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Investigating the Impact of a Christian Based Life Skills Training Programme: Perceptions of Unemployed People

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the impact of a Christian based life skills training programme in terms of the perceptions of unemployed people. This training programme is part of an upliftment programme for unemployed people in South Africa. A mixed method

approach was utilised by adopting a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods. Convenience sampling was used for the quantitative approach and 96 unemployed persons completed the life skills training programme. The Wilcoxon matched pair signed rank significance tests were carried out to determine differences between the pre- and post answers. The sample size for the qualitative approach was 18 unemployed people that completed the life skills training programme. A semi-structured interview was used to collect the data and a coding system was used to analyse the data. The results specified that the respondents perceived that this training programme had a significant positive effect on their lives and their employability. The article will help to address the most important life skills issues in preparing unemployed people for the workplace.

Keywords: Life Skills, Christian based, life skills training programme, unemployment

1. Introduction

Unemployment has been pushed to the forefront in South Africa with recent events such as the 62km “Economic liberation” march by thousands of young people, between Johannesburg and Pretoria (Timeslive, 2011, online).

South Africa is a developing country within the third world, with an estimated population of over 50,5 million people (SouthAfrica.info, 2011). One of the major stumbling blocks in the social and economical growth of South Africa is the high rate of unemployment that exists. There is no consensus regarding the exact number of the population that is unemployed. The official government estimations are approximately 25,7% for the second quarter of 2011 (Tradingeconomics, 2011, online). Different references however, provide different estimations, for example the CIA World Fact book (2011) estimates the unemployment rate of the South African youth, aged between 15 and 24 years, at a total of 48,15%. Divided into gender groupings, young males represent 44,59% and young females 52,51%. Irrespective of what the exact figures might be, it is evident that the unemployment rate is extremely high. According to Roos (2011) South Africa’s latest unemployment figures make the country the one with the highest official unemployment statistics among 61 surveyed by Bloomberg. Another 100 000 private-sector jobs were lost during the first few months of 2011.

For South Africa to prosper as a country and for its people to grow and develop, it is essential that unemployment be addressed. Many researchers have studied the main causes of unemployment and above all other the lack of employable skills, have been highlighted over the past two decades (Jerling, 1996; De Jager, Horne & Joubert, 2006). Many unemployed people simply do not have any skills that are in demand in the labour market. The majority of skills programmes that are created for the unemployed are not successful, mainly because the programmes are one-dimensional and not designed to address the wide spectrum of problems faced by the unemployed. It has however been the number one priority of many community programmes over the past decade. One of these community programmes is the Popup programme in Tshwane, Gauteng. The focus of this research project was to determine if a training programme for the unemployed, based on Christian values, as

presented by Popup, can make a meaningful contribution to the lives of unemployed people and provide hope for their future.

Popup started as a Christian shelter for homeless people, but after a couple of years as a shelter, it was clear that being a shelter does not address the core problem of uplifting the unemployed and providing them with skills that would make them employable in the South African labour market. The people residents remained without any prospects or hope for their future and remained in the shelter for extended periods of time, without finding employment.

Popup set out to address this issue by providing the unemployed with the opportunity to master skills that will enable them to find a job and join the economically active population in South Africa. What distinguishes the Popup programme from other skills programmes, is that Popup offers a holistic approach, where learners are supported on a spiritual, physical, mental and educational level. The programme has a strong Christian value base, hence the participants' problems are also addressed on a spiritual level. The programme employs social workers and medical staff to address possible medical issues. On a physical level food parcels and clothing are provided to the needy.

All participants complete a ten day life skills training programme, where finding personal purpose, improving self-esteem, overcoming life's challenges, and other topics are addressed. Once the participants successfully completed the life skills programme, they choose a specific course to continue with. Spiritual support and guidance continue throughout the programme and learners are encouraged to reach out to their communities at home as well. This research project was specifically concerned with determining if the life skills training programme made a meaningful contribution to the lives of unemployed people and provided hope for their future.

2. Literature Review

The nature of life skills training for the unemployed and the history and context of the People Upliftment Programme (POPUP) will be discussed below.

2.1 Life Skills Training for the Unemployed

Life skills training are defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2011:3) as a "mix of knowledge, behaviour, attitudes and values and designate the possession of some skill and know-how to do something, or reach an aim".

