



Social innovation
on paper

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Winner 2.1: Parents Guidance Centre Reakgona

By Gus Silber



The health innovator

Undine 'Mmatumelo' Rauter, Gelukspan, North West Province

The innovation

The Parents Guidance Centre (PGC) at the Gelukspan District Hospital is a “University of Life”, set up in one of the poorest rural areas of the country. The aim is to challenge misperceptions around disability, and empower youth and adults through counselling, therapy, and vocational training.

Winner of the **Transforming the System From the Inside Out Award** at the 2014 Inclusive Healthcare Innovation Summit

The action

The PGC is also known by the Setswana name Reakgona, which means “we can”. But Undine Rauter likes to call it a “University of Life” for children, youth, and families learning to cope with Cerebral Palsy and other disabilities. A sports therapist and physiotherapist from Northwest Germany, she arrived in South Africa in April 1993, just days after the assassination of Chris Hani. At the request of a missionary group, she had come to see a 150-bed institution for people with disabilities, where there was a desperate need for physiotherapy. Overwhelmed by what she saw, she decided to stay.

Today, Rauter is known as Mmatumelo, which is Setswana for “Mother of Faith”. But faith and hope could never have been enough to

fulfill her mission of making a difference.

The PGC slogan, says Rauter, who is fluent in Setswana, is “CP ga se boloi”. It means: Cerebral Palsy is not witchcraft. Rural children with severe disabilities are among the most marginalised people in South Africa, she explains. So the centre has to confront age-old perceptions of disability as a curse.

It also emphasises life skills, understanding and coping. Working with a team of physiotherapy assistants and community-based volunteers – including parents who run disability centres in their own villages – Rauter has shifted the focus from institutionalisation to integration and inclusion. There are practical courses for mothers and caregivers that help them to accept and bond with children, and to stimulate their development. Through counselling, therapy, workshops and district-based training in the local language, the centre imparts skills and improves lives.

Disability, says Rauter is not seen as something to be pitied, and its limitations are not seen as an excuse. The simple ability to communicate, using a laptop, or motoring around on an electrical wheelchair, can be a breakthrough for a young person who would have been bed-ridden and alienated.

Also, given access to long-term study and work opportunities, severely disabled children have a better chance of becoming self-sufficient adults who can contribute to society and become breadwinners for their families, says Rauter. The centre has been able to place children with Cerebral Palsy in school, and employ people with disabilities in its busy wheelchair workshop, where innovations have included the provision of customised prone trolleys for a group of young paraplegics.

Rauter speaks with motherly pride, too, of an intervention that introduced one of the toughest, most demanding sporting codes to Gelukspan. Wheelchair basketball, The Gelukspan Basketball Team, known as GBT Mongoose, has gone as far as producing players for the national squad. But the real triumph for Rauter has been seeing the “graduates” of her University of Life taking charge of their own destiny.

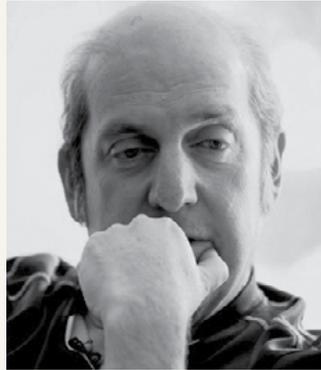
The lesson learned

For Mmatumelo, the Mother of Faith – who came to visit and chose to stay – innovation in healthcare is a marathon, not a sprint. Take it step-by-step. Work to understand the people and their challenges. And budget your strength. The road is hard and you need to be strong.

ALL THE WINNING INNOVATIONS IN HEALTHCARE: Nominations poured in. There were so many innovators to consider and commend. But, at the close of the first Inclusive Healthcare Innovation Summit (IHIS) in Cape Town 2014, a winner (or two) was finally chosen from the finalists in each of the five award categories. **Meet the prize-winning people and projects here...** Collaborative Reimagining Award: → Operation Sakuma Sakhe → Electronic Continuity Of Care Record (eCCR) / Transforming the System from the Inside Out Award: → Parents Guidance Centre Reakgona → AfriTox / Minding the Gap Award: → Umthombo Youth Development Foundation /Inclusive Technology Award: → Praekelt Foundation / Pioneering Approaches Award: → Kheth’Impilo

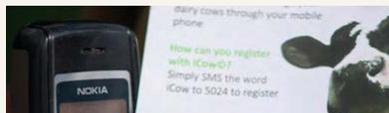
Adapted from the *2014 Health Innovator’s Review*, compiled by Inclusive Healthcare Innovation, a joint initiative between the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation & Entrepreneurship at the University of Cape Town (UCT) Graduate School of Business, and the UCT Faculty of Health Sciences.

Inside | Gus Silber



Gus Silber is a journalist, author, editor and scriptwriter based in Johannesburg. His books include The Phelophepa Health Care Train, Ten lessons From the Future and Radical Innovation, co-authored with Wolfgang Grulke. "Healthcare and innovation happen to be two of my abiding interests as a journalist," he says. "Too often, we focus on the gloom and doom surrounding social services in our country. The iHI Review was an opportunity to shine a light on the good and the great." Memeburn considers Gus one of the 50+ prominent South African journalists on Twitter. Find out why: @gussilber.

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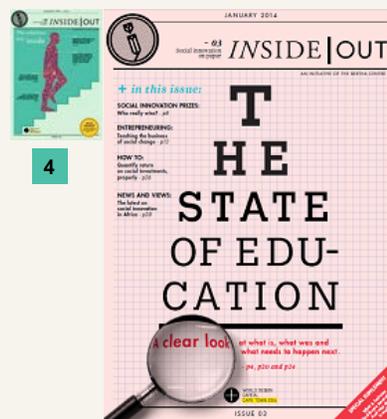
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