

## Men For Change (MFC)

Men For Change (MFC) is a community-based organisation that embodies the vision of one man, determined to make a difference within his own community.

Thulani Nkosi is the founder of Men for Change (MFC), a community-based organisation in Alexandra township, Johannesburg. MFC is committed to engaging with men about their relationships with women, each other, and their responsibility in the VAW cycle. Nkosi is a gender activist who started working with youth for Agisanang Domestic Abuse Prevention and Training Project (ADAPT). As an ADAPT trainer he was responsible for running workshops in schools and educating young people on issues of domestic violence. Like many men who work in the field, Nkosi became involved once he recognised his own culpability in his personal relationships, as an abuser. His response was to gain the tools to stop his own abuse, and also to intervene within his community.

As Nkosi worked with ADAPT, he became increasingly aware of the need for a focused programme that intervened with men in the community.

He gained support from Interfund in 1999, and was involved in a number of training workshops with GETNET (Gender Training Network). This training gave Nkosi a framework within which to understand the dynamics of VAW, and helped him to begin to create a methodology that was relevant to Alexandra Township.

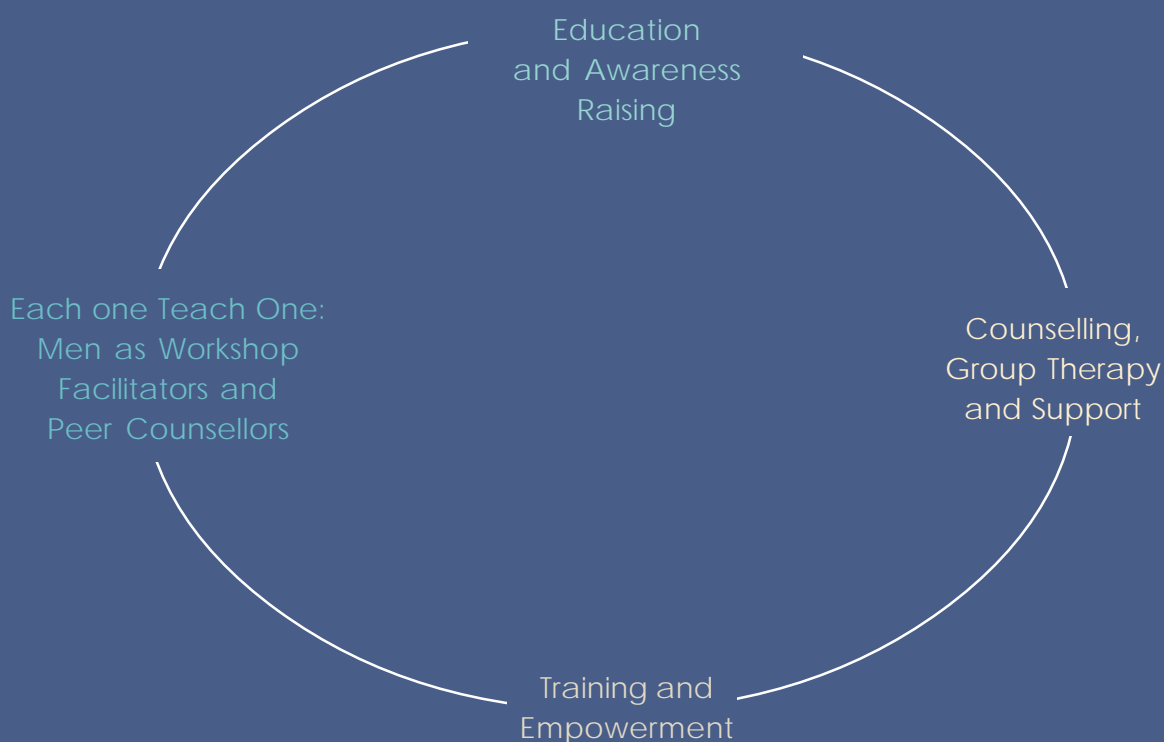
### OBJECTIVE

MFC's objective is to empower men as change agents within their community.

### APPROACH

MFC's approach is primarily concerned with education, workshops and training.

### EMPOWERING MEN AS CHANGE AGENTS



## BACKGROUND

- **Education and Awareness Raising.** This first phase involved workshops with men within the community to highlight and raise awareness about domestic violence. The 11 men recruited by MFC for the first phase were offered workshops to try to assist the men to understand their role in the VAW dynamic. The workshops followed the GETNET model, which looked at issues of sexism, masculinities, socialisation and domestic violence.
- **Counselling and Support Services.** From this first phase of workshops and working together with a registered social worker, MFC identified men who were interested in continuing the change process. These men were offered individual and group therapy, as well as additional workshops and tools to deal with the internal changes that were wrought by the initial workshops. The men who continued to this level of intervention were identified as possible trainers and facilitators for future workshops.

This level of counselling and support began to challenge the socialisation of men – it looked at the concept of ‘macho men’ – and dealt with how men bottle up their vulnerabilities and feelings. Counselling was seen as a venue for men to be vulnerable and begin to speak about issues they never spoke about before. Men who entered this phase began to identify patterns of behaviour related to violence, learned anger management skills, and formed a support group where they positively reinforced behaviour change. Although this process was extremely slow, and often *ad hoc* and informal, it did produce a core group of future MFC facilitators.