Young (2001) stipulates that the following themes should be included in life skills training for South Africans, namely finances, cultures, diseases such as malaria, HIV/Aids and tuberculosis, drug abuse, human rights, tax, compiling a curriculum vitae, interviewing skills, applying for a job, legislation, medical care, protocol and etiquette, pension, entrepreneurship in small businesses and finally child and woman abuse. De Kock (2003) from the South African Skills Training and Job creation Centre states that people must be encouraged to become lifelong learners and the following skills should be taught: Coping with real life situations, budgeting, running a small business, conducting a business meeting, keeping

minutes of a meeting, coping with conflict, customer care, stress management, cultivation of good customer relations and basic managerial skills.

The Continuing Education Department at the University of Pretoria suggests (Bizcommunity, 2010) that areas such as communication, conflict management strategies, self-knowledge, balanced lifestyle and self-assertiveness should be included in a life skills course. Life skills for vocational success (1998) suggests that social skills, decision-making skills, employability, money management, transportation, health, family responsibilities, basic understanding of law and telephone skills should be included in a life skills training programme.

Morgan (2010) states that people skills necessary in the workplace are a positive attitude, active listening, team playing, approachability and dealing with failure. Life skills training is important to encourage lifelong learning (Taute, 2008). Lobner (1997) mentions that Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) should be addressed to enhance efficiency and quality of work.

Van Heerden (2005) proposes that goal setting, time management, conflict management, problem solving, decision making, healthy life style, alcohol and drug abuse, creativity, analytical thinking, listening skills, helping skills, employability skills and work ethics should be part of a life skills programme to prepare a person for the workplace.

2.2 The People Upliftment Programme (POPUP)

Initially POPUP served as a shelter for homeless people, with on-site income generation projects, and accompanying social- and medical support services. In 2004 POPUP shifted its focus to meet the need for market-related, cost-effective training, while still maintaining its social- and medical support services. All the information in this section was derived directly from POPUP (POPUP, 2011).

The mission of POPUP entails the following:

- The delivery of market related skills and competencies through cost-effective training.
- Job placement.
- The provision of medical services.
- The provision of social services.

The mission statement and subsequent strategic focus serves as a departure point for the various services rendered at POPUP. It lays the foundation of future development processes and new entities to be formed and developed, as well as the structuring of the POPUP development process.

According to POPUP's records, 923 people were placed in employment during 2010.

Interesting facts since 2005 (when skills training and development started):

- 2 806 learners were trained in various skills programmes.
- 2 684 learners found employment (95.7%) – temporary, contractual and permanent.

- During 2009 and 2010 a total number of 2 268 people were placed in employment (80.8%) of the total employment statistics for the last past 6 years combined, happened during the past two years.

Additional to the life skills programme, services such as job placement, entrepreneurial activities (including 11 month incubation phase at POPUP), medical services, social services, a day care centre for learners children, two homes for children and further skills development are offered by POPUP. The specialised skills development includes hospitality services (cleaning, laundry and child minding), cooking and baking, sewing, early childhood development, home-based care, computer and office administration, arts and crafts, forklift driving, painting, plumbing, business practice and business game and adult basic education and training (ABET: English and mathematical literary).

Themes such as purpose, self-esteem, how to overcome life's challenges, communication, handling conflict, time management, the effect of HIV/Aids, setting goals, stress management, eating healthily, emotional healing, making the right choices, finding a job, sexuality and finding hope for the future are covered during the life skills training programme at POPUP.

POPUP embarked on a second phase in skills development at Garankuwa in June 2011 and also a third phase at Soshanguve. The second phase (Garankuwa) will focus on an extension of skills programmes offered at Salvokop and will just be reduced to fewer skills training programmes. The third phase development will focus primarily on technical skills (building constructions skills), initially aiming to present six building trades, which we plan to expand in time to come. The identified trades are currently among some of the identified skills on the national critical and scarce skills needed in South Africa.

The centre will be developed in different phases. POPUP is currently in the process of developing a workshop area.

The first two training programmes that will be implemented on the site include the Plumbing and Painting training programmes. POPUP hopes to expand these programmes to six construction related training programmes in time to come.

The topics that are covered during the ten day life skills course are purpose, self-esteem, how to overcome life's challenges, communication, handling conflict, time management, the effect of HIV/Aids, setting goals, stress management, eating healthy, emotional healing, making the right choices and best practices in finding a job.

3. Method

A mixed methods approach, including both the quantitative and qualitative paradigm was used. The research design included a survey (quantitatively) and semi-structured group interviews (qualitatively). A plant at a mining industry in the North West province of South Africa was targeted in this investigation. For the quantitative section, all the attendants at a ten day Christian Based life skills training programme were invited to complete the survey. Hence a census was used. Regarding the qualitative section, purposive sampling was used.

