveness was that they did not have control over it, but that their emotions controlled them. For some, the programme offered them the first opportunity to realise that they are able to take the control. They also lacked knowledge and memory for their own history. For them, life was lived for the present, without reflecting or remembering the past. Indeed, most of them could not even anticipate a future for themselves. Few of them had any sense of moral accountability for their actions. Hence the act is not really real, not really wrong, not really mine. This denial is a defense against knowing, against taking ownership, against feeling shame or guilt.

The pictures that the girls and boys drew during the process also reflected a lot of themes that were in their minds and hearts. While they portrayed themselves as tough, aggressive and in control, deeper exploration of emotions and defense mechanisms revealed emotions they themselves had no words to express - mostly pain, vulnerability and fear. Eighty percent of the masks drawn by the girls had tears on them, portraying states of helplessness, pain and depression. Some portrayed themselves as animal-like or as ghosts. A significant number of the masks portrayed injuries or scars, symbolizing emotional scars and pain. Many of the pictures that represented the lives of the prisoners, had images of hearts. But the hearts were either broken, or bleeding, and some were punctured by daggers and spears. With guided exploration of the art, participants were able to gain insight into their emotional states.

To sum up, in the hearts and minds of these young offenders there was a deep longing for love, for life, for ability to feel, for belonging. What follows is an illustration of the experiences of the participants through two cases studies.

Case Studies

Mandisa's³ Story

I was born in 1981 in Johannesburg. At birth my mother left me in the care of my grandmother in Swaziland. I only got introduced to my mother at the age of 10. This was a difficult moment of my life. I did not know how to relate to this stranger I always wanted to meet. My grandmother was ill, so I agreed to go and live with her. She did not know how to take care of me and I felt she did not have time for me. We had a lot of conflicts and she beat me up often. I remember a day I went to school with blood dripping from my head.

Living with my mom was made worse by the fact that she was staying with another man. He was alcoholic and abusive to my mother. I kept running away from home to escape these circumstances and my school attendance was bad. My escape was when I fell in love with a boy and then decided to move in with him. Unfortunately, he was very abusive to me. I found myself trapped in the same circumstances my mother was in. In addition, he was involved in criminal activities in which he insisted I take part. I became pregnant and the only way to survive was through crime. I ran away from my boyfriend and decided to return to my grandmother in Swaziland. When I got there I was heart broken when I discovered that she had died and I had not been informed. I returned to Johannesburg. Life was really tough so I went back to crime, ultimately to end up in prison.

There are a lot of things that bother me in my life. When I was in primary school my brother sexually abused me. My mother knew about this but did not do anything. Although this event is fading from memory, I still experience funny smells that make me scared. When I hold a pen I suddenly get reminded of this pain. I have this fear that my future is doomed and that I may never have children of my own. I have wanted to kill myself on many occasions. I have cut my wrists and my stomach to try and get rid of the pain I feel inside and I blame myself for this incident.

Mandisa's story was not unique. It highlighted many of the themes that were shared by other female participants. Traumatic experiences such as rape or childhood abuse often forced these girls trust people who were untrustworthy. Neglected by those who should have protected them, they often ran away to seek safety in unsafe environments. A lot of them even internalized the badness of their abusers, blaming themselves for their painful experiences. They carried with them a bruised self-image and shame as they viewed themselves often as contaminated. At times they resorted to self-mutilation.

According to Gilligan, infliction of harm on self helps to create physical sensation, thus counteracting the feelings of deadness, or an absence of feelings (Gilligan, 2000, 52). He describes violent offenders as 'dead souls' incapable of feeling physical pain even when they hurt themselves. Herman adds that the physical pain is more preferable to the emotional pain that they feel. Self mutilation is thus self-preserving, producing a powerful feeling of calm and relief (Herman, 1997:109).

Sabelo's Story

I was born in 1975. I had a normal childhood living with both parents. I started school in 1980 and I was a brilliant boy who listened to his parents and teachers. I was well-liked by peers and adults in my life. I participated in extra-mural activities at school and excelled in athletics. When I was doing standard two my life was disrupted by the disappearance of my father. He left us and we didn't know where he was for a period of four years. I was heart broken because I loved him very much. As a family we went through a difficult time as my mother could not provide all our needs. The determination of my mother stands out for me as she instilled in me the value for education. I had her strength to persevere despite difficulties in life and continued to excel at school.

The worst memory of my early adolescent years was when I was involved murder. In our community people were complaining about witches and their evil behaviours. The youth decided to act on this complaint by looking for them in order to burn them. We caught some of the people suspected as witches and we burned them. This created a stir in the village. The police and the soldiers came looking for us so we went to hide in the mountain for a period of four months. This meant that we could not attend school.

When all was calm, I still managed to return to school and continued to excel in athletics. In 1990 I represented South Africa for the first time overseas. We competed in London and I came first in the 100m and 200m races. I won gold medals for these races. In 1991 I passed standard ten and because of financial difficulties I could not proceed with my tertiary education. It was at this point that my parents said I should go and look for a job in Johannesburg.

In 1992 I left the village to look for the job in Johannesburg. For my first job I was a motor mechanic. I was very happy about my job and I was earning a fairly decent salary. I was sending some of the money home, keeping some for myself to buy clothes, go to movies and enjoy myself. I was independent and felt good about myself. Two years later I moved into another job as a forklift driver. I associated with friends who introduced me to smoking and drinking alcohol. Within no time I was going out with different girls to parties. I could no longer send money home because I was buying girls alcohol and clothes. I started to realise that the money I was earning was not enough. I left the job in 1995 and began to work as a panel beater. Again I was never satisfied with the money they were paying me. At the age of twenty five I got sucked into the life of a criminal with the aim of pursue happiness in material things. I started with house breaking and theft, to robbery and hi-jacking, finally to be arrested for armed robbery in 2002 and sentenced to 11 years.

These two young offender stories differ significantly. Although Sabelo did have painful experiences in his early years, he also had sense of a purpose in life. He had dreams to pursue and had the motivation and support from his family and peers. Sabelo could visualise a positive future ahead of him because he was ambitious, perceived himself to be likeable, and felt successful in a number of things in life. He also had a strong sense of conforming to social norms where even his early murder of the suspected witches was an indication of a misguided attempt to help the community. His story was so touching because he seemed to have had the recipe to make it in life, only to get sidetracked into

crime in his mid-twenties. On the other hand, Mandisa's life was one of tragedy from the beginning. With minimal supports and no sense of purpose or control in her life, hopelessness consumed her.

Sabelo's story further suggests that there are indeed many reasons young people get pulled to the world of violence. It is therefore important to look at each case as unique and within its context. These stories further suggest that no-matter how conducive the social environment is for a child's development, factors like personal choice, personality factors, peer pressure, greed and seeking instant gratification, seeking status and recognition, can be significant factors that provide the young with a pull towards criminal violence.

Part Two: The Vuka S'hambe Model

In his book, *Lost Boys: Why our sons turn violent and how we can save them* (1999), James Garbarino defines resilience as the ability to bounce back from crisis and overcome stress and injury. Very closely aligned to this definition is Judith Herman's definition: The capacity to withstand adverse environmental circumstances. Her view is based on her work with trauma survivors (1992).

