



# 22

## Finding Safety in Trauma Recovery at a South African State Care Centre for Abused and Neglected Youth

Sharon Johnson

### Introduction

Key principles of love, acceptance and appreciation provide safety (Ziegler, 2018) for recovery from trauma for abused and neglected youth. This study considers the application of these principles in an education-managed male residential state care centre in Cape Town, South Africa (SA). Retrospective meaning-making (Chase, 2005) in categorical transcriptions of care (Schiff, 2017) utilise both text and photographs in various forms of narrative enquiry, from poetry and case studies to photo-elicitation.

Narrative strategies are descriptive tools to systematically examine people's lives to discover meaning. Sensitive, multifaceted and multicoloured portraits of sense develop fine-grained theories of human experiences, which are credible, useful and trustworthy (Schiff, 2017). By taking into account what people say and do in a particular context at a specific time, a transformed psychology of meaning emerges, creating a vision of the person in their social and cultural world (Schiff, 2017).

Love is considered a basic need, but is largely absent in the critical formative years of neglected and abused youth and is under-researched in psychology (Ziegler, 2018). In order to believe in traumatised children, it is necessary to look beyond the dysfunctional protective layers built up and, with love,

---

S. Johnson (✉)  
Cornerstone Institute, Cape Town, South Africa

help them to access their higher selves. Love should provide a consistent and unwavering focus on what is best for the child (Ziegler, 2018).

Acceptance counteracts the negative experiences of youth being in state care, such as loneliness, rejection and being alone (Ziegler, 2018). With firmness and consistency, the adolescent starts to experience their needs being met. Acceptance through attachment involves a neurological brain change for children who have been neglected and abused, requiring “consistent hard work” (Ziegler, 2018, Kindle location 679) to help a troubled child head in a positive direction. Nurturing self-acceptance helps them discover who they are, rather than a focus on how they act.

Appreciation involves disaffirming negative thoughts and creating self-belief from disempowering past experiences (Johnson, 2019b). By meeting basic needs of care and safety, youth are able to consider higher aspects of self-development towards self-actualisation (Maslow, 1962). They appreciate their own abilities and the efforts of others to guide them towards their life goals.

This narrative research on finding safety in a community setting for trauma recovery with principles of love, acceptance and appreciation was considered on multiple levels: youth; teachers and carers; management and policymakers. A main question for the youth was: What has impacted your life at the centre? For the teachers and carers the focus was: How has work with maltreated children affected you and what are your notions of care? For management the question was: How have you survived threatened closure? Policymakers were asked: What are future directions for vulnerable children in SA?

Firstly, Reuben (16) introduces youth narratives with a love poem, followed by insights of 17-year-old Tlali’s rebirth at the centre (Johnson, 2019d). Acceptance is studied through self-care narratives of teachers and carers in groups in participatory action research (PAR) (Johnson, 2019c). A legal narrative then examines the response of Mr M, the manager, who lost a legal battle for survival, and changing government policy for care and educational practices also shed light on acceptance. Finally, appreciation is then expressed through selected institutional photographs of the boys, with captioned interpretations, give visual care insights from a variety of participants, offering a different type of information in memories and feelings (Collier, 1957; Harper, 2002).

Photographs, selected in this study, provoke different emotions, feelings and insights, impacting older evolutionary parts of the brain than verbal expression. They are part of collective memories, enabling a participant to relate to events in which they may not have been directly involved.

Historic black and white photographs at the youth care and education centre (YCEC) therapeutic hostel were selected by staff from an archive of images to depict notions of appreciation, with handwritten descriptions of the meaning of these images. Black and white photographs are paradoxically more evocative than colour, creating an onrush of memories because more has been left out, challenging the imagination (Berger, cited by Harper, 2002).

Participants provided photofeedback of images depicting a range of scenes of youth engaging in institutional and outdoor activities in a variety of settings. Ethically, only photographs concealing the identity of the boys were deemed suitable, to ensure confidentiality. In the cases of possible identification, faces were blurred to guarantee anonymity. The question asked was: Which photograph best captures the meaning of care and how would you describe the importance of the activity?

All these insights add up to a variety of challenging community perspectives on providing safety for youth-at-risk in state care in violent, impoverished contexts. A trauma protocol for teachers and carers is being developed collaboratively with staff in high-risk schools for the provision of safety on multiple levels as a possible care resource going forward (Johnson, 2019a).

