

Missionvale Care Centre Community Exchange Program: Shifting from welfare to development



Even though we work in one of the poorest areas in our city, we believe every person has something to offer and we strive to unlock that potential in each one!



Our community exchange system channels people away from handouts and dependency. Instead it provides our community with a platform to do something in exchange for the services / items they receive from the Care Centre.



While they are learning, volunteering or cleaning up the environment, they earn tokens called MCC Bucks which can be exchanged for essential items such as food and clothing.



It is exciting because it uplifts, develops and empowers, rather than creating expectation and entitlement.

There are 4 ways community members can earn MCC Bucks:



1. Recycling

Community members bring recyclable items (cardboard, tin, plastic etc.) to the Missionvale Care Centre. For each kilogram they bring, they earn “MCC Bucks”. MCC Bucks can be exchanged for essentials in our Swop Shop. The swop shop stocks essential groceries, toiletries, clothing and more. This way the community can choose what they need, rather than depending on a hand-out.

We have close to 4000 people who are participating in this initiative and recycle an average of 120000 kilograms of waste per annum!

Outcomes include access to a regular decent meal, improved nutrition and a cleaner living environment.



2. Volunteering

Another way to earn MCC bucks is volunteering. For example we have people helping with cleaning, security duties and general maintenance. Some have special skills such as carpentry work or painting which they are able to bring to the Centre.

It has been hugely encouraging to see the community embracing this approach!

Having community volunteers saves us the cost of hiring staff to perform these duties, but more importantly, we have seen what it has done for people's sense of self-worth and purpose!



3. Attending support groups

We offer a wide variety of support groups that include groups for men, women, young girls, substance abusers, parents, people with HIV and TB and even a breastfeeding group for young mothers.

So many people have lost hope for the future. Often low self-esteem and desperation for acceptance, love, and / or survival leads them into Gangsterism and substance abuse.

It was interesting to see how many initially came to attend these groups only to earn the MCC bucks, but they have now grown into close-knit groups, singing together and offering incredible support to one another.

We have seen such amazing transformations take place through these safe spaces. All are welcomed with open arms, regardless of their background or things done in the past. There is no judgement, and we walk a road of positive transformation and accountability alongside them. In just a few months, we have seen some using less substances than before and a few have come off all together!

4. Upskilling.



The ultimate goal of our skills development programs is self sufficiency either through employment, or a successful new venture. Practical learning classes teach participants a wide variety of topics including literacy, mathematics, putting together a business plan, budgeting, life skills, ethics, new venture creation, food gardening and craft making such as sewing and traditional beadwork. All committed participants earn MCC bucks while they are attending educational programs so they are able to provide for themselves while they are learning.

The beauty is that each individual's success also impacts their families, so for every person one could estimate that an additional 4 people at home will benefit as their home circumstances improve.

Outcomes to date include increased levels of self-reliance, skills level, and empowerment amongst youth as well as improved household income.

In the last 2 years alone, we have placed more than 100 previously unemployed people into temporary or permanent jobs, and we're receiving excellent feedback on their progress!

Funding Request:

- The swop shop is stocked with a variety of items - clothing, food, toiletries, furniture, toys and more.
- Fresh produce is supplied by the community workers attending gardening training on site
- All donations of household goods are sent to the swop shop where the community can “buy” it with their MCC Bucks
- We have to purchase non-perishable food items as well as toiletries.
- These are ongoing costs we have to fundraise for on a constant basis.
- We do get a small income from the recycling (roughly R70 000 per annum), but this is fully utilised towards paying stipends for previously unemployed men to work on the site, sorting the items into the correct categories.
- Any contribution, large or small, towards these expenses, or donations of non-perishable food / toiletries are therefore hugely appreciated!
- This is not a feeding scheme, it is a critical part of our community development work!
- The cost of living has put tremendous pressure on all South Africans, but in particular on the poor because they are not able to access even the very basics anymore. Through our Community Exchange System, we can uplift and upskill, and still ensure that we meet them at the point of their need.
- We cannot do it alone, it is only because of the kindness and generosity of others that we are able to continue, and we are so grateful for that!