Gabarino (1998), Herman (1997) and O'Hanlon & Bertolino (1998) highlight the following as key ingredients of resilience:

- Positive coping style - this is an active and task oriented coping style as opposed to an emotion oriented style.
- High sociability - the ability to cooperate and communicate with others, seek support purposefully rather than alienate oneself in times of crisis.
- Androgyny - balancing masculine and feminine attributes in oneself.
- Perception of ability to control one's destiny- an internal locus of control, and the ability to influence one's course and outcomes of one's life.
- Social anchors- connection to family, school, community organisations.
- Strong attachments – meaningful and trusting relationships, sense of belonging and acceptance.
- Authentic self-esteem- a belief of being lovable, worthy or valuable. It reflects a person's mastery of developmental tasks and competence.
- Sense of meaning – according to Herman (1997), research indicates that Vietnam veterans who coped with the war without developing post-traumatic stress disorder did so because they had a sense of meaning for their task as soldiers. They did not take risks, were responsible in danger situations and their task was to stay alive, unlike those who saw themselves as victims in the war.
- In their book, *Even from a Broken Web*, O'Hanlon & Bertolino (1998), describe another factor of resilience- the ability to connect to a positive future, a future with possibilities and meaning. They cite the example of how Viktor Frankl survived physical and psychological torture while imprisoned in a Nazi camp in Germany. Frankl did not allow himself to stay frozen in that painful time, but dissociated from the painful moment, and instead created a vision and a sense of future with possibilities and meaning.

Resilience entails special individual, interpersonal and transpersonal qualities that enable one to cope effectively with a presenting problem. It is an important ability that equips an

individual with resources to handle a variety of situations that may be perceived as harmful, threatening or challenging. All individuals may be exposed to the same stressor, how they respond or are affected depends a lot on their resilience. Resilience may thus be considered as playing a protective role during times of stress or crises. A lack of resilience may expose one to feelings of powerlessness, helplessness and inability to cope. Violent behaviour may then arise as a defense to having lost control of the situation.

Factors that promote resilience

Developmental theories point out several factors that promote a child's social and emotional well-being and resilience. Important factors include: the quality of the interactions and attachment the child has with the caregiver; his socialisation; the discipline that he is subject to; and a climate that promotes pro-social behaviour. These can help to develop a range of qualities including positive self-esteem and confidence, internal locus of control, a sense of trust, pro-social behaviour, empathy, and social competence.

All infants form some kind of attachment to the primary caregiver. A secure attachment gives a good emotional start for a child. Securely attached children have been found to be more cooperative, enthusiastic and persistent at solving problems. They show more initiative and social skills. They are also more compliant and likelier to have more internalized controls. They also tend to be happier and more sociable and attract more positive responses from peers. These children also tend to be more trusting and present with fewer psychological problems as they grew up.

Caregivers of securely attached children have been found to be psychologically healthier—have self confidence, are warm and affectionate, smile at the child and play happily with them, and enjoy everyday details of taking care of the child. Not only are these caregivers affectionate, but also sensitive and have empathic qualities. The empathic caregiver sees things through the eyes of the child, picks up and understands the child's cues, responds quickly, appropriately and reliably. These parents are better able to reinforce the child's social skills, create positive expectations, and encourage a sense of personal efficacy.

The nature of the socialisation and discipline a child is exposed to during development also plays a role in enhancing resilience. Authoritative parental style has been found to create a climate for development of resilience. These parents set firm rules and limits and yet they are loving, understanding and encourage independence. They reason with the child, encourage discussion and listen, thus managing to keep levels of conflicts low. This atmosphere of warm approval, praise and acceptance fosters children's social cognitive and moral development. Children whose parents are authoritative are more likely to be friendly, cooperative, competent intellectually assertive, self-reliant, independent, happy and socially responsible, an ideal combination of qualities for promoting resilience. These parents are able to explain why a child should act in particular ways, tend to intervene actively when the child acts otherwise, and they also explain how certain behaviours will affect other people. This results in a child being able to think about consequences. Also, parents who are able to explain other people's motives or needs to the child, develop the child's pride, social competence and concern for others. The child learns how his/her behaviour affects other people, and this helps them to integrate this knowledge with their capacity for empathy.

This authoritative style of parenting also promotes positive self-esteem and confidence (a reflection of a child's mastery of developmental tasks), enhances school performance and success at solving social problems. The child further derives esteem from other people's reactions and his achievements. High self-esteem is associated with being more independent and creative, with being more acceptable in social groups, with leadership qualities including being more assertive and outspoken, with expression of own opinions and better at taking criticism (Clarke-Stewart & Friedman: 1987, 360-366).

Pro-social behaviour in children can also be fostered when parents are warm and loving, if they reason with the child rather than punish and threaten them, and when they model and encourage their children to get along with others, to be helpful and caring, and to control their emotions. Children can imitate antisocial acts like aggression from adults, other children, and television. By punishing severely, parents can stimulate the child's anger and provide a model of aggressive behaviour. When discipline is consistent and mixed with love and reasoning, and if parents foster acceptable outlets for impulses like anger and frustration which children inevitably feel. Parents can provide positive encouragement for the child to replace aggression with other behaviour (like verbalizing their anger in words rather than in physical attacks) and thus teaching the child what they cannot do, as well as what they should do (Clarke-Stewart & Friedman: 1987, 384-390).

In developing the Vuka S'hambe model, the goal was to build resilience in young prisoners. Our conceptualisation of the causes of violence and how to promote resilience contributed a lot towards the development of our methodology as well as the Vuka S'hambe programme content. The therapeutic relationship also became the vehicle for the promotion of personal healing and growth for participants.

What follows is a discussion of the methodology used in the intervention, followed by an outline of activities, and expected outcomes.

Methodology of Intervention

Theoretical Orientation: Vuka S'hambe utilizes an integrated theoretical framework, drawing concepts and techniques from various theoretical models that target the prisoner's thinking (attitudes), feelings (emotions) and behaviours. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and Psychodynamic approaches have been found to be very useful with this work.

The Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) refers to techniques that aim to reduce dysfunctional emotions and behaviours by altering behaviour and by altering thinking patterns (attributions and attitudes). It is based on the assumption that irrational beliefs are the root of maladaptive feelings and behaviours. The goal of therapy when utilizing this approach is to challenge the validity of a person's irrational thinking, that very often is the source of distress, resulting in anxiety, aggressive impulses, depression, or low self-esteem. Very often these reactions are unrealistic/irrational, and are as a result of inappropriate and negative thinking patterns that are unconscious. Therapy is directed at these thoughts to develop a different set of attitudes and attributes (cognitive dimension) as well as different emotional reactions to situations.

The psychodynamic approach is based on the assumption that behaviour is largely influenced by repressed, unconscious experiences and defense mechanisms. Using this

approach it is possible to assist participants to gain insight into their behaviours and attitudes. An understanding of some of the psychodynamic concepts assists us with understanding group dynamics. For an example, the prisoners tend to relate to the therapist more as a parent figure than as a helper. The concept of transference allows us to understand their repressed conflicts, fears, dependency needs of the clients, which may originate from earlier experiences and sometimes get directed towards the therapist. These feelings need to be brought out in the open, acknowledged for what they are to foster autonomy and self-growth rather than dependency. Counter-transference refers to the emotional reactions of the therapist to issues being dealt with in therapy. These personal emotions would prejudice the therapist's ability to be of help if they go unchecked. The utilisation of both these techniques ensures a balance between allowing participants to understand themselves and at the same time to translate this understanding into action.

Group Intervention: We chose to use a group work approach for our intervention. From birth, human beings spend most of their life in groups. A child is born within a family, gains autonomy and expands the family circle to involve play peers and then school peers and other groups in clubs and institutions like churches, gangs, political affiliations, etc. Groups thus have the power to provide support and a truly positive experience for offenders in dealing with some of their behavioural, attitudinal and emotional difficulties. Groups can allow participants to invest themselves by sharing personal matters in a genuine manner, listen to others, receive and give feedback and providing support and promoting of cooperativeness, interdependence, experience emotional closeness, caring, sharing and reciprocity (Corey & Corey, 1997:12-13).