## Background and Context

The YCEC is located on the Cape Flats, one of the most notorious areas of SA in terms of gangsterism, drug trafficking and violence. Established in 1948 as an industrial school for indigent, coloured youth (Badroodien, 2001), YCEC reflected the harsh history following on from slavery, apartheid, colonialism and discrimination. As a detention centre for justice boys who had committed crimes, it also accommodated neglected and abused youth from neighbouring impoverished communities, with no distinction being made between these different backgrounds.

Incarceration, corporal punishment and sexual abuse were features of punishing practices of former times (Johnson, 2019c). The centre recently lost a legal battle after years of a protracted court case, with their role for vulnerable youth being reconceptualised. They are emerging from former punitive practices into more enlightened restorative care, with safety for recovery on multiple levels becoming the focus for different types of trauma of staff and boys (such as historic, intergenerational, continuous, post-traumatic stress disorder, complex, secondary and vicarious traumas).

Three years of post-doctoral PAR research and two subsequent years of academic and consulting work involved a wide range of data

collection—from conversations, interviews, experiential workshops, evaluation questionnaires, reflective writing and discussions to photographs, institutional records, emails, letters, WhatsApp messages and observation with different groups and individuals. Weekly, 10–30 men and women took part in a PAR open group out of 45 staff, teachers and interns (aged 20–70), responsible for the care of 70–80 boys (aged 11–18) in three hostels.

## First Safety Principle: Love

Loving care took many forms at the YCEC, such as the manager's literal open door policy. Passing boys appeared at his outside door at all times of the day, receiving a piece of fruit or sweet, getting a hug and short greeting, encouraged to say what was on their minds. As researcher and consultant, I was mindful of the importance of modelling love through kindness and compassion, whilst acutely aware of differences, being a mature white woman from a privileged background. Some staff had been there for over 30 years. During apartheid, the institution was racially classified as coloured, but for 25 years since democracy it had become a melting pot of diversity, with boys from not only SA but all parts of Africa, representing many races, religions and cultures.

## Reuben's Poem

I met Reuben (16) as an academic supervisor, observing two female undergraduate Psychology students in their fieldwork from a non-profit community college. He had nowhere to go in the school holidays, attending a group programme with ten others who also had no home or caregivers. During school these boys attended class, also gaining practical skills in workshops and participating in extra-mural outdoor activities. The students asked the boys to express themselves in poetry and/or rap.

### “Love”

Love is just a word.  
Love is painful.  
It means something.  
It means nothing.  
It comes out of your heart.  
Love is true.  
Don't abuse it.  
Don't lose it.

Reuben stood up and self-consciously delivered this moving poem in a quiet room. Each boy listened intently, seemingly deeply touched by the pain and hope expressed. Some new arrivals were faced with many challenges—not knowing their birth date or age, unable to read or even write their name. Seated among them were adult visitors from a neighbouring Christian-based rehabilitation centre. They had come as mentors to assist the boys to leave the world of drugs, violence and crime.

Together the group began an exercise on goal setting. A visitor described his goals as getting married, being successful and giving up drugs and gangsterism. A participant, Antonio, who looked no older than ten, said his goal was to have a relationship with his mother, a reminder of the bitter, sweet love poem. The boys joked together as each spoke their truth. During conversation time Antonio approached a visitor and asked him how he could extricate himself from the gangs. They had given him six months to join and his time was up. He was likely to be shot if he went home. I watched the two in intense conversation, considering the power of restorative connection, as the visitor attempted to help the boy to transcend a violent and fearful world.

It was hard to identify these seemingly compliant, vulnerable and sensitive boys with those in teachers' reflections in my counselling wellness groups. They described students who refused to be seated in class, pacing the floor or jumping out of windows. I learnt of petty crimes as cell phones were stolen and lack of respect as youth swore at and hurled abuse at their carers. Not all staff agreed with restorative care, believing instead in harsh disciplinary measures involving punishment and violence, practised during apartheid. Youth were isolated then in detention cells and made to endure corporal punishment.

The educational psychologist explained the care metaphor of darkness versus light:

As practitioners, conceptually that darkness is where we...find ourselves when we are under pressure, or egos are at risk, or power is being displayed. We venture back into those kinds of spaces that contaminate the light that we are trying to have here. The residual effect of that darkness is almost in your DNA and you have to keep a waking eye at the conscious level. Shadows are always lurking somewhere in us, and sometimes they can be overpowering when the ego is not strong.

In attempting to create safety, participants in the wellness groups developed a quiet inner peace and strength, sharing practices like journaling, mindfulness meditation, calming exercises and group sharing. This helped them to deal with their disruptive environment and model care to youth who did not

seem capable of love and respect. By showing loving care to teachers, they were able to connect positively to boys in distress, providing a supportive relationship to those deprived of early attachment with a primary caregiver.

