**Complete Circle: Leadership, Learning and Living: Addressing learning challenges and issues of adolescence among vulnerable teenagers in JT Gatsewe district, Northern Cape province South Africa.**

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**Life Centre realising human potential NPO No. 028 – 183**

**Strategic Approach**

South Africa, the country that gave the world Nelson Mandela the freedom fighter has new battles to fight twenty years into the new dispensation. The approach of Life Centre using its method of Complete Circle, entail developing methods which will ensure that the children and teenage develop leadership and are provided a platform whereby they can excel in education so that in the long term we develop leadership, deal effectively with the challenges of growing up and contribute to the human capital base of the country. What is fundamental to this approach is that the future we desire is built today through various endeavours like the one in this document. Thus the socioeconomic and political landscape is somehow impacted through the programme we implement as focus on the long term goals.

**Background**

There are many variable affecting the social and educational development of children in the twenty first century in South Africa. Both the government and other stakeholders have recognised the symbiotic relationships that affect the potential of children and youths. These challenges becomes more compounded among orphans and vulnerable and especially in poor communities because the causative factors are dire and widespread. For example in JT Gaetsewe district a rural district of the Northern Cape Province the pass rate is very low and teenage pregnancy and high dropout rates in both the primary and high schools are prevalent. These factors are symptomatic of other deep rooted social factors which must be addressed appropriately. Government alone especially department of basic education cannot be expected to deal with the multiple challenges alone as education has been recognised by many experts both in education and outside that it is a community effort which can deal with them effectively. Thus the mooted private and community endeavour initiative is supported academically and holistically as sound and capable of producing good academic results, leadership for the future and nip in the bud other social ills. The department of Basic education and the National development as indicators of nascent issues among children have alluded to the need to retain learners in schools for as long as possible as well as deal with psycho social issues affecting children so that we provide the necessary human capital base necessary to develop the country in the medium to long term future. The late President Nelson Mandela regarded education as a one of the best tools to deal with inequality in the world. It is in this light Life Centre has decided to strategically position itself in being an agent to bring about good quality education in the schools in the JT Gatsewe district together with other stakeholders. In order to deal effectively with the challenges children are facing we have recognised leadership and sexuality education skills and knowledge as very critical to bring about a holistic improvement. The aspects included in this programme have a strategy of developing the human capital base of the country which is dire when synchronised against the huge skills shortage the country faces.

**Philosophical approach**

Life Centre believes that each child is born with the potential to succeed if the right environment is created for them to flourish. This has been vindicated through many interventions and thus we embrace it to ensure that children succeed especially in education and nurturing leadership aspects. For example the movement of academic success from the western world to the east is proof of this assertion. Thus the thousands of children who fall prey to early pregnancies, drug abuse and other social ills can achieve much success with support like the one mooted in this business plan.

**Area of investment: Complete Circle : Learning leadership and living**

We have identified that dealing with the above factors calls for a holistic approach in order to produce tangible and long term positive results. Growing children, especially at the offset of teenage hood go through many changes which may have negative ramifications especially for orphans and vulnerable children because of the added challenges they face. The intervention is named complete circle because the nature of challenges vulnerable children face are complex. For example an orphan is more likely to be abused sexually, has learning disabilities or fails to cope with learning and therefore lag behind their peers and likely to drop out of school sooner and unlikely to struggle with academic performance compared to his/her peers with proper family support in their growth and development. Our intervention will be at that level especially among the grades 5 and 6 age group because of the reasons given below.

The provision of minimal educational support is because a child who does not fit in may compensate through behavioural misdemeanour, thus disrupting the learning process which has a class wide impact. In our cursory investigation in the schools, the staff members and management teams have strongly indicated such an intervention is desired to improve the learning and teaching environment. The project is branded Complete circle because if a learner has behaviour problems we consider academic performance, home situation and have discussions and interviews with the learner so that a holistic solution is developed. The Complete Circle approach is recognition that society keeps changing and thus how we work, play, learn and live must accordingly adjust in order to be relevant and make sense to individuals, especially children.