In the Vuka S'hambe programme, group intervention allowed for simultaneous exploration of both personal and social issues. It offered an opportunity for each member to draw upon the strengths of others for problem resolution and decision-making. This offered an opportunity to overcome the sense of isolation and loneliness or even anti-social tendencies. It had the potential to promote a community and family spirit and sense of belonging, decreasing alienation, promoting socialisation skills, and increasing hope and optimism.

Members saw the enactment of their own problems in the group and this gave them a sense of universality (realisation that one was not alone in their struggle). Within this context participants also discovered how they affected others, thus gaining personal awareness. According to Corey & Corey (1997), a group is a major therapeutic resource in that it can also pose a greater challenge and prompt individuals to analyse their views and attitudes and behaviours more intensely than in individual therapy.

Nature and Duration of the Groups: The nature and duration of these groups evolved over time. The first group was categorised as a life skills (psycho-educational) group, whose primary goal was to educate, to impart tools for participants to make certain changes in their attitudes, feelings and behaviour. It was structured around themes such as self-awareness, coping skills like anger and stress management, building self-esteem, and addressing an information deficit in some of the participants' lives. This intervention was carried out over a four-month period. It was run over 20 two-hour sessions.

As the facilitators engaged with this group they recognised the need to re-define the intervention to be more therapeutic in nature. The depth and the extent of behavioural,

interpersonal and emotional difficulties of the young prisoners necessitated an intervention that incorporated both the educational as well as a therapeutic component. According to Corey & Corey's definition, a therapeutic group is one that encompasses two categories, counselling as well as a psycho-educational (life skills) component (Corey & Corey, 1997, 9-10). It was then decided to extend the duration of the second and third groups to six months, running over 30 two-hour sessions.

Techniques: A variety of tools and techniques were utilised to ensure that the group afforded participants fun, creativity, as well as a therapeutic outcome. Among those used were painting and drawing, clay modeling, music and relaxation techniques, movement therapy and role-plays, story telling, analogies, metaphors and rituals. These experiential processes engaged participants in creative ways to reflect upon themselves and learn new ways of thinking, feeling and behaving.

Participants could engage in a learning process that gave them the freedom to express themselves in ways they were comfortable with. They could lose themselves without their usual guardedness. These processes also catered for individuality and participants' mode of communication. These also suited the needs of the participants, their different levels of understanding and abilities. When someone does not have words to explain their world, the practical focus involving use of colours, shapes and symbols, can allow them to access their internal world, bringing their unconscious processes to the conscious level. Their thoughts and emotions could more easily come to the surface, allowing for observation of individual patterns and group processes.

Safety, containment and rituals played a critical part of Vuka S'hambe programme. In her article entitled *Healing Rituals: Powerful and Empowering*, Zulli (1998) argues that rituals are an integral part of ensuring a containing, sacred and therapeutic atmosphere and for those dealing with pain, hopelessness, despair, grief, and anger. Rituals can offer a sense of balance to life and containment. In the Vuka S'hambe groups, the circular seating arrangement, lighting a candle at the beginning of each session to symbolise the beginning of the group, and touching hands to perform a closing ritual at the end of each session, were some of the rituals used to provide continuity and create a platform for strengthening bonds and connections among participants. Each meeting ensured that a safe space was created for exploring emotions, affirming interconnections and compassion, allowing for celebration of unity and togetherness.

Facilitation: Extensive thought was given to the manner in which this group would be facilitated. It was clear that to fulfill our goals as outlined above there would be a need for a clinical as well as a data collection component to this process. The groups were co-facilitated by two leaders, a male and a female. This gender representation was considered ideal for this population in that it modeled a couple, a representation of a mother and a father figure. This was considered an important modeling of the world as it is in some families. This also served to demonstrate cooperation and team work among the facilitators. This modeling was an important tool considering that some of the participants came from single parent backgrounds, dysfunctional or violent families.

The facilitators of these groups possessed different abilities and skills, therapeutic and as well as data collection skills. While the psychologist was experienced in group processes and practice and managed the therapeutic process, the field-worker managed data

collection. Recording and facilitating at the same time can be distracting and it can appear as if one is not fully attending. To minimize these influences roles were clearly defined.

Data Collection: Facilitators played a critical role of observation during the group process. This afforded them privileged access to private processes, not only to behaviours, but also to attitudes, opinions and feelings as they occurred during the intervention. There was a strong focus on making ongoing observation of group processes in order to monitor some of the changes happening in the group. In addition to these observations there was reliance on self-reports by participants as well as feedback from other group participants and prison officials. It is our belief that a lot happens outside the group within the prison environment than within a two-hour session. Each session therefore allowed for time to process challenges and triumphs encountered outside the group. The prisoners were also encouraged to keep journals for recording their own reflections about their journey and to volunteer sharing these. All these different modes of information gathering, afforded for richness of data as the programme progressed. In an attempt to develop a model of working with young offenders, it became necessary to keep these records to afford for reflection on the processes as well as challenges with each group facilitated. This was explained to the participants. Confidentiality and consent to utilise the information for documentation purposes was discussed with the participants.

Group Structure: Some consideration was given to the structure of the groups. For all of these groups, participation was voluntary. A proposal was written to the prison management requesting them to set up the groups, stating the purpose, intended starting month and duration of the group, and a brief outline of the programme content. For the programme we set out to involve prisoners who were sentenced for serious crimes and had at least another year left of their sentence to serve in prison. Once approved, publicity was then undertaken by prison officials (social workers and correctional officers), who then forwarded the facilitators a list of those interested in the programme. Even though the final decision to join the group or not depended on prisoners themselves, involving the officials was a way to get them to buy into the programme. Since they were the people in direct contact with the prisoners, they were potentially more aware of the needs of the inmates in their care. Most of the participants joined the groups voluntarily, and a few had been told by officials to attend, due to behavioural problems they were exhibiting in their sections.

Informed consent played a critical role in the decisions about membership of the groups. An initial meeting with prospective members was held in order to provide attendees with adequate information of what the group was about, its content, meeting times, and expectations. This afforded attendees an opportunity to ask questions and come to a decision whether they were interested.

Group size and format: In recruiting for the groups, clear and firm boundaries about the size of group were necessary. It was observed that this programme held a lot of appeal for more people than could be accommodated and that the nature of this intervention. However, it was also recognised that facilitation needed both physical and psychological stamina and some control measures to prevent burnout had to be put in place for facilitators. An attempt was made to keep the sizes of the groups between 12 and 14 members. The first group had 12 boys, and the second had 14 girls. However, the third group had 16 boys. This was justified based on past experience that some participants would automatically drop out, get released or be transferred to another prison. Also, as the programme gained popularity, the

facilitators too gained confidence in the process. To optimise group functioning, it was decided that the third group be facilitated by two psychologists, rather one as in the first two groups.

In making decisions about group size what had to be kept in mind throughout was that a large group could be draining and that its productivity could also be put in doubt. Kreeger (1975) argues that a large group can pose a dilemma for participants. For some members it can be overwhelming and frightening. It can allow others the comfort to remain anonymous, lose sense of identity in the group and not take responsibility. Considering this, it was decided that the participant-facilitator ratio should be kept small to optimize group functioning in the Vuka S'hambe groups.