## Tlali Found Love

Tlali, a 17-year-old Sotho from the rural Eastern Cape, had only been at the YCEC for 8 months when preparing to leave. In a short time, he felt that his life had turned around, ascribing change to meaningful connection. He felt loved by everyone who worked at the centre, and received respect, which he then modelled back to others. He contrasted his time at YCEC with being in a lock-up facility for boys in conflict with the law:

There you see a leaf outside but you don't touch it—you live in a cement prison and you may connect to one or two people. Here you connect to everyone. You connect to people in the kitchen, in the garden. I can say you are in heaven. You get love everywhere. Even those people not working in the school, there by the gate, as part of security, they love you too!

Tlali had a dramatic life story of abusive and neglectful caregivers, including his mother, father, three step-mothers, aunt and grandmother and multiple homes, from his village to a township, dropping out of schools and suffering from substance addictions like glue, alcohol and drugs. He committed many crimes and by the age of 17 feared for his life. After being in different institutions, such as street shelters and a juvenile secure centre, he was sent to the YCEC, which he said turned his life around. Mr M, the manager, took a leap of faith in accepting Tlali, as the centre no longer shelters boys with criminal records. This is a remarkable story of transformation in a broader context of SA struggling to emerge from decades of exploitation and community disintegration from factors such as poverty, domestic and community violence, crime, substance abuse, discrimination, unemployment and illiteracy.

Tlali described his healing journey as being “pulled back” from criminal behaviour, with the care centre removing the uncontrollable anger within him. He reflected that he was most impacted by the love and respect he received. He admitted that loving experiences sometimes frightened him. He clapped his hands and described his transformation being like a “boom”; it was so dramatic and sudden.

“I came here and I talked to Colin (educational psychologist). He touched my heart and I started to change. What I saw outside, they use people to get something—like back in the days of slaves, they use you to get something. When I was in prison, they locked me up. The boys stay there too long; they are trouble, forming gangs. The teachers and carers protect those in the gangs.

“What I like about them here—even a carer who was an ex-American (gangster) boy—they pull you back.... He doesn't say I am not in his gang. They just give us love. Here many people play a part. What I saw the most, which scared me, was a person who was the father I wanted, the father who could understand me, who was true. This person, Mr X, is a unit manager. He said, “When I see this boy, he reminds me of myself. When I am angry or shout, he said: ‘Don't pull your finger, don't be angry. Go to him and ask forgiveness and hold his hand and show him what kind of man you are.’”

“...They really give you love. They really change your life. That is what I like about this school....I want to be a good father. I would like to become a security guard....The centre is helping me....To be honest, what I want in life is to prove...that I have really changed.”

He went on to describe his dramatic transformation:

“It was like a boom (clapping his hands). I never saw I had it. Mr M used to look at me and say: ‘Tlali, don't worry about what happened in your life’. They coached me to let this meneer (person) see me. They steal a person's heart—they can take out the thing that is in me. They did that. Respect is a most important quality for helping boys. This is what I have experienced here, and what I saw in myself—I respect you because I want you to respect me. I respect you first.”

Tlali's response to restorative care practices at YCEC reflected the focus of teachers and staff to develop an ethos of healing, with love and respect. Self-care took many forms, from teacher psychoeducation and training to wellness groups.

## Second Safety Principle: Acceptance

YCEC teachers and support staff, like those in public schools, are trained in the Western Cape Education Department's (WCED's) Circle of Courage as a foundational attitude. Originating from research with Indian Americans (Brendtro et al., 2002), this philosophy aims to foster acceptance of youth by developing belonging, mastery, independence and generosity in young people for resilience and self-worth. However, gangsterism is rife in Cape Flats'

schools, with a high drop-out rate (Plato, 2012), with youth suffering multiple effects from exposure to life traumas.

The focus of previous mixed-methods M and PhD research (Johnson, 2010, 2013, 2015; Johnson & Naidoo, 2013, 2016, 2017) was on interventions for teachers in high-risk schools, based on evolutionary brain responses to threat.

At the YCEC, a community psychology approach was taken, with a primary goal to assist teachers and staff to accept the youth, seeing them as survivors, with behaviours appropriate to manage their abusive and/or neglectful backgrounds. The centre's care goals focused on alleviating complex trauma symptoms, such as developing capacity for secure organisational attachments, overcoming developmental deficits and acquiring skills for emotional experiencing and self-regulation (Courtois & Ford, 2009).

