



## **Voortrekker Road Corridor Improvement District**

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

According to a recent study, Cape Town has a homeless population of over 14,000 individuals, with an average of 8.5 years spent living on the streets. However, there are effective strategies that can be implemented to address these issues. This population faces significant challenges, with half experiencing long-term homelessness and 85% dealing with untreated chronic health or psychological conditions. It is concerning that an estimated South African Rand 286 million in cash is given directly to homeless people by the public each year, which can perpetuate drug addiction and hinder rehabilitation efforts. The Centre of Hope (COH) was established to address pressing issues in the Parow community. It provides a safe space for the most vulnerable, offering access to social services, counselling and physical assistance. The primary goal is to support individuals in their journey to restoration, with a strong emphasis on change and job readiness. The COH offers various developmental training programs, supported by social work and therapy services, to help individuals achieve their goals. The Centre confidently provides managed care accommodation for clients throughout their development journeys until they successfully exit the program. In doing so, the Centre addresses immediate needs and contributes to the regeneration and economic development of the area. In addition, the Voortrekker Road Corridor Improvement District (VRCID)'s aim is to educate and empower the public to give responsibly and support the NGO instead of handing out cash on the street. These services are essential to the community, and the VRCID are committed to providing the best care possible.

### **INNOVATION**

The Centre of Hope within the VRCID is a pioneering approach to downtown management and social development in South Africa. It offers a comprehensive range of social upliftment services all under one roof, making it the first of its kind. This one-stop centre serves as a beacon of hope for vulnerable communities, providing them with access to much-needed professional services in a centralized location. The Centre's holistic approach to addressing homelessness is embodied in the MES 4-phase approach. This model guides individuals through a structured transformation journey, starting with outreach and social relief, moving through change readiness and work readiness and culminating in successful reintegration into society. The Centre of Hope is committed to ensuring beneficiaries receive the necessary support at each stage of their journey, leading to sustainable change. Moreover, the Centre has taken steps towards environmental sustainability by installing solar panels and selling electricity back to the City of Cape Town, reducing its carbon footprint and operational costs. The Centre's commitment to positive environmental change and long-term financial sustainability is clearly demonstrated through this innovative approach to green energy. Furthermore, The Centre of Hope participates in the Better Bellville Together recycling program. This initiative involves recycling plastics, food waste, paper, cans, and polystyrene, which will not only reduce waste but also generate revenue for the Centre. The Centre of Hope sets a new standard for downtown management and social development initiatives with its unique combination of comprehensive services, innovative programming and environmental consciousness.

### **OUTCOME**

The Centre of Hope has significantly improved public safety and cleanliness in the surrounding areas, resulting in a notable decrease in loitering and petty crimes. Since its opening in August 2023, the shelter has consistently operated at full capacity, empowering 50 people every night with the dignity of a safe sleeping space. Natalie's testimonial, featured in the accompanying video, underscores the transformative impact of the VRCID and the Centre of Hope: "Staying outside for the longest period of my life, the VRCID has been an instrumental support system for me. Thanks to their informative seminars and engaging sessions, I have been able to overcome my 45-year addiction successfully and remain clean for almost two years and seven months. As a result, I am now able to actively engage in meaningful conversations with my sons and fully participate in their lives. I am proud to say that I am once again a productive member of society and am moving forward with confidence." The past year, 18,212 meals were served, and 547 individuals assisted through their journey out of homelessness. Services include rehabilitation support and various change readiness workshops. The Centre of Hope's services have restored dignity, rebuilt lives, and strengthened communities. The Centre of Hope

is a sustainable effort that has the potential to grow and become self-sufficient. Its ongoing success depends on the community's continued support and funding. This initiative will confidently and diplomatically address the ongoing challenges of homelessness and urban decay, leaving a lasting impact.

## **EXECUTION**

The Centre of Hope was established in response to the findings of a 2020 homeless study in Cape Town, which highlighted the urgent need for such a facility. MES initiated discussions with the owner of a dilapidated building in Parow in 2020, ultimately securing a rental agreement for the site in 2021. Later that year, a property group provided crucial support with a South African Rand 4 million loan. A reputable engineering firm led the project design and renovations. The renovations began in December 2021, with twelve businesses offering pro bono services to support the cause. After months of dedicated effort, the Centre of Hope was completed in June 2022 and officially opened on October 10, 2022, coinciding with World Homeless Day. The project's phased approach ensured immediate access to social relief and outreach services, with the shelter component opening on August 17, 2023, due to construction challenges. The unwavering support of businesses, churches, city improvement districts and the community has made this two-year journey to full operational capacity possible. This demonstrates a remarkable display of collaborative effort and commitment to addressing homelessness in the VRCID community.

## **REPRESENTATION**

The Centre of Hope showcases its ability to foster inclusive collaboration by uniting diverse stakeholders to tackle homelessness in the VRCID community. This joint effort encompasses city improvement districts, civil society, communities and government entities working together to revitalize districts, stimulate economic growth and improve community safety. The Social Upliftment Joint Operations Committee, composed of representatives from the state, church and security sectors, was established to oversee planning and service delivery in this community. The committee confidently identified and endorsed the need for the Centre, recognizing its crucial role in solving homelessness. Twelve business partners, including architects and contractors, offered their services pro bono, emphasizing the project's inclusive nature. The Centre has received widespread acclaim as a beacon of proactive change, with the full support of local government. Western Cape Premier Alan Winde visited the centre, underscoring its pivotal role in transforming lives. In a video message shared on social media, the Premier appeals to fellow Capetonians to support the Centre of Hope. His endorsement serves as a call to action for solidarity, urging all South Africans to embrace and support initiatives like this. It is a testament to the power of community and its ability to effect positive change.

## **REPLICATION**

The Centre of Hope provides a replicable model for addressing homelessness and urban decay in various downtowns or districts. Its holistic approach encompasses all essential services under one roof, providing a template that others can modify to suit their circumstances. By offering professional services and assistance one step at a time, the Centre ensures that individuals experiencing homelessness receive comprehensive support. The success of the Centre is based on evidence-based interventions and a focus on solving homelessness. This model can be replicated in other areas facing similar challenges by adapting it to local needs and resources. Strong partnerships between city improvement districts, social upliftment partners, businesses, government and churches are crucial for replicating this model elsewhere. The project has successfully addressed homelessness and VRCID believe it can be replicated in other communities. They are confident in the effectiveness of our approach and encourage others to consider implementing similar projects. The Centre of Hope's adaptability allows for implementation in various locations and on multiple dates.

## **COMPLEXITY/SIMPLICITY**

Finding suitable property for initiatives like the Centre of Hope can be challenging in urban areas. Identified properties are often in disrepair, with renovation costs extortionate. In addition, obtaining community buy-in and support can be a significant obstacle; however, the organization overcame these challenges by utilizing factual evidence from the NGO sector and securing the backing of the Joint Operation Committee (JOC). VRCID and MES's extensive experience in the NGO sector, particularly in social relief and upliftment, played a vital role in community support. MES's successful operation of seven shelters nationwide and its longstanding relationship with the VRCID, added credibility. After completion, the Centre's installed staircase did not meet the City's safety regulations, affecting the proposed opening date. Combating the opening delay, VRCID decided to open the Centre with a phased approach, providing immediate daily social relief support to the homeless. The aid of a foundation helped rebuild the staircase to meet the City's regulations, leading to the final stage of opening the shelter on 17th August 2023. Strong relationships between city improvement districts, social upliftment partners, businesses, government and churches were crucial in overcoming complexity and ensuring the Centre's success.