The groups were homogeneous in nature in that the participants shared an experience of being young perpetrators of violence who were convicted of one or more offences, and who were presently incarcerated together in the same prison. These groups were also unique and heterogeneous in some ways. Although all participants had committed violent offences, there was a random mix in terms of nature of crimes committed; personal backgrounds; those who were perceived by the prison authorities as 'good', and those who were labeled as 'trouble-makers' and who were told to attend the group to get 'sorted out'. They also had different levels of commitment and motivation.

It was decided to choose a closed-group format. This meant that the same people that started the group remained and no new members were allowed to join once the group was in progress. This was preferred over an open group in order to enhance group cohesion, safety and trust. However, some participants did leave the group over the period for different reasons. In most cases participants were lost when they were transferred to other prisons or to different sections of the same prison, very often without prior knowledge and thus no opportunity to say goodbye. As facilitators we often wondered about the psychological impact of this loss and the breaking of relationships so abruptly. There were also a few cases when participants chose to leave the group, but this was always during the early phases of the programme.

Vuka S'hambe Programme: Thematic Activities

An outline of the activities used in the intervention follows. These are arranged thematically according to the key objectives of the programme.

1. Promotion of self awareness and personal insight into reasons for engaging in criminal violence

Self-awareness plays an important role in changing attitudes, emotions and behaviours. In working with young prisoners, it has been recognised that this group has a tendency to split the present and the past. This was apparent from comments like, 'I struggle to remember what happened to me when I was a child'; 'Now that Eric is saying this, I also remember this from my past'. There is inability to make connections, and a lack of awareness about who they were, thus offering them limited insight into why they behaved the way they did. The activity was designed to promote greater self-awareness and the ability to form these links.

1.1. Train Journey and Life Line Exercise

Method/ activity

Members were given pictures of a train (sample in appendix) which they were asked to paint on as a reflection on their lives. The train is used as a metaphor of life to facilitate sharing of personal histories from childhood, up to the current day. The participants, who preferred to draw, were guided to plot significant events in their lives in the form of pictures. These non-intrusive techniques allowed participants to path their past, present and future, as they were guided to discover who they are, and to make a link between their experiences and their acts of perpetration. It was hoped that they could begin to see a possibility of taking control of their destiny rather than seeing themselves as victims of their negative past experiences.

Several themes were used to guide this self-exploration:

- **Driver:** Who is the driver of your train? Where about are you in the train? Are you the driver or passenger? This theme explores the level to which the young offenders perceive themselves as accountable and responsible for controlling their destiny.
- **Supports:** Who is with you? Who are the important people in your life? This theme explores the young offenders' perceptions of their support networks and interpersonal strengths.
- **Smoke:** What is it in your life that represents smoke? The train emits its waste in the form of smoke. This theme permits the offenders to take responsibility and ownership of personal problems that they would like to address or resolve. It also challenges them to undertake introspection, acknowledge weaknesses and to stop blaming circumstances or others for their problems.
- **Wheels:** What is it that keeps you moving even when life is challenging? This theme helps the participants to search for their personal strengths, skills, and abilities.
- **Track:** What restores and anchors you in life? This theme addresses the participants' meaning of life, their spirituality, and values.
- **Future:** What does the future look like? What is the weather around the train? This theme enables the young offenders to visualise their future and possibilities ahead of them. It made them realise the importance of having goals in order to move beyond the present.
- **Past:** What key events represent the past? What weather represents your past? This theme encourages participants to share about their past and what it looked like.

Outcomes:

- Greater awareness of personal history and how it has shaped some knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.
- An awareness of the possibility for internal locus of control as opposed to external

locus of control.

- Promoting understanding of the importance of friendships and support systems. The group provided for an experimentation of social skills.
- Development of increased self-understanding about personal weaknesses, strengths and positive coping skills.

1.2. The mask exercise

Activity

Art is the basic tool used for this activity. The young offenders were asked to draw and then paint a mask on an A3 sheet of white paper that represents how they portrayed themselves to the world. Once completed the participants are asked to cut their masks into shape, cut open the eye slits and to attach a string to secure the mask around their head.

On sharing with other group members the participants were guided as follows:

- What is/ was the purpose of a mask in your life? This is linked to the need for anonymity and disguising when undertaking criminal behaviour. What does it mean to be 'real' in relation to expression of emotion?
- Who am I? Where do I come from? The mask is used as a portrait of the self, a representation of one's self-image and self-concept.
- How do you portray yourself to the world and why? What are you communicating to those around you? What emotions are recognisable in your mask? What does your mask hide? These questions guide participants to recognise their deeper hidden emotions and the purpose of defense mechanisms like denial, repression, and projection.

Outcomes:

- Increased awareness of different aspects of self that are disowned and dissociated, for an example, emotional pain, vulnerability, inadequacy, anger, loneliness etc.
- Increased understanding of defenses used to avoid feeling pain, loneliness rejection/abandonment, etc.

2. Develop effective coping skills that enhance personal strengths and resources

Poor impulse control, the need for instant gratification, and impulsive aggression and being in a state of hyper-vigilance and arousal in a crisis were identified as prevalent issues among the participants. There was also an inability to express what is felt in words, and actions often become a preferred form of communication. The participants also tended to be emotion rather than task-oriented in their problem solving. They tended to be in a constant state of hyper-vigilance and were unable to modulate their levels of arousal and anxiety. The prison environment also feeds into this state of mind and perpetuates frustration and stress. This aspect of the programme focuses on gaining insight into anger, management of stress and learning alternatives to violence.

Activity: exploring anger

Participants were led into a general discussion about the definition of anger, causes of anger, and the impact of anger on others. This offered an opportunity to assess young offenders' views about anger, how they expressed it, and level of accountability for their aggressive actions.

- **Visualisation of personal anger:** the participants were guided to close their eyes, to allow their bodies to relax while they began to visualise (create a picture in their minds) what their anger looked like, felt like, smelled like, and sounded like. Participants were asked to hold onto this mental picture, and then to externalise it by modeling it using clay. This affords the participants an opportunity to perceive their anger as something separate from themselves. As something they can manipulate and control and stop blaming others or circumstances for how they express their anger.
- **The metaphor of coke and water:** One group member was asked to stand in the centre of the group and was given a bottle of water. He/ she was instructed to shake a bottle of water and to immediately open it in front of other group members. Another member was asked to shake a bottle of Coke and to immediately open it. The facilitators observed responses in both cases and explored the reasons with the group. The lesson of the exercise: We have a choice to act like water, assuming control in situations or like coke, relinquishing our control.
- **Exploring the source of anger** to gain personal insight: Participants were encouraged to discuss things in their past or present that make them angry, and to evaluate the gains and losses for expressing anger negatively.
- **Techniques on anger and stress management:** Participants were given an opportunity to discuss practical ways they can use to manage their stress and anger. There was focus on the challenges and applicability of these in the prison environment.
- **Relaxation exercise** to manage stress and anger: Participants were guided to progressively relax different parts of their bodies with the aid of music.

Outcomes:

- The participants construct an anger model
- Recognition of personal choice and accountability for own impulsive behaviours.
- Insight into causes and manifestations of anger.
- Learned skills to manage anger more effectively.

3. Promoting self-esteem and confidence

Most of these youth expressed a deep sense of worthlessness and low self-esteem. They had internalized a sense of 'badness' and negative beliefs about themselves and tended to act in congruence with these beliefs. They tended to act violently to assert personal identity and power, or to escape nothingness. Violent actions seemed to act as a defense against overwhelming feelings of insecurity, worthlessness and powerlessness. This part of the programme aimed to promote a sense of being valuable and worthy, challenging their

negative beliefs, and encouraged them to identify new positive beliefs which apply in the present context of group participation. For example, the meaningful attachments experienced in the group, a sense of belonging, trust, and increased levels of confidence.