Teachers and staff took charge of the PAR process, deciding on location, structure and content. Cycles of observation, reflection, planning and action took place over two years. Co-established self-care goals were to reduce self-reported stress and prevent burnout, assisting participants to deal with their greatest work stressor—disruptive learner behaviours. Staff gathered from all over the vast premises, connecting, sharing and relaxing. Multiple techniques were introduced, such as trauma release exercises for somatic destressing (Berceli, 2008) and psychoanalytic psychoeducation to understand the youth better (Canham, 2006). The teachers learnt about temperament and labels (MacGuire, 2008) and the benefit of living values in the classroom (Tillman, 2000).

Group structure and content changed according to participants' needs. Most sessions comprised a counselling support group of 90 minutes, with initial quiet time of 15–20 minutes of journal reflective writing and 15 minutes of mindfulness meditation. An extract from a teacher's reflective journal is: "I feel contented with myself not upsetting myself, and I listen, trying to listen to what others are telling me". Thereafter the group chose a physical activity, like Tai Chi (Cane, 2000), to physically destress, contextualising the movements to their issues.

Sometimes the group just sat in silence. Being a main form of communication, there could be multiple interpretations of silence and in the presence of others; it is always interactive (Haddock, cited in Schlapobersky, 2016). Sharing mostly involved feelings about the learners and responses to boys in the classroom; at other times participants spoke about personal stressors.



## Reflections on Acceptance

Teachers struggled to respond to some youths' lack of self-worth: "One learner said: 'Why bother about me? I am rubbish; I come from nothing and I will be nothing.'" The calming, relaxation techniques and group discussions and support gave them tools to manage better. For example, the woodwork teacher explained in his journal:

"Two weeks ago a learner, who was reluctant to co-operate in the workshop, was very upset because his wood for a project disappeared. He took a piece of wood and damaged other learners' projects. After I stopped him...he broke a bottle in the workshop. It made me very upset, but I calmed myself by taking very deep breaths and counting to 10. I explained to him that damaging other learners' projects won't solve the problem. I promised him I would recover his timber. He seemed to calm down a bit."

Teachers were able to model sharing in the group with the boys, taking practices learnt together into the classroom: "I try to encourage them and speak to them in such a way that they change their attitude for the best"; "The time I spend here I learn a lot, because the children can stress a person out"; "(I) feel good about myself"; "I am always thinking about what we did in sessions"; "I am thinking more of my actions".

A reformed former gangster, who was a hostel carer, described the impact of the self-care group sessions in a focus group reflection: he moved from punishment to care with the boys in his charge.

"I just needed the sessions...to give me a wider understanding about where the boy comes from, what (do) they need in their lives and what (does) it mean(s) to be a child care worker....So that programme changed my thinking and it changed my way of handling the boys....I realised my boys were responding from the survival brain, coming from fear as a result of being oppressed and abused on the outside. (They were) sent here to be better—(they) don't need more oppression and abuse—they need love, compassion and care."

## Court Battle

YCEC's future has been uncertain for years. After receiving ongoing closure notices from local government, it turned to the courts for protection. In 2014, the High Court ruled in its favour. This decision was later overturned at the Supreme Court of Appeal on the grounds that these centres fall under the

jurisdiction of the provincial departments, who have decision-making powers. In addition, the court cautioned that it was not their place to intervene in such decisions (Minister of Social Development [DSD], 2016).

For Mr M, the principal and manager, strong attachment to boys in their care meant a commitment to acceptance, consistently being present despite the odds. His name means one who extracts, and when musing on the meaning he compared the ability to draw water out of stone with the seemingly impossible task of running a centre legally earmarked for closure.

“My name being Moses means to take water out of stone. Perhaps I took (it) too seriously. My dad had difficulty in finding an appropriate name. He told my mum: ‘With this one I need some guidance, so I trust the process’. My dad was a Sufi—saints and prophets practise through Quawali—in the one song he spoke about Nabi Moosa—and as those lines opened up, I got my name.

“It’s been forever that we have tried to be closed, but (it has been) formally since 2012. Prior to that, in the first round in 1995, we were also earmarked for closure and we were one of the schools that remained out of the 18. There were six that remained in early 2000 and now we are the only one—the only youth care centre grounded in an educational model.

When asked if he has come to terms with losing in the Supreme Court of Appeal and what it means for the future, he considers the benefits of the experience.