- **Empowerment of men as activists.** Within this third phase, the men were challenged to plan for change in their own communities, homes, workplaces and families. With in-depth training-of-trainers and focused gender workshops, the men were given tools to change the environment, and challenge ingrained stereotypes about men, and their roles.

MFC decided to utilise the original group of 11 men to work with targeted groups of young men, particularly between the ages of 16 and 35. The participants of the original workshops had identified that VAW runs generationally, and felt strongly that intervention at a young age is critical, because young men are more adaptable to change.

## IMPLEMENTATION

These awareness-raising workshops hit an initial wall of resistance. Facilitators identified a great deal of fear and mistrust when they tried to challenge so-called ‘normal’ behaviour patterns. However, because the facilitators were a part of the community (Alexandra), they were able to unpack the peer pressures that went into creating these forms of behaviour. Being among their peers, they were able to challenge young men about their behaviour. In addition they were able to ask if they were perpetrating violence to ‘belong’. Many facilitators talked about violence as a habit, or a way of living – to perpetrate violence is to assert oneself as a man.

Learning from this initial experience, MFC has created a three-day workshop that emphasises education and empowerment of men. The workshops are run by men, for men and are structured as follows:

- Day 1:** Domestic violence (definitions), Socialisation of men, Sexism;
- Day 2:** Focus on men, men’s emotions, understanding when they feel hurt or vulnerable, unpacking men’s understanding of violence, getting men to begin to talk to one another;
- Day 3:** Sexual rights, Sexuality, Sexual health.

Participants at these workshops were often extremely confused and defensive. Nkosi reported that the key area of defence was, ‘This is our tradition, it is our culture – to be a man you have to assert yourself.’ The workshop gave men the space to state these

feelings concretely, and then assisted them in understanding ways of breaking through these patterns of defence. Facilitators were trained to ensure that men engaged on an emotional level, and took them through their own personal experiences.

## SUMMARY

MFC is a small community-based organisation that has as its core focus changing men's understanding of the world around them, and impacting upon VAW through this changed consciousness.

MFC has managed to create an intervention that is increasingly relevant and responsive to the particular cultural, ethnic, racial and socio-economic context within the area it operates. By utilising local men as facilitators, MFC enables its workshops to cut through many of the defences that are inherent in the recipients of this kind of work. Trust levels are built, and the process can move more quickly into change education.

MFC has integrated the idea of activism/change agents within its therapeutic and counselling process. This gives participants the understanding that the process has positive and powerful ramifications both personally and publicly. Overtly encouraging activism as a result of the MFC process enables men to look at their lives and build an empowering experience.

MFC is the vision of one person, Thulani Nkosi. While this enables the organisation to be streamlined, it runs the risk of depending too much upon the personality, ability and charisma of an individual. While the MFC model is strong, it is important to begin to instil an understanding of longevity into the organisation that will enable it to survive without Nkosi, and to begin to model its work into replicable projects.

## REFLECTION

Men going through the workshops needed follow-up support, as their own families and communities often rejected their attempts to implement change. Going back into their communities, men felt isolated, and were often challenged by women, as well as men, about their changed behaviour. Nkosi tells about his grandmother and sister insisting that he should not wash the dishes because it was 'unmanly' behaviour. Within the support groups, men started talking about the root causes of their behaviour.

The personal experiences of the facilitators gradually began to inform the design of the workshops. They became aware that many of the models they were using were based on Western paradigms, and they needed to begin to integrate traditional, cultural and religious experiences located in South African contexts. MFC is still trying to integrate this awareness into their workshop models. MFC has also piloted training in the North West province and Mpumalanga.

## CHALLENGES

Although clearly unique and innovative, it is difficult to assess, in concrete terms, the *impact* of the MFC programme. MFC operates on a very small budget, without proper infrastructure or administrative support. It has no evaluation or monitoring processes in place. There are no manuals from the workshops, nor is there an integrated archive system that can measure the number of men trained or the impact on the communities where training has taken place. Very little substantive material has been documented, and workshops are not, on the whole, recorded either on paper or tape. This is a key weakness in the MFC approach. Because very little may have been captured, much of the process may reside in Nkosi's memory.<sup>19</sup>

Without this, the organisation could stagnate with the original 11 men who were trained.

Because Nkosi dominates the organisation, he has become the chief facilitator, administrator, visionary, fundraiser and workshop designer. This has created a situation where MFC forges ahead without any integrated infrastructure, and very little documentation. While their ideas are powerful, and there is little doubt that they have impacted on the lives of the men they have trained, the organisation will not be sustainable without capacity-building and resource development.

MFC does not have any written documentation of its work – its workshops have not been evaluated, no central workshop manual been developed, nor are there any annual reports or position papers available. Because very little has been written down, many of the processes reside in Nkosi's memory. It is critical that an intervention be made here that will ensure that this information is captured in a logical format, which will enable it to be assessed and models to be created.

MFC is caught in a difficult cycle -- because it does not document its work, it is not a good candidate for international funding or support, but without it, it will be unable to begin the documentation and organisational planning process it needs to sustain its work.