Activity: t-shirt exercise

This section of the programme began with a general discussion about what self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence mean. Individuals began to measure their own levels of self-esteem in different areas of their lives, for an example, in school, social skills, communication, criminal activities, sports, etc. The lesson is that one's level of self-worth in one area could be determined by many factors including past experiences, level of competence and a general belief in oneself.

T-shirt painting: The participants are guided to think about significant negative experiences they had while they were growing up. A link was made between these negative experiences, beliefs, labels and assumptions about themselves and present feelings of low esteem and self-destructive behaviours. Each group participant was given a white T-shirt to paint on. On the back of the T-shirt participants portrayed an image of their negative self-esteem.

Individuals were further encouraged to identify new labels/ beliefs/ mission statements that capture positive experiences, and these were drawn on the front of the T-shirt. This was facilitated by highlighting memories of role models or other significant people who believed in them.

Outcomes:

- Participants produce a painted T-shirt.
- Gain insight into some of the reasons for low self-esteem.
- Increased sense of personal worth and value.

4. Building positive and stable emotional relationships

Negative or traumatic experiences can disrupt attachment systems, creating a disconnection in relationships, fomenting isolation and alienation. The sense of trust and safety is lost. The group is a powerful platform for developing positive relationships, and for instilling a sense of belonging and positive group identity. It provides participants with a meaningful support network where feelings and experiences can be validated and a belief in being lovable as a person is reinforced. Our project aimed to foster these meaningful connections within and outside the group. It encouraged purposeful cooperation with others, networking, seeking mutual support and communicating with others as opposed to isolating oneself.

Activity

Games and role-plays played an important part of this group experience. Participants were given an opportunity to role-play their experiences or to put into practice the skills they had learnt. Games were utilised as icebreakers at the beginning of sessions, creating an atmosphere for experiencing fun, spontaneity, and openness towards others in the group. Participants are always encouraged to try new behaviours, to give feedback to others sensitively, to receive feedback, to share their experiences with the group verbally or

through creative arts. It was hoped that through these activities members could begin to experience a sense of belonging, trust, caring, cooperation and social skills.

Outcomes:

- Improvement in the quality of emotional relationships.
- Cooperation with others and learning to work as part of a team.
- Managing loneliness through building relationships.
- Improved communication skills- effective listening and talking.

In summary

The Vuka S'hambe model aimed to address the key ingredients of resilience as outlined by Herman (1997), Gabarino (1998) and O'Hanlon (1998). The programme promoted a sense of meaning and a need for prisoners to see a positive future beyond prison. It promoted a positive coping style, the development of an internal locus of control and fostered accountability for one's actions.

Participation in the group fostered high sociability and strong attachments. By creating opportunities in the group for all participants to accomplish tasks, to meet expectations and most importantly, to experience positive feelings as members of the group, an opportunity for development of positive self-esteem, sense of connectedness is created. Experiences challenged frequently held stereotypes about manhood (real men don't cry; man should not express painful feelings) and femininity (females are weak; women call for rape). The development of self-awareness provided a platform for balancing feminine and masculine qualities.

The programme aimed to encourage the prisoners to better utilize their time in prison. It encouraged prisoners to acknowledge their role as perpetrators of violence and to understand the impact of their behaviours on victims. Through developing a new set of skills, and improving on their social relationship, it aimed to prepare them for their release.

Besides the actual content, the key to the success of the Vuka S'hambe programme was the facilitators' approach. Given the limited understanding of what counseling involves, the key focus in interacting with prisoners lay in building rapport between facilitators and group participants. In the initial stages of the group process participants tended to be aloof, reserved, or passive-aggressive, while others tended to be superficially pleasant in a bid to please the facilitators. Building a personal relationship based on openness and trust was critical. We have learned that a degree of self-disclosure by the therapist increases credibility, promotes trust and facilitates introspection on the part of the participants. This enabled participants to view the facilitators as people they can identify with.

We aimed to demonstrate is a sensitive, warm, and caring approach. This message was imparted through small acts like keeping promises, being on time, showing concern, demonstrating an understanding of participants' feelings, and demonstrating an interest in all as individuals. Group rules on attendance, expectations, confidentiality, respect for others, etc., were established and agreed upon by the members. When rules were not adhered to, the facilitators maintained a non-judgemental approach by encouraging discussion about the participant's choices in being late and also allowing the person to

reflect upon his/her behaviour and how it impacts on others. This assisted participants to take responsibility and ownership for their decisions and to develop empathy.

In summary, promotion of resilience through the Vuka S'hambe programme depended on a number of factors, such as:

- Programme content and the extent to which the participants learn and internalise the concepts and experiences of the programme.
- The quality of the relationship participants develop with the facilitators and with other group members.
- The approach and attitude of the facilitators, and
- The extent to which change and growth can be sustainable.

Part Three: Project Evaluation

At the end of the second and third Vuka S'hambe interventions, an internal evaluation was undertaken. We believed that it was important to conduct an internal evaluation to determine the extent to which our objectives had been met. It was also hoped that this process would capture details around knowledge participants had acquired, and assess the degree to which they have been able to transfer acquired knowledge to daily life in prison. We also hoped to consolidate and summarise the experiences of the participants in a manner that would assist in developing a meaningful and effective model of intervention for future work. It was an opportunity for receiving feedback from participants about the programme content and delivery, so as to be aware of its strengths and limitations.

The first evaluation was undertaken with the girls' group. Only five of the ten participants who completed the programme managed to make it to the evaluation phase, as many of them had been released or transferred elsewhere. The second evaluation was undertaken with the boys. Ten participants completed the programme. On completion of the programme three participants were transferred to adult section, another was transferred to another prison, thus leaving six participants to undertake the evaluation. We therefore did not have the opportunity to evaluate all the participants, but we believe it is a representative sample of both groups and thus give us some understanding of the impact of the programme on the participants, its strengths and weaknesses.

Evaluation methodology

When the group process terminated, all group participants were informed about the intention to evaluate the programme and the purpose for such an evaluation. Informed consent was thus ensured and participation was on a voluntary basis. In an attempt to counteract the effect of bias of the facilitators of the group and to allow the participants the freedom to be open and honest in their responses, the services of another CSVr therapist were sought to run the evaluation session. The programme facilitators were present during the evaluation. These procedures were followed with both groups.

Techniques of data elicitation

In an attempt to measure changes in attitudes, behavior and feelings of the young female and male offenders, an integrated approach was used. A combination formal evaluation

questionnaires as well as informal indirect techniques were utilised. For the direct elicitation of data, a structured group interview with a set of open-ended questions was used to elicit responses from participants about their experiences in the group (attached as Annexure B). Narrative data from this interview was captured on tape and subsequently transcribed for analysis, to ensure objectivity and accuracy of the data. Responses were then categorised into themes and summarised into findings, according to the major objectives of the project.