“When you fight a very good fight in literally a David and Goliath type of way—the benefits that have accrued from this engagement with lawyers and the amazing support that we got from senior counsel really have been unbelievable. The fact that we have walked such a long path, and while all that has happened at a legal formal level, still to maintain the care paradigm and look at the rhythm and practice of the centre, and how we go about our duties—that to me is the major achievement.”

He reflected on the uncertainty of the political times in SA. Having survived colonial domination and apartheid injustice, the struggle in the post-democratic era is one of diminishing resources, increasing demands and economic survival. He acknowledged the toll of the court case, including giving up his academic studies, but appreciated the experience’s benefits. He connected his spirituality with fatalism and a belief that right things are happening at the right time. With a temporary order to remain open, the courts continue to send youth to YCEC’s residential academic and therapeutic programmes.

“I have to acknowledge that the court case did impact profoundly as these are not easy processes that you go through—but...it has strengthened our resolve, it has given us a level of tenacity and depth of belief in what we are doing....

“It is a blessing, a privilege to be able to serve. And also to come through this with a kind of protection and because of my belief system—I am not at any place by chance—there is nothing incidental. I am deeply rooted in spirituality, so for me there is so much more going on than at the formal work level. I think one thing that has clearly happened (is) that I have never been a principal, because role definition did not match with what was needed of me.”

Mr M has completely accepted his uncertain fate and that of the centre. He is vulnerable, in the hands of provincial stakeholders who have various models for the care of abused and neglected children, including foster care, child and youth care centres without educational facilities, incarceration and temporary shelters. Dalal (2012) describes the morality of care, with considerate attitudes and behaviours, as making our lives meaningful. Courtois (2015) suggests that, ethically, dealing with those who suffer from trauma is to do no *more* harm

“So the role in this interim period is not an easy one....Predemocracy dealt with a retributive and containment environment, not easily accessible to community participation programmes through developmental perspectives. Access was limited and we now see a potential return to these conditions under the guise of a notion of care.”

The Western Cape Education Department’s focus on inclusivity and streaming in education gives insights into future directions for abused and neglected children who need institutional care. Centres like YCEC may continue, with educational facilities depending on the child’s needs. High support will offer residential facilities, giving children access to a range of appropriate professionals, from occupational therapists to educational psychologists. Medium support will involve working with children in their communities, monitored by suitable professionals collaborating in specialist teams. Low support will offer psychoeducation and continuous training in groups for teachers, parents and support staff.

## Third Safety Principle: Appreciation

It will take many years of planning and implementation before national effective care programmes protect vulnerable children in SA. In the meantime, YCEC has implemented after-care programmes offering a wide range of experiences, encouraging appreciation of talents and interests and offering the possibility of achieving newly formed life goals.

In obtaining 53 black and white laminated photographs of youth involved in activities in their time at the centre, captured by staff and kept in a therapeutic hostel, 11 were selected by male (2) and female (3) staff and professionals for captioning. Participants were asked to briefly explain their choice of photograph/s in writing. Photofeedback generally involves photographers commenting on their own work (Harper, 2002), but in this case comments were made on the images of others. The following photographs and captions offer insights into the range of after-care activities at the YCEC; examples of what the educational psychologist described as “caring in the light”.

## Connection and Transformation: Educational Psychologist/WCED Support Services Official (Female)



**Fig. 22.1** Connecting with nature at the sea and feeling safe and comfortable with my "big brother"



**Fig. 22.2** Connecting with nature...tending these plants like we are being tended and growing in this place



**Fig. 22.3** (a) and (b) Transforming the place that we are living in...as the staff of the centre are transforming us

Shakespeare, pushing up daisies, at the inn  
 The best and the worst of what  
 lies in wait for our kids.  
 The anticipation/excitement of approaching  
 the adult world.

**Fig. 22.4** Shakespeare pushing up daisies at the inn: YCEC counsellor (male)

*This photograph represents for Mr B, the counsellor, “the best and worst of what lies ahead for our kids”. It shows “the anticipation and excitement of approaching the adult world” as they enjoy a ball game. (The boy on the left has a talent for the stage and acting—hence being called Shakespeare.) He is still searching for work in his community. The centre boy is dead, fatally stabbed in the heart by a gang member. The third boy works in a liquor store. Mr B reflected that often the least flamboyant boys find their niche and get along best in the outside world.*

Circle of Courage skills of mastery, belonging and independence: Education psychologist (male)



Fig. 22.5 Portability of skills (work skills)





Fig. 22.6 Trusting is a big issue in training (belonging)



