

Taking A Closer Look: Insight on Mental Health Services for Black South African Youth

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LOCATION: Durban, South Africa

I worked mainly in Durban, South Africa, a coastal city in eastern South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province. KwaZulu-Natal is influenced by African and Indian cultures, as well as colonial influences. Durban is the third most populous city in South Africa—after Johannesburg and Cape Town—and the largest city in the South African province of KwaZulu Natal, with a population of 595,061. 2019 marks 25 years of the end of the apartheid era.



MENTAL HEALTH & AFRICAN CULTURE:

- Goodley, Fairfax and LaNey (2017) Africentric paradigm offers a crucial organizing. It speaks to the unique contributions, strengths and capacity of African people throughout the diaspora.
- Starkowitz (2014) found that most black South African families access traditional African healers as primary means of health care, holistic healing of physical, mental and spiritual health.
- The 2005 Children's Act regarding mental health is within the Disability category and serve more so as a protection policy for youth to not be restrained or harmed. Mental health and health have not yet been fully integrated within South Africa



GLOBAL FIELD AGENCY

University of KwaZulu-Natal Social Work
I worked within the Masters program of the School of Social Work around research topics concerning improving the quality of life of people and the promotion of peace, human rights, equality and social justice. Closely working within the University of KwaZulu-Natal: Community Outreach and Research (UKZNCORE) created to enhancing the delivery of Social work services. In addition to collaborating with community organizations and agencies within Durban such as Meyrick Bennet Guidance Centre

Meyrick Bennet Guidance Centre

The agency aims to support and assist children and their parents in helping with the challenges within the family and home. Meyrick Bennet receive referral problems related to: School problems, behavioral and emotional problems, family relationship problems, developmental difficulties, substance abuse, and speech/ language problems. Individual cases are assessed with a pre-interview to determine the type of assessment the child requires. Assessments such as: psychological, psychoeducation, speech and hearing therapy, or occupational therapy

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

- Lead a lesson on the various forms of bullying and the effect on youth today, to classes of six and seventh graders.
- The activities gave space for the students to express their experiences and challenges with bullying within the classroom and/or one on one with me.
- Introduced a mindfulness/positive affirmation exercise, using a drawn mirror to help combat the negative words the youth has heard or said about themselves
- Completed mental health assessments and screenings for the sixth and seventh graders utilizing an assessment tool created by my UKZN mentor Dr. Maud.
- Reviewed research with master students of social work at the University of KwaZulu Natal.
- Networked with social work and psychology students, faculty, and professionals.

CONNECTIONS:

Classrooms

- SW 629: This course helped me to gain knowledge and skills essential to providing effective school social work interventions. 629 helped me to be able to identify, select, and apply evidence-based prevention and intervention to enhance student learning, development, and school success.
- SW713: This course provided me with African-centered values and principles in historical and contemporary context in order to implement methods in a broadly-defined practice with African-descent client systems.

Career:

This opportunity has shown me how imperative my work as a future therapist will be. It has also inspired me to one day provide group therapy sessions within the schools.

OUTCOMES:

One of my favorite outcomes was that of seeing how beautifully the students engaged within each activity on the positive affirmations for themselves (see below). In addition to that, I had the opportunity to engage in dialogue and field work surrounding mental health practices for South African youth, specifically Black and native Zulu youth. Learning how a big part of social work practice involves the Afrocentric approach for children, youth, and families. Also, learning the integration of using both western modalities and interventions as well as cultural and spiritual practices to bring appropriate interventions to children and youth in need of mental health services



"I am kind, loving, fun, fast learner, charmer, generous, handsome, creative, amazing, and forgiving."

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Learning and practicing cultural humility and competency is an ongoing and imperative process in order to become a good social worker
- Community and family are powerful intervention tools to strengthen and help heal an individual
- Letting go of the savior complex, listen to the people, and let the community tell and guide you on how you can be of service to them
- Gratefulness and the privileges I hold



ADVICE:

- Learn the primary language and how to say common words and phrases. Then, ask a native on how to pronounce it correctly.
- Leave your biases at the airport, check your privilege, and be open to the culture!
- Write or type out your plans. Have back up plans
- Research the organization you will be placed at.
- Be okay with changes or not doing what your originally planned to do. Have an A, B, and C plan!
- Document your journey, digital or written.
- Take time to do some sightseeing, and embrace the moment!

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