**Areas of Investment**

**Life skills**: HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, anger and management, self-esteem, love and relationships, careers, leadership training, as well dealing with family and societal issues affecting the growth and development of the learners. The advent of the democratic dispensation in 1994 brought about massive challenges in education as the exponential increase in learner numbers brought about insurmountable logistical, manpower, infrastructure and human resources which have been compounded. The teenage pregnancy problem, drug abuse in schools, disciplinary issues in our schools are all some of symptoms of the challenges alluded to above. Thus discourse with learners as well as providing psychosocial support in order to nib the challenges in the bud will be the major approach. It is important to note that some of the best performing schools use similar approaches, thus vindicating the approach being mooted herewith.

**English language intervention**: providing added support to the teaching of English language due to the strategic nature it plays in the education of many learners. Because the project will primarily focus on farm and village schools, these learners are expected to learn more than 90 per cent of subject matter in English language. Studies by both National department of basic education and other experts like universities have revealed that the learning of the language of instruction is lacking and needs serious attention. The current approaches in education expects parental involvement in education of each learner but in poor communities either the parents are either illiterate or some learners are orphans thus inhibiting the learning process. Thus this process provide the missing link so that each child is provided an opportunity to learn as advocated by the South African Constitution.

**Minimal education support**: providing essential material needed by learners so that they can learn well. E.g. shoes, writing material, pens, school bags, etc. Experience has shown that a learner who does not fit in with other learners feels embarrassed and may develop deviant behaviours which are counterproductive and for this reason we see this as progressive.

**Window of opportunity**

Children are developing sexually at an early age around 10 to 12 years and becoming sexually active yet they are not mature to handle the responsibilities and to do it safely. As they enter this crucial stage in the development towards adulthood the challenges multiply. Thus we see this developmental stage as a window of opportunity. This is so because if we inculcate positive sexuality messages and build their leadership capability as well as give instruction in reading and writing then there is a greater possibility that we will reduce dropout rates, teenage pregnancy and substance abuse among these children. Conversely the programme will result in children remaining in school longer, avoiding substance abuse, starting alcohol use much later in life and general improve academic performance. This is a strategic window of opportunity because it is intervention when the children are entering a new phase in life adolescence. Thus any efforts at this stage would have greater impact than later in life when at times bad habits have taken root. The HIV infection prevalence in both the country and the province show that female are highly infected from the age of 15 years. Therefore we see this as strategic in reducing new infections and imparting positive health behaviour traits. The major advantages of any intervention at this stage is that it captures children before bad habits commence and thus empowers them appropriately or for those starting to experiment it can enable them to stop and or give skills and knowledge which will make them safe.

The other advantage is that the remedial activities provided through reading and writing skills will assist the learners to improve in class. In poor communities teachers are mostly least qualified and there are other environmental challenges like large classes and a general demoralising environment due to lack of development in such communities. Generally the above factors makes any remedial education difficult for teachers and thus the cumulative learning gaps result in drop outs and poor academic results.

**HIV/AIDS Challenge**

The social problem of teenage pregnancy is reflected by the fact that many children get pregnant every year and some of them end HIV infected. The 2011 Female HIV prevalence of pregnant women show that teenage girls get pregnant as early as 12 years. The HIV prevalence of pregnant women is illustrated below for comparison basis as well as show the nature of the challenge.

A worrying indication in the above statistics is that all the 15 year old girls were pregnant and secondly that they were already infected with the HIV virus. The infection rate of 14 per cent among the 15 – 19 age group is a serious concern because all these girls are theoretically school girls. This shows that after thirty years of HIV awareness and education there is need to conjure innovative programs so that the tide against HIV/AIDS can be turned. This is critical as a lot of people and organisations have grown weary of this fight. HIV infection among these girls is a symptoms of other factors and this is why the approach in this proposal is multi-pronged so that the underlying factors are dealt with at the foundational level. This is vindicated by the amount of awareness and education over the last thirty years. The trinity approach is an individual discourse to try to dig deep into causative factors so that change may occur.