Specific participants that attended the two day change intervention were targeted and asked to participate in the group interviews that were conducted.

3.1 Quantitative Method

The data collection, design and methodology provide the reader with insight into “how” data are collected and subsequently analysed (Watkins, 2006). The collected data were analysed in order to make the interpretation of results possible. The following statistical techniques were applied using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program for Windows version 14.0 (2001). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The sample demographics were obtained using analysis of the frequencies of respondents in each of the demographic categories. The frequencies and average percentages were used to describe and compare results. The statistical analysis also included tests of significance.

3.1.1 Participants and Sampling

This study utilised a census survey and the participants were all volunteers. They were informed about the purpose of the research project and they all signed an informed consent document. They were assured that their anonymity will be protected in the reporting of the results.

The biographical data was as follows:

Age: From the frequency table, using the cumulative frequencies, it is clear that 89% of the participants were in the age group 15 – 35 years and only 6% older than 40 years of age.

Gender: 78% of the group was female.

Language: 23,2% of the group was Setswana speaking, 15,9% Northern Sotho speaking and Sesotho and Xitsonga both 14,6%.

Birthplace: 51,2% originated in Gauteng, South Africa.

Current home: 34,1% of the respondents chose the category *other* and no information was available on the data basis with regards to the location of *other*.

Qualification: 87,8% hold a Grade 12 certificate.

Marital status: 78% was single.

Number of dependants: 35,4% has one dependant, while 42,7% did not answer the question.

3.1.2 Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 8 Biographical questions, 40 closed-ended questions and 2 open-ended questions. The 40 closed-ended questions consisted of a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree).

3.1.3 Data Collection

The learners were requested to complete a paper-and-pen questionnaire at the beginning and the end of the 10 day life skills training programme. After the questionnaires were collected, 96 questionnaires were judged acceptable for statistical analysis.

3.2 Qualitative Method

A phenomenological research paradigm was used in the qualitative section of this study was phenomenology. The research design included semi-structured interviews.

3.1.1 Participants and Sampling

The participants were all volunteers. They were informed of the purpose of the research project and they all signed an informed consent document. They were assured that their anonymity will be protected in the reporting of the results. The population consisted of the POPUP learners who completed the life skills course and who were busy with technical training at POPUP. The criteria that was used for inclusion was that the person should have been a learner at Popup in the last 12 months. The person should have completed the Life Skills section and should at least be busy with one of the technical training courses. Through purposive sampling, a staff member of Popup helped to initially identify eighteen willing participants. Saturation of the information was reached after fifteen interviews and a decision was made to conclude the data gathering process. To ensure representativeness, a grid was used to identify possible participants. The grid made provision for the age and the gender of the participants. The grid was compiled as follows:

Table 1 Grid used for interviewing

AGE	MEN	WOMEN
24 years and younger	3	3
25-34	3	3
35-45	3	3

The staff member from Popup asked for volunteers from the respective categories in the grid to participate in the research. Eventually the profile of the participants, were Popup learners, male and female, between the ages of 22 and 35.

3.1.2 Instrument

The principal researchers conducted the interviews themselves. No field workers were used. It was decided to use semi structured interviews, as the participants struggled to express themselves. Maree (2007, 87) describe semi-structured interviews as a set of predetermined

questions that allows the interviewer to probe and clarify answers. The semi-structured interview guide determines the line of inquiry and the researcher must constantly be aware of participants' responses, in order to identify new lines of inquiry. The interview guide that was used, was as follows:

Table 2 Interview guide

Tell me more about your experiences at POPUP.
How did you experience the life skills?
Which session(s) of the life skills added value to your life?
How did you experience the session of emotional healing?
Tell me more about your technical here at POPUP.
How did you experience devotions?
What do you think of the medical services (dental, eye care and clinic)?
How will go about to be of service to other people?
What will you do or have you already done to impact/change your community?
Anything else that you want to mention?

The participants' permission was asked to use a voice recorder to record the interviews. After the interviews, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcriptions were then used to analyse the data.

3.1.3 Data Collection

Individual semi structured interviews were conducted during July and August 2011. Eighteen interviews were initially scheduled. It was decided that a decision regarding saturation would be taken after the fifteenth interview. If saturation was reached, no additional interviews would be conducted. If saturation was not reached, more interviews would be scheduled. After the fifteenth interview was conducted and the results were analysed, it was decided that saturation was achieved. Hence no additional interviews were scheduled. Saturation is an indication of internal validity and consistency in the results. From the analysis, several significant themes emerged. The interviews were then recorded, transcribed and analysed.