**Fig. 22.7** Taking care of nature as a transferable skill to taking care of self (belonging)

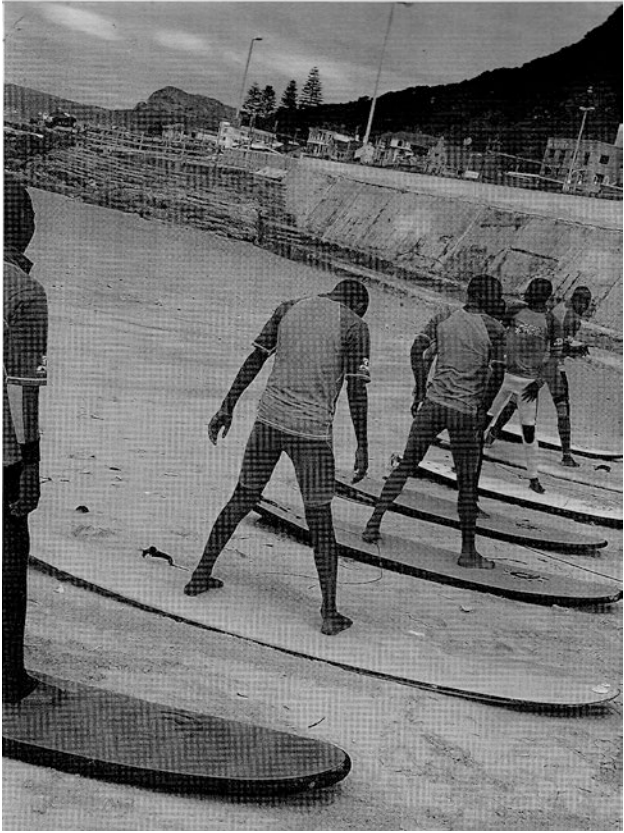


Fig. 22.8 Mastery skills for self-image, with a "can do" attitude

- ① Portability of skills (transferable)
- ② Trusting big issue or frame (Belonging)
- ③ Taking care of nature as a transferable skill to taking care of self (Belonging)
- ④ Mastery skills for self image "can do" attitude
- Edna Pynch

Fig. 22.9 Fishing...a positive recreational activity—Occupational therapist (female)



Fig. 22.10 This picture shows (to) me that the boys are now being exposed to other possible recreational activities that (is) are available to them other than substance (abuse) and gangsterism

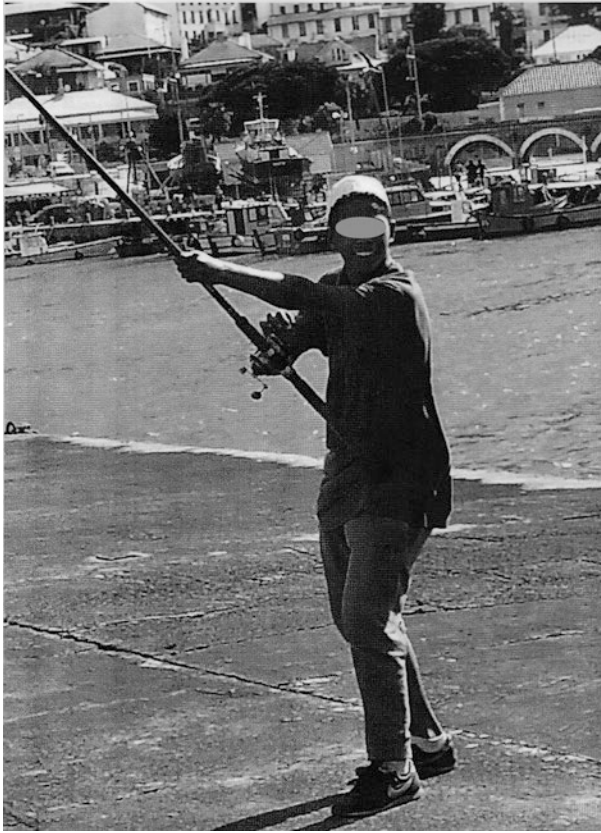


Fig. 22.11 The look on his face as he learns how to use the fish line and preparing to go and catch fish shows that he is a bit (in) shock, as he probably didn't think that he would ever do this, as well as happy learning a new activity skill

Occupational Therapist

This picture shows to me that the boys are now being exposed to other positive recreation activities that is available to them, other than substance and gangsterism.

The look on his face as he learns how to use the fish line, and preparing to go and catch fish, shows that he is both a bit shock, as he probably didn't think he would ever do this, as well as happy learning a new fun activity | skill.