**Curriculum of the intervention**

The following will be covered in the intervention for the children;

* Personal purpose
* Self-esteem and career development
* HIV and AIDS
* Gender and gender based violence
* Sex and Sexuality
* Gender and human rights
* Love and relationships
* Abuse
* Substances abuse
* Anger and anger management
* Learning strategies for academic success
* Leadership
* Careers and career planning

The approach envisaged is value based one so that the principles imparted result in the behaviour which the programme intent to achieve. The methodology is individual focussed and the role of the social worker is to make sure that a holistic approach and any personal issues are effectively dealt with so that the total being is developed.

**Beneficiaries**

The primary beneficiaries are the orphans and vulnerable children who face the risks of teenage pregnancy as a result of ignorance, or other factors; dropout from school at an early age, becoming victims of drugs and alcohol abuse due to a number of factors are the primary beneficiaries of such an intervention. These children will receive innovative life skills programs as well as leadership training compounded with educational support where some of them may struggle for example in reading and writing. We intend to work in more than 800 schools in the province. A cursory research output vindicated this approach among primary schools in the JT Gaetsewe district of the Northern Cape Province.

**Area of Operation**

We envisage our operating area as the whole of the Northern Cape Province but our key focus are the rural areas, the farming communities. Because a key output of our intervention is academic improvement our selection criteria among others is that the primary schools in the area must be performing badly in English language as measured by the Ministry of Basic Education through the Annual National Assessment Standards. Thus we will focus on the orphans in these schools. The key areas of our operations will be the Frances Baard district namely the sub district of Jan Kemp dorp and Pampierstad and Warrenton areas. These are same urban areas and have a huge farm population

An important area of our operation is the whole JT Gaetsewe district which is rural place where the need is greatest. In the other district the focus will be on the small towns and farms schools.

**Scenario Planning for the Programme**

Scenario planning is an important tool for strategizing so that operations produce the desired results. The business world regularly uses scenario planning among many other tools to ensure that their investments result in the desired outputs. Many experts have alluded to the effectiveness of such tools in the social and governmental sectors to improve efficiency and efficacy especially in how the value of funds invested in any programme must produce the results without wastage. Thus the scenario plan below has been devised with such expectations. It is built upon one of the foremost scenario planners in South Africa, Clem Sunter, who has operated and researched in this field for many years.

**Scenario Planning for Farm and Village Schools**

**Quadrant 1 Rules of the game**

In any area of life there are defining rules which must be adhered to in order to operate in that field. Such rules are as effective as scientific ones because just as in science each field has some fundamental aspects which guide progress and achievement of specific objectives. This is what make the private sector succeed. In terms of the under consideration the following are the rules which guide operations;

Vulnerable children and orphans easily become victims of social ills like HIV infection, teenage pregnancy, substance abuse, drop out of school too early, etc.

Quadrant 2

1. **Key uncertainties**

Funding is not always available especially for long term developmental projects

Other factors which may hamper development in communities and education

Government policy may change

1. **Scenarios**
* Leave government to operate alone
* Public private partnership
* Community wide interventions e.g. Complete Circle, thus rallying community to the cause of education.

Quadrant 3 Options

In this quadrant the options available are discussed and they are as follows;

* + Leave status quo as is (allow the problems to progress unabated), resulting in learners dropping out too early from school, teenage pregnancies, etc
	+ Limited private public partnership interventions
	+ Revamp education department (unlikely)
	+ Fund innovative interventions programmes and measure progress

Quadrant 4 Decisions

In this quadrant this is where right decisions must be made to decisively address the challenges.

The premise alluded in this proposal is that the objectives of this business plan are a good decision. The National Development Plan and the Ministry of Education have both observed after research that children in poor communities lag behind their peers in well-resourced schools and that they suffer many social ills because of their unique environment, which produces dire consequences and that there is need for concerted effort to bring all stakeholders to work together to improve education.

This is vindicated by the National Development Plan as well as various Stats South Africa research outputs over the years.