The information gathered from this formal interview process was supplemented by ongoing indirect data elicitation and observation obtained throughout the implementation of the programme through self-revelation about behaviour, attitudes and feelings (observed in role plays, performance on tasks, general attitude and motivation), as well as through informants (feedback from other group members and prison officials). Most of this information was recorded throughout the group process in the form of process notes, yielding qualitative data, which described some of the processes that were happening and even some of the outcomes of the activities. Findings from both the direct and indirect techniques were then integrated; inferences and interpretations were made and summarized into findings about the impact of the programme.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this methodological approach. Firstly, it relied mainly on self-reported information and on observation during the groups, although it was to some extent supported by observations from correctional officials. However, it may be possible that participants were acting in ways different than reported on here. Secondly, the evaluation was conducted fairly shortly after the termination of the programme when group and individual learning's were still fresh in participants' minds. In addition, because the participants were still in prison at the time of the evaluation, we were unable to determine whether it had any impact on their engagement in criminal activities, or assisted in their reintegration into society. A longer-term evaluation is needed to determine whether the impact was sustainable in any way. Thirdly, since the evaluation was conducted in the presence of the facilitators, there may have been a tendency to try to please and say what they believed the facilitators wanted to hear. The results were also written up by the facilitators, potentially compromising on the objectivity of the findings.

Emerging Themes from the Evaluation

Ability To Manage Anger

In both the male and female groups evaluated, participants demonstrated some degree of understanding of their anger as well as an ability to manage it. During the evaluation they shared some insights about the knowledge they had gained during the programme as well as behaviour changes noticed in themselves or others. Specific indicators they talked about included:

- Learning to think before one acts.
- Being able to listen to others when angry.
- Being aware of consequences for aggressive behaviour.
- A recognition that each one is accountable for one's actions.

- Having self-control or being able to control one's emotions.

Some of the participants gained insight about the source of their anger. One of the boys said, 'I have never spoken about my life to any one. I never thought about the causes of my anger and violence. It was only when I shared about my life that the pieces of the puzzle started to fit together for me.' Another girl reported that she gained awareness of the source of her anger,

'This has taught me how I have lived my life with anger from my childhood. My anger often involved me in fights throughout my life. I can recognise improvement in that I have self-control now, even my friends are commenting about how calm I am since I started attending the life skills programme.'

The participants also found an opportunity to reflect on their past aggressive acts. Several of the boys and girls explained that they had acted aggressively 'in self-defense', 'to gain my dignity and pride', 'not to lose face in front of my friends', (to prevent feeling shame), or 'to take back my blood – *ndilanda igazi lam*'. The group afforded participants new insights and new perspectives on these views, and an opportunity to challenge their justifications for aggressiveness.

Participants reported that they learned anger management skills through the programme. They provided concrete examples of strategies they utilised to deal with difficult situations. These included moving away from the situation, talking about their feelings, and breathing exercises. They stated that the Coke and Water metaphor (see discussion on activities) helped them to recognise that the manner one expressed anger was a choice. They added that this empowered them to take responsibility for the choices they make in future.

Some of the participants gave positive feedback based on how they viewed the changes of others in the group. One of the girls described how another who was regarded as aggressive had turned 'soft' as a result of the intervention. She witnessed this group member being attacked and was amazed that she did not retaliate but showed a reconciliatory and calm response. The victim added that she did not care if in that instance she was regarded as a 'fool', but rather she was proud that she acted differently rather than 'bravely', as she had done in the past. In the past she had acted without thinking and without considering consequences for her actions.

Self Awareness

Most of the youths admitted that they acted violently out of ignorance, greed, and peer pressure. With greater self-awareness they assumed understanding of their own weaknesses and strengths, and as a result they felt that they could be in a position to make better decisions in the future. Some said that the programme enabled them to know themselves better by enabling them to be in touch with their deepest hidden emotions and to be genuine rather than 'live a life of a lie'. Vuyo said, 'by knowing my background, and myself, I feel I can be real rather than live life pretending to be something I am not. I got in touch with the child in me and the innocence I lost as a child. Actually, I feel free now.'

As a result of increased self-awareness participants were able to reflect on their own changes. These were reflected in their perceptions about self before the intervention and at

the end of the intervention in statements such as:

- I was blind, now I can see things differently.
- I was apathetic and stubborn, and never wanted to listen to anyone.
- We were like wild dogs.
- I felt like an animal- now I feel human among people.
- Now I am able to think about life in a positive way.
- I was evil and hurt others in many ways.
- I have pretended to be someone I was not. Now I feel like I have found myself.

While these statements were indicators of increased self-awareness, they also indicated the shifts in behaviour, attitude and feelings of participants, their renewed optimism and hope and a sense of purpose. The group experience helped to orientate the participants to the present and give them sense of a meaningful future.

Many participants shared that the programme helped them to gain insight into some of the reasons for their criminal violence. One of the boys said,

'I never knew why I cannot care or love anyone, why I feel empty and black inside. I always saw myself as a bad person. Having revisited my life, I can see that I have never felt happiness or love. Wanting to fill this void in my life, I engaged in crime, seeking fulfillment in material things, became greedy, had no self respect and no respect for humanity.'

Participants also shared how the mask exercise enabled them to gain self-awareness in terms of their attitudes and emotions. They discovered how they portrayed themselves as cruel and dangerous in order to evoke fear, to gain control and power, to get their way, and to inflict pain on others who are perceived as less powerful. Others came to realise through their masks how they portrayed themselves as unapproachable, lonely, and non-caring in order to keep others at a distance. They reached a realisation of themselves as not only strong and aggressive, but came to a new realisation of deep emotions like fear, helplessness, worthlessness, vulnerability, pain and loneliness. There was a realisation that aggression and violence were for many of them a self-defense against these overwhelming emotions.

Self-Esteem and Confidence

Participants of both groups recognised that they had low self-esteem due to negative experiences in the past, including rejection by significant others, failure to succeed at school or in life in general, and negative labels they were given when growing up. Many had memories of bad names they assumed in childhood such as 'stupid', 'ugly', 'evil', 'dog', etc. This became self-fulfilling for most of these youths who internalized these labels and could not believe they were lovable, respectable, worthy, good, or human. Some even wished that they were never born, feeling that they were 'mistakes'. Through their behavioural problems, failure at school, not respecting the rights of others, they were living up to the negative expectations others had of them.

Participants shared that through the group experience, they were able to put a positive spin on how they viewed themselves by challenging beliefs about themselves ingrained from

their past. Most of them shared that it was only within the group experiences that they could experience being respected, loved and experience feeling worthy. Their improved esteem and confidence was evident in statements like, 'I learned to respect myself and this made me to start believing that I am worthy of love and respect from others'. Another participant said, 'I learned to focus on my strengths rather than weaknesses, now I feel good about who I am.'

They described their increased levels of self-esteem as the ability to love themselves, feel worthy, accept themselves and be recognised as important. Two of the girls added that they have learned that they were responsible for what they felt about themselves. One girl said, 'Even when someone tells me I am fat or ugly, I do not worry because I have accepted myself as I am. My beauty is not in my appearance only, but in how I feel as a person'. Another said, 'I looked down upon myself and did not think there is anything good about myself. I can now see myself walking tall knowing that I have certain qualities that make me a person among persons.'

The group gave participants an opportunity to experience a feeling of intrinsic value. They reported how the group made them feel valued, respected and appreciated for who they were and for the positive contribution they made to the group. One of the girls reported that she felt 'brand new' in that she could begin to love herself for the first time, irrespective of what other people thought. Another boy described his sense of confidence by saying he felt 'turned inside out'. He came to realise his positive self that had been hidden.

Based on facilitators' observations improved self-esteem was evidenced by several participants making appropriate eye contact; displaying an open rather than closed posture during sessions, and greater confidence in expressing self. Unlike the boys, the girls did not wear prison uniform. At the beginning of the programme it was also noted that they presented as untidy. Some arrived to sessions with torn dresses, uncombed hair, or without having washed. Midway through the programme it was noticed that their appearance changed significantly. They presented as neat and clean. The boys' section tended to have more supervision and stricter regulations about waking up time, bath time, and mealtime, so there were no observable changes as far as outside appearance was concerned.