Fig. 22.12 On the quayside—Admin Clerk (female)



**Fig. 22.13** I have chosen this pic because I can see the care shown from one boy to the other. I get the sense that the one boy is telling the other boy to be careful not to fall in the water

I have chosen this picture as I can see the care shown from one boy to the other. I get the sense that the one boy is telling the other boy to be careful not to fall in the water.

## Discussion

WCED is considering multilevels of support for vulnerable youth in Cape Town's ganglands. As a high-level centre, YCEC has become a restorative care model of providing safety for traumatised youth, treating them with love, acceptance and appreciation. By surviving, despite ongoing traumatic threats of closure and protracted court battles, it has modelled for the boys the very resilience and strength needed for trauma recovery. The concept of inclusivity means youths are not labelled and isolated, but integrated back into their schools and communities as enabled young men after home visits, sporting activities and family days as well as gaining practical skills. There will be nationally recognised qualifications, giving youth an improved chance of employment.

In caring for high-risk youth, teachers and staff needed to manage their own stress and burnout, especially as role models of love and respect, exposed to the same continuous traumatic contexts of their charges. In PAR, carers were able to take responsibility for their healing, determining what worked for them, enjoying quiet and reflective time together, sharing triumphs and tragedies and gaining psychological insights. Connection and calm were achieved through bodywork and emotional processing in groups, which led to greater attachment to the boys and appreciation of their talents beneath the protective armour of dysfunctional behaviour.

Losing a protracted court battle has done little to deter the determination of staff to accept boys in need of care into the centre and strive to give them optimal opportunities to thrive going forward. In dealing with multiple traumas presented by learners on a daily basis, a teacher trauma tool is being developed collaboratively with Cape Flats schools, based on this research in the centre and a pilot trauma project in primary schools (Johnson, 2019a). It is hoped that educators and carers can prevent further harm to the youth in their care. Based on the goal of providing optimum safety on physical, emotional and cognitive levels, the principles of love, acceptance and appreciation were factors taken into consideration in the protocol design.

## Future Directions

While focusing on people in a specific context at a moment in time might seem fleetingly incomplete, narrative strategies provide a creative space to make interpretive acts part of a dynamic interaction (Schiff, 2017). Making connections in varied forms and contexts results in greater understanding.

Multiple narratives and photographic perspectives of love, acceptance and appreciation provided insights into the meaning of safety for trauma recovery of staff and boys at YCEC. Reuben reflected on love and connection, gaining support from peers and mentors. Tlali was able to develop an improved sense of self, integrating attachment to staff and teachers back in his community, establishing improved relations with significant others. Self-care of staff enabled the modelling of restorative care for others. Having survived the legal battle, the centre is considering its inclusion in future educational models. The YCEC may face uncertainty, but the determination of staff to protect the boys in their care and the success of their restorative care programmes suggest a new roadmap of hope for society's most vulnerable at a critical developmental stage of late adolescence.

SA has historically experienced some of the worst atrocities but the country has also led the way in morality with the former president, Nelson Mandela, who reflected: "History will judge us by the differences we make in the everyday lives of children" (Special Report, 2014). Apartheid-era punitive disciplinary practices as a school of industries have been replaced by positive attachment in a restorative care centre, based on principles of safety for vulnerable youths. In large centres with many boys and limited staff, this familial-type care can be logistically hard to practise. In addition, the DNA of "dark age" practices are ever present, threatening the success of more enlightened youth-centred psychological understandings of care, which can make a meaningful contribution to progress in social upliftment projects. As this study showed, it is in the small gestures and daily genuine connections that healing takes place. Hopefully, with the ability to draw water out of stone, the YCEC team will find innovative ways to continue as change agents in times of serious drought.

## Afterword

YCEC has been formally closed as a result of the economic hardships of the Covid-19 pandemic effecting government programs. Remaining staff are considering their future role in newly developing care spaces for neglected and abused youth in Cape Town.



