

The Garden – Place of Reflection and Healing

Background Information

The Good Hope Psychiatric Support Group for psychiatric clients and their carers focus on reaching out to others, raising funds and implementing various projects. TC Newman clinic has given the group part of the garden to develop as a therapeutic garden with rape and the consequences of rape as the theme. The group started a vegetable garden and will also help propagating plants for the therapeutic garden.

The garden is not only used in a therapeutic context but is also used to train 5th year medical students about rape. Dr Deborah Bedford-Strohm from Germany will use the garden in February 2019 when she presented a course in trauma using sandplay therapy. A group from Europe, The Executive MBA Health Care Management students, annually visits the garden.

In 2016 the garden, together with two other psychiatric projects, was entered in a competition run by the Department of Health and TC Newman won the James Claassen Integrated Service Award for a holistic and integrated approach to mental health.

A copy of a piece written in our annual report of 2017 about the psychiatric support group:

"Only one of the 54 group members were hospitalized this year. This was an important milestone for the group. The goal of a psycho-social education group such as this one is to foster greater insight into their illness through training. Also, the social cohesion between the group members causes them to look out for one another and notice any behaviour changes. They can then keep each other accountable regarding aspects like the taking of medication. Training comprises half of the group meetings. Subjects covered this year included depression, schizophrenia and bipolar mood disorder. Other themes we explored were self-image and personal growth.

"A highlight on the group's social calendar was a visit to the TB Hospital on Mandela Day to distribute food and toiletries, as well as an outing to the beach. It was with great sadness that we had to say good bye to Heather Manual and Marileze Syferts, who both passed away this year. Although they are dearly missed, it encouraged the group members to hear from both Heather and Marileze's families how much the support of the group meant to them.

"The psychiatric support group's garden still serves as a place of healing and reflection. Although the drought had a huge impact on the garden, the group members decided that they will collect grey water."

Garden of healing and reflection:

On 10 October 2014, Mental Health Day, we celebrated the opening of the symbolic garden which was cultivated by the psychiatric support group in Paarl under the competent guidance of our counsellor Sara van Tonder. This creative garden at the TC Newman District Community Health Clinic, depicts the trauma of rape and the therapeutic healing process.

Sara van Tonder (clinical pastoral counsellor) writes: Eighteen members of the psychiatric support group worked relentlessly every Saturday since October 2014 to complete the main structures in The Garden – Place of Reflection and Healing. This unique garden reflects the trauma that rape victims experience, but it also takes the person to a place of healing and prayer. The Garden was opened by the Provincial Minister of Health – Minister Theuns Botha on the 10th of October 2014.

Without donations it would have been impossible to complete this project. The main donor was Pastor Andries Coetzee from the Presbyterian Church in Ohio (America), who donated a substantial amount. We received plants and compost from several donors. We were also privileged to have been nurtured through kindness and support by both Jann Kirby and Prof. Louise du Toit. Jann helped with the layout and plant selection. She generously donated compost and plants, but most of all she taught the group members about soil and soil preparation. Her husband, Arnold, helped with the irrigation system.

Prof. du Toit was the speaker during the opening of The Garden and she also wrote the opening text: “Human sexuality has since antiquity been associated with gardens, as in the story of Eden. Like a well-tended garden, our humanity also flourishes when our sexuality is healthy. Since our sexuality is our source of life energy, sexual violence constitutes a shortcut to humiliation, domination and exploitation. This garden shows how sexual violence can undermine our human dignity, silence our voices, hollow us out from the inside, drain our self-respect and torture us with ongoing trauma. But sex is inherently good. That is why the garden also celebrates sex. It reminds us that healing is possible, that we can take back our sexual self. With loving care plants will one day again lift their heads to the sun and bear flowers and fruit that are “beautiful to behold and good to eat.” (Gen. 1). This happens when our sexual self is protected, supported and nourished. The Garden invites you to consider the current state of needs of your garden, whether you have been the target of sexual hatred or not. You are invited to tend to your garden in order for it to flower in abundance as a blessing to your world.”

Several members of the management committee also visited the premature babies at Paarl Hospital on Mandela Day and handed the staff knitted blankets, jerseys, socks and caps.

“I have to congratulate you for a most amazing and successful project. You and your wonderful people (broken, healed and yet searching for answers) have created a place of tranquility ... a picture of artistry and love ... for all ... not just those in pain ... but all of us to

reflect and re-focus on who and what we are.” Brenda Wayne (donated plants from Green Planet Nursery).

The need: Upgrade of the Emporium Building at TC Newmand Clinic

A subsection of GHPS is a psychiatric support group. This group has 70 members and meet once a month. Eighteen group members work 3 Saturdays a month in ‘The Garden – Place of Reflection and Healing’ at TC Newman hospital.

The group meets in a building on the grounds at TC Newman called the Emporium. This building is no longer used by the Department of Health, and the support group uses it as their "home".