Improved Interpersonal Skills and Supportiveness

Another dimension on which growth was measured was the extent to which participants were able to expand their social skills and relationships in the groups as well as in the prison environment. Although there was no specific exercise particularly geared to address this objective, continuous observations and feedback enabled for evaluating participants' progress in this area.

At the beginning of the programme both the girls and boys in the groups were aware of their tendencies to isolate themselves, and to not get along with other people. They viewed themselves as loners and rejects and as unable to maintain good social interactions. When asked to share significant experiences they shared with significant people in their lives, it was an effort for many to remember and identify meaningful relationship or role models in their lives. The Train Exercise revealed that most of these youth had inadequate social support systems. They tended to have an inability to recognise when and how to seek support and to understand the importance of support systems.

Participants revealed that the programme helped them to improve their inter-personal skills and communication skills. During the evaluation they reported that they were now able to deal with problems more proactively. They could sit down with others and express themselves instead of 'bottling up' their problems (self-disclosure). They learned to communicate feelings, to listen, to give support to others, and to interact with others without creating conflicts. Facilitators also observed that participants learned to involve others in discussion where before certain individuals had dominated. They were also able to adjust their language to suit the group context. In the earlier stages of the group, we had to ask for explanation for some of the words or phrases they used.

The intervention also enhanced the participants' ability to develop and maintain relationships. All participants in both evaluations agreed that they have been able to make new friends and had begun to experience less loneliness as a result. They learned to seek others for support as evidenced by some establishing a pattern of writing letters to family and friends, requesting facilitators to contact those with whom they had lost contact, and requesting for visits. This also enhanced their belief that they were important and valued.

Another significant shift highlighted by some of the participants was the development of empathetic understanding and caring for others. As they listened to each other's stories they developed an ability to listen, an ability to support as well as to understand another's emotion. Within the group, caring/ supportive gestures were observed throughout the programme and appropriate feedback was given to reinforce these behaviours. Examples of these include participants helping with preparation or clearing of the room, taking responsibility to keep group materials, sharing resources like paints and brushes, and promoting team spirit as when participants assisted each other during activities, rather than working alone.

Personal Accountability and Responsibility

From the beginning of the programme the participants' manner of expression in telling their stories was devoid of feeling, justifying that they had committed their crimes because the circumstances demanded it, and they felt no empathy for the victims or remorse. The programme seems to have had a profound impact in awakening participants' sense of responsibility and accountability. The Train Exercise helped the participants to realise their own sense of vulnerability and powerlessness, recognising that they were not the drivers of their trains. They became aware of their tendencies to blame others or circumstances for their actions. They committed themselves to take responsibility for their lives. One participant stated that she no longer wanted to be the victim of her past. While looking at her picture showing a sunny future and a cloudy dark past, she said, 'The only way for me to reach my dreams is to heal my past so that I do not allow it to affect my present and future.'

There was a general consensus among participants that the programme provided them with necessary information to strive for self-determination and accountability. One girl reported that the programme promoted her self-determination by saying,

'I have learned that material things alone will never make me happy. This programme has made me to deal with the pain inside me. I have sought pleasure and comfort in all the wrong places. From now onwards I can be the driver of

my train [life].'

Another participant said, 'In the future I will never do things to please others, but for myself. I must take decisions for me and never for other people.' For a number of participants there was a shift from external to internal locus of control, and a realisation that each person is the creator of his/her journey.

Development of Empathy

The group experiences promoted an understanding of the self as well as empathy for others. One of the participants shared that she had experienced respect in the group and this instilled a new understanding that she 'deserved to be respected', and she would be able to respect others. The Vuka S'hambe programme instilled a culture of respect, of listening to others' stories and feelings, of sharing and acknowledging each other's painful emotions, and of giving supporting to each other. Participants admitted that this atmosphere enabled them to develop empathetic understanding. This was evident in statements like, 'I have learned what it means to inflict pain on others', 'I never used to care about how other people feel, now I do.'

As they reflected on their masks, feelings of shame, grief and despair, sadness and pain that surfaced were not only linked to their personal experiences of violations but also to their acts of perpetration of violence. Although they started off making humour out of their acts of perpetration, they were challenged to consider what had happened to their victims.

As a result of the programme participants gained increased understanding about the impact of violence on victims. Although many of them reported never having thought about their victims, there were occasions where it was possible for members to talk about feelings of remorse for what they had done. For Thami, the recollection of being loved by a girlfriend provoked, for the first time, a feeling of sadness and sorrow for his wrongs, and of remorse. It was when he was in touch with his own humanity that he could experience these emotions. For others, the turning point was when they were asked questions about what happened to their victims that they expressed sadness and remorse at the thought of death, serious injury, and devastating consequences for the families of the victims. The group experience offered participants a different lens to see their world, enabling them to make new meaning as they began to understand the impact of their behaviours.

Willingness for Restoration

The group process explored the concept of taking responsibility for one's actions and making restoration for the consequences of the crime, although no process was put in place to allow this to actually happen. Many of the participants expressed willingness for restoration towards their victims. Four of the ten boys evaluated in the third group said that they wished to make restoration for what they had done to the victims or families of the victims. They were willing to say sorry and ask for forgiveness. They reported that the programme managed to bring about some understanding of the impact of their behaviour, and evoked feelings of guilt and remorse. This enabled them to acknowledge their own weaknesses, failures, greed and feel a willingness to take responsibility for their actions. In contrast, three of the group members said that they would only be willing to apologise on condition that their sentences would be reduced, indicating that they had not taken full

responsibility for their actions, or developed a sense of remorse. Three of the boys said that they were unsure as they had fears that the people they had offended would not be willing to speak to them or to forgive them.

Building Optimism

Most participants reported increased optimism and hope as a result of the Vuka S'hambe programme. They felt that it provided a nurturing experience, an experience of trust, love and a sense of belonging. The group was described as 'a home we never had', and as a 'container' which fostered safety and confidentiality, and as a 'space to vent out negative experiences that were making me feel pessimistic about life'.

A poignant example of the groups' meaning was illustrated when Muzi built a double-story house out of cardboard, match-sticks and paper, to symbolise his hope and dreams for the group. He shared that,

'I am finding myself, now I can have dreams and I have hope. This house represents this group. The group has become a container of our feelings, in this house there is a mother, a father, warm fire and food is cooking. There is peace in this house.' He continued to say, for many months he had been learning to know himself. He said, 'I have worked through my pain, sadness and anger of not having things I wanted in life. I was young and I wished for things beyond my reach. I have grown in this group to realise that material things will not make me happy. This house stands for our dreams.'

This was a powerful moment for the group who responded by expressing in words their hopes and their deep longing for what they missed as children (love, protection, innocence, humanity, warmth, joy, etc.). They shared that the programme afforded them an opportunity for healing their wounds of the past. Having expressed their losses and longings, and shared their painful past, the programme validated their feelings, thus building a foundation for optimism to develop. Through this house the participants expressed their optimism and dreams for a better life.

Muhle's Transformation

Muhle, described himself as 'disruptive', 'stubborn', and a 'loner' at the beginning of the intervention. For the facilitators, Muhle posed the greatest challenge. He dominated the group, disrupted others while they were talking, criticised insensitively, disrespected others by arriving late, and often walked out without being excused. He thrived on hurting others and he did not seem to have any insight into his behaviour. Countless attempts were made to reflect upon these behaviours, challenging him sensitively and making him recognise the impact of his actions on others. Over time Muhle was able to engage in the group meaningfully, he listened, and stopped criticising others. He assumed a responsible and mature role and instead of taking what others shared as irrelevant, he learnt to reflect on the content and how he felt.