The Department of education through its National evaluation and development unit (NEEDU) investigated the teaching of languages in the foundation phase (grade 1 to 3) and the following were observed;

1. Language literacy levels at the foundation levels are below the age appropriate level of proficiency and thus has the potential to result in low level achievement especially as the learner progresses upwards, as the knowledge gaps accumulates.
2. There is need to invest in improving language literacy levels in all languages (and also addressing causative factors or ancillary agents in this situation)
3. It’s also important to note that our current education system bleeds learners because of low level achievement, as a major causative factor.

The above factors have also been vindicated by the Annual National Assessment (ANA) from 2010 and other related assessments since that period. Some analysts have argued that there at least some 1,5 million children who are supposed to be in school but have dropped out. This approach advocated in this proposal is an attempt to bridge that gap in a very minute scale, as all progressive plans do, one step at a time.

The strategy being argued here is that orphans and vulnerable children are the majority victims and this is why intervention include dealing primarily with social ills, building the individual child and dealing with learning challenges and generally providing life skills in a safe, playful environment because this novel approach does not replicate what is already happening but spots gaps and fill them.

**Objectives of the programme**

* To provide psychosocial intervention in life skills and knowledge
* Reduce teenage pregnancy rate
* Empower children and teenagers with coping skills
* Train high school learners as leaders and peer counsellors
* Provide counselling to learners with behavioural problems
* To assist academically struggling learners with reading and writing skills
* Train vulnerable children with leadership skills
* Provide positive peer education process to counter negative peer pressure
* Provide minimal educational support for vulnerable children e.g. school shoes, uniforms etc
* Retain learners in schools longer so that they come out with useful qualifications

**The Trinity Approach (3 in 1)**

The three in one approach illustrated below show the three critical intervention components are circular and continuous to indicate that they serve a common purpose, improve learning so that the learner acquire the skills and knowledge which are age appropriate as well as lay a solid foundation for future learning. The establishment of language skills i.e. English must be firmly established while the mind is still mild enough to grasp the fundamentals. The life skills are regular interventions to prepare vulnerable children for life.

**Life skills**

Life skills is a critical component of the Complete Circle program because as alluded elsewhere in this document children from broken families suffer immeasurable harm and this compound their learning. Thus the approach mooted here is meant to address the challenges they face. The list of issues identified above are not conclusive and will depend on the individual social ills in each community. The focus will be on the major issues which can solve 80 per cent of the challenges, using the Pareto principle.

This life skills programme is different from the Life Orientation as it is not academic in nature but focusses on change and the individual. It is a process of discourse with the children because the issues they face can only be decisively dealt at the individual level. It is an opportunity for each learner to talk about what challenges they face in life. Here we use the peer education strategy where the field workers are trained youngsters who run the programmes. The learners identify with them and are free to talk openly. This is critical because change is personal and it occurs in the personal space and when that happens the impact goes beyond the person.

**English language**

The acquisition of language skills is critical to learning especially as the learner progresses to higher grades, because for the majority of black children they learn in this language which means that when the language skills are not up to the required level then the learning process is hampered greatly. Acquiring language literacy involves profound personal change for learners. If reading is not an everyday practice, one needs a shift in identity to learn to value reading. For majority of our learners are exposed to their language of instruction far too late and at times for too few hours a week, which cripples their learning. Children the world over have the same potential for mathematics when they enter school but South Africa is not harnessing this latent capability because of shortcomings in public institutions. The approach being advocated here may result in massive changes in learner achievement in English language and other subjects. A fivefold approach will be utilised in this intervention will focus on inter alia;

* Reading
* Writing
* Thinking patterns
* Comprehension
* Homework support

All the above aspects are meant to inculcate a language culture at an early age so that the learners will be able to simultaneously learn in two languages, English and the home language as some specialist advocate that the learning process is made easier at an early age and language proficiency in a second language is far easier at a young age. English has been identified as a critical language because for more than 95 per cent of South African learners it is the language of instruction and learning and thus the need for them to be proficient in it is a key success factor. It is important to note the above approach does not take over the work of the teachers but provides an essential support to their work.

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