## References

- Badroodien, A. (2001). *A history of the Ottery School of Industries in Cape Town: Issues of race, welfare and social order in the period 1937 to 1968*. Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape.
- Berceli, D. (2008). *The revolutionary trauma release process: Transcend your toughest times*. Namaste Publishing, A.A.
- Brendtro, L. K., Brokenleg, M., & Van Brokern, S. (2002). *Reclaiming youth at risk: Our hope for the future*. Solution Tree Press.
- Cane, P. M. (2000). *Trauma healing and transformation*. Capacitar International.
- Canham, H. (2006). Where do babies come from – What makes children want to learn? In B. Youell (Ed.), *The learning experience – Psychoanalytic thinking in education*. Tavistock Clinic.
- Chase, S. (2005). Narrative inquiry: Multiple lenses, approaches, voices. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 651–679). Sage.
- Collier, J. (1957). Photography in anthropology: A report on two experiments. *American Anthropologist*, 59, 843–859.
- Courtois, C. A. (2015). *First do no more harm: Ethics of trauma treatment*. Retrieved May 12, 2017, from [www.goodtherapy.org](http://www.goodtherapy.org)
- Courtois, C. A., & Ford, J. D. (2009). *Treating complex traumatic stress disorders – An evidence based guide*. Guilford Press.
- Dalal, F. (2012). Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart: Psychotherapy as a moral endeavour. *Group Analysis*, 45(4), 405–429. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0533316412461862>
- Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo-elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13–26.
- Johnson, S. (2019a). *Circles of care: Developing a teacher trauma tool in high-risk South African schools*. [Manuscript in preparation].
- Johnson, S. (2019b). From disempowerment to self-belief: A centre of hope for abused and neglected youth in Cape Town. In M. F. Diaz & B. Shepard (Eds.), *Narrating practice with children and adolescents*. Columbia University Press.
- Johnson, S. (2019c). *Lessons of care: Triumph over trauma and tribulation*. [Manuscript in preparation].
- Johnson, S. (2019d). Psychobiography as an effective research methodology for the advocacy of abused and neglected youth in South Africa. In C. Mayer & Z. Kovary (Eds.), *New trends in psychobiography*. Springer.
- Johnson, S. M. (2010). *Transpersonal practices as prevention intervention for burnout amongst HIV/Aids coordinator teachers*. Unpublished master's thesis, Stellenbosch University.
- Johnson, S. M. (2013). *Impact of stress and burnout interventions on educators in high-risk secondary schools*. Doctoral dissertation, Stellenbosch University.

- Johnson, S. M. (2015). Reducing teacher stress and burnout in high-risk secondary schools with Transactional Analysis. *International Journal of Transactional Analysis Research*, 6(1), 70–85.
- Johnson, S. M., & Naidoo, A. V. (2013). Transpersonal practices as prevention intervention for burnout among HIV/Aids coordinator teachers. *SA Journal of Psychology*, 43(59), 70.
- Johnson, S. M., & Naidoo, A. V. (2016). A psychoeducational approach for prevention of burnout among teachers dealing with HIV/AIDS in South Africa. *AIDS Care*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2016.1201193>
- Johnson, S. M., & Naidoo, A. V. (2017). Can evolutionary insights into the brain's response to threat suggest different interventions for perceived stress and burnout of teachers in high-risk schools? *SA Journal of Psychology*, 47, 401–415. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246316675588>
- MacGuire, P. (2008). *Never assume – Getting to know children before labelling them*. Outskirts Press.
- Maslow, A. H. (1962). *Towards a psychology of being*. Harper & Row.
- Minister of Social Development Western Cape and Others v Justice Alliance of South Africa and Another (20806/2013) [2016] ZAWCHC 34 (1 April 2016) para 39.
- Plato, D. (2012). *Gangsterism in South African schools*. Public dialogue address by Minister for Community Safety in the Western Cape. Cape Town: Centre for Conflict Resolution.
- Schiff, B. (2017). *A new narrative for psychology*. Oxford University Press.
- Schlapobersky, J. R. (2016). *From the couch to the circle: Group-analytic psychotherapy in practice*. Routledge.
- Special Report, “Twenty-five years of children's rights.” (2014). Advertorial, 21 November. <http://mg.co.za/article/2014-11-21-00-twenty-five-years-of-childrens-rights>
- Tillman, D. (2000). *Living values activities for young adults*. Sterling Publishers.
- Ziegler, D. (2018). *Mental health therapy for children*. Jasper Mountain.

**Sharon Johnson** is in the Psychology Faculty of non-profit community college, Cornerstone Institute. She holds a PhD in Psychology from Stellenbosch University, South Africa, where she also completed a three-year post-doctoral fellowship in 2016. For the past few years she has been actively involved as a researcher and consultant at a Youth Care and Education Centre, Western Cape Education Department and has conducted workshops on crisis and trauma in high-risk schools. Her community psychology focus is on the stress and burnout of teachers, and institutional restorative care for abused and neglected youth. Johnson has written numerous papers which have been published in peer-reviewed journals on her research in schools. She has chapters published in academic books in the USA and Europe and is writing her own books on the restorative care of vulnerable youth in state care and trauma work with educators in high-risk schools. Johnson runs her own counselling practice and consults to NGOs and Government Departments.