One day he surprised everyone when for the first time after one of the participants spoke about never having happiness or love in his life and about feeling dead inside, Muhle said,

'What you are saying Broer hurts me too. It scares me. I feel cold shivers in my spine'. He fell into silence and everybody in the group witnessed the sadness and pain he had never spoken about. This group provided an opportunity for Muhle to experience being in someone else's shoes, to empathise with another.

During the session on anger, Muhle shared how his anger and lack of empathy led him to murderous acts in the past. He shared that he was feared in his community and never wanted to be made to feel weak or vulnerable. He said, 'if anyone insulted me, undermined me or hurt me, I never hesitated *to take back my blood*.' Pointing to marks on his face, head and back, he added, 'look at the stab wounds I have sustained over the years. This demonstrates my life. Through this programme I can see how I have deceived myself. I understand now that power, pride and recognition are not always won through violent acts, of which there is a high price to pay. There is power in losing a fight and in assuming control. There is more shame and loss of recognition in being behind bars – the victory gained through aggressive acts is only temporary'.

Towards the end of the programme the section warden reported how other correctional officials had been full of praise for Muhle's good behaviour, since he joined the group. This warden confirmed that Muhle had been a problematic prisoner in the section, always involved in fights and arguments. He added that the programme had transformed Muhle, as evidenced by his improved interpersonal skills, calm presentation, non-involvement in fights, and the fact that he never needed to punish him. During the graduation ceremony hosted at the end of the Vuka S'Hambe programme, he stood bravely in front of family and peers and spoke with pride about his transformation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it appears that the Vuka S'hambe programme did have a positive impact on the youth concerned. As evidenced by the reports during the evaluation process, as well as observations during the programme, participants demonstrated changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour over the intervention period.

With reference to the model called *Steps for Behaviour Change* by the Youth Development Network (2002), there are five milestones in the journey from gathering information to changing behaviour. These are: knowledge, approval, intention to use the information, practice, and advocacy. Adapting this model, it can be concluded that for the Vuka S'hambe participants there was evidence of having met the milestones in the following ways:

- **Knowledge:** the participants reported on specific programme information that they recalled and understood. They reported that the programme provided them with the necessary information that would enable them to make appropriate choices, thus prevent them coming back to prison.
- There was **approval** by the participants of the information as apparent from the favourable messages participants shared about the programme content and its impact on them. They found the programme relevant to their needs.
- Participants expressed an **intention to use the programme information**, in other areas of their lives, recognising its relevance for themselves as well as others.

- Practice: the participants put what they had learned into practice as evidenced by self-reports, feedback by peers and correctional officials. These reports confirmed that some participants were using the information gathered in the programme, as evidenced by their behaviours and attitudes.
- **Advocacy** skills were learned as evidenced by some participants sharing the information with others and even lobbying them to participate in the next group. Facilitators had many requests from non-members who had interest to join in the next groups, as a result of being told by participants about the group. With the first boys' group the participants developed their own support group and continued to meet after the conclusion of the programme to reinforce what they learnt and shared information with other offenders. The follow-up sessions undertaken after termination of each group also confirmed the above indicators of the programme's impact.

Apart from sharing the positive aspects about the programme, participants had regrets. This was summed up by one participant saying, 'If I were to live my life from the beginning again, I would know what I should not do. My regret is that I never got this information at the right time'. On the whole the group experience made some participants realise some of the things they had missed in their upbringing. A few commented that if they had parents like the facilitators they would never have landed in prison. One said, 'If my life was not the way it was I would not have turned into crime. Even though regrets tend to portray a sense of lack of agency, the meaning embedded in these regrets is that the programme succeeded to provide participants with hope and with necessary information they needed to lead meaningful lives.

Change takes time. It is an ongoing process, hence no single intervention can be expected to transform an individual entirely. Based on the comments from the evaluation, the self-reports, as well as observations, we believe that Vuka S'hambe provided each individual in the groups a powerful experience for starting a journey for personal growth.

Growth needs to be nurtured and sustained. Sustainability is a major challenge with this programme and in working with prisoners in general. Although Vuka S'hambe is a ten-month intervention (six months programme work plus monthly follow-ups), there are limitations to be noted. Firstly, in respect of long-term sentenced prisoners, without continuous support throughout their sentence, it could make it easy for prisoners to slip back onto old patterns of thinking and behaving over time. Secondly, a programme of this nature only accommodates a handful of prisoners, thus the total impact within the prison may not be realized. Thirdly, the mobility of the prisoners creates a challenge. Participants get transferred to other prisons, encounter new challenges and negative peer pressure, all with limited support. Fourthly, we acknowledge the difficulty of maintaining a positive attitude in an environment filled with pessimism and where the challenges that face prisoners every day do not support a culture of empathy, openness, trust and responsibility.

Imprisonment of young people has serious implications that need to be kept in mind. Not only is the cost of imprisonment high, but there is lost productivity as a result of keeping young people behind bars, at a time when they should be most productive to the community. Unfortunately, the prison environment does not model life as it exists outside. Instead, many of these offenders are still marginalized within prison. Some have been shunned by their families and thus do not get visits, and some do not receive adequate

education or lose interest in education. The prison environment is also mostly unable to provide the required support for an individual to make lasting changes in their lives. Although the department of Correctional Services has now adopted a philosophy which places rehabilitation at the core of its activities, in reality there are insufficient resources to properly achieve this aim. In addition, not all staff share the concept of rehabilitation, and many lack the skills to make a difference. There is also a need for all levels of the staff in the hierarchy to focus on rehabilitation. This may be through actual programme implementation in the case of professional staff, but it also requires the support of correctional officers.

Notes:

¹ Studies show that the numbers of children in prison has increased over the years. Between January 1995 and July 2000 the number of children serving prison sentences had increased by 158,67% (Muntingh in [Palmary, 2003](#)).

² Women prisoners constitute 2,3% of the overall prison population, suggesting an under representation in the younger age categories (DCS, 2004:27).

³ The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities.

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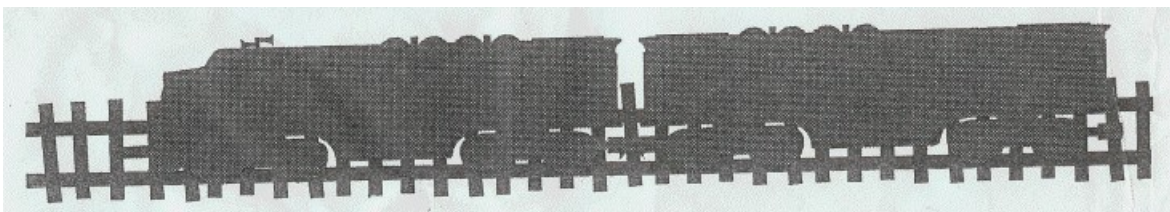
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Annexure A

The train picture



Annexure B

Evaluation Questionnaire

Vuka S'hambe

1. Have you gained or learned anything as a result of the Vuka S'hambe programme?

Yes No

2. What are the 3 most important things you have learned?

3. List three things that you have learned about yourself during this time.

4. Do you think you have changed in any way?

Yes No

5. List three ways in which you have changed.

6. What did you like most about the project?

7. What did you not like about the project?

8. Which art activities did you like most and why?

9. Which art activities did you not like and why?

10. What did you like about the facilitators. Explain.

11. What did you not like about the facilitators. Explain.

12. What were your views about involvement in crime at the beginning of the programme?

13. What are your views about involvement in crime now?