3.1.4 Data Analysis

The mechanics of interpretational qualitative analysis (Tesch, 1990):

De-contextualising and re-contextualising in descriptive/interpretive analysis:

- Segmenting: identify smaller parts of the data documents (segments, items, incidents, meaning units or analysis units)
- Developing an organizing system: identify topics (this helps to know where to put each relevant segment of data.
- Sorting data (coding): abbreviations of the labels of categories.

After coding the data, it is still not ready for interpretation. Everything that belongs in one category must be assembled in one place, so that the researcher can read in a continuous fashion about everyone's ideas towards POPUP's adding of value and extra sessions needed. This assembling is what Tesch (1990:122) calls "re-contextualization". A category is topical, i.e., it deals with one concept, representing one "pool of meanings". A concept therefore forms the new "context" of a segment. The segment is settled in the context of its topic, in the neighborhood of all other segments of the data corpus that deal with the same topic. Thus transfer segment to the relevant category context.

Themes that were raised by the respondents were identified and the themes were categorised (Huysamen, 1993; Marais, 1997; Schultz, 1999).

4. Results and Discussions

The quantitative and qualitative results will be presented below.

4.1 Quantitative Results

4.1.1 Reliability

Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) is a measure of reliability. More specifically, alpha is a lower bound for the true reliability of the survey. Mathematically, reliability is defined as the proportion of the variability in the responses to the survey that is the result of differences in the respondents. That is, answers to a reliable survey will differ because respondents have different opinions, not because the survey is confusing or has multiple interpretations. The computation of Cronbach's alpha is based on the number of items on the survey (k) and the ratio of the average inter-item covariance to the average item variance. The alpha coefficient must be at least 80% in order for the instrument to be consistent in what it measures.

In this study the Cronbach's alpha is 0,917 which proves that the questionnaire truly measured what it was intended to measure.

4.1.2 Pre- and Post Testing

Classification of Closed Questions

To determine whether the life skills training benefited the participants, Wilcoxon matched pair signed rank significance tests were carried out between the pre and post test questionnaire answers. Significance levels show you how likely a result is due to chance. The most common level, used to mean something is good enough to be believed, is 0,95. This means that the finding has a 95% chance of being true. People sometimes think that the 95% level is sacred when looking at significance levels. If a test shows a 0,06 probability, it means that it has a 94% chance of being true. The 95% level comes from academic publications, where a theory usually has to have at least a 95% chance of being true to be considered worth telling people about.

In the business world if something has a 90% chance of being true (probability is 0,01), it cannot be considered proven, but it is probably better to act as if it were true rather than false (<http://www.surveysystem.com/signif.htm>). However, it is the researcher's prerogative to decide, for the specific experiment, which is relevant.

The column entries indicate the questions and the "direction" of the questions. For example, in Question 4, *I will never give up, no matter what problems I have*, the 95% indicates that significantly more people answered yes after (POST) the life skills training than before (PRE). This (95%) column indicates that this finding has a 95% chance of being true. In Q18: *I handle conflict in a positive way*, the direction changed (PRE >POST) which could be interpreted as follows: I thought I did, but now understand that I did not.

In the second column we look at a 90% certainty of the finding being true and similar for the other columns except for the last column which indicates questions where there was no change in behaviour. That is, perception or attitude was the same before training as after training.

Not only were the tests done to determine benefits or not, it was also to determine if there were classification of questions into groups with some groups more important than other.

Table 3 Statistical significant improvement

Statistical significant improvement (95%)	Statistical significant improvement (90%)	Statistical significant improvement (80%)	Statistical significant improvement (70%)	No improvement
Q4: PRE < POST	Q7: PRE < POST	Q19: PRE > POST	Q1 PRE < POST	Q3
Q8: PRE < POST	Q9: PRE < POST	Q25: PRE < POST	Q2: PRE < POST	Q5
Q10 PRE < POST	Q15: PRE > POST	Q26: PRE < POST	Q6: PRE < POST	Q13
Q18: PRE > POST	Q16: PRE > POST	Q27: PRE > POST	Q11: PRE < POST	Q14
Q24: PRE < POST	Q17: PRE < POST	Q33: PRE < POST	Q12: PRE > POST	Q23
Q34: PRE < POST	Q18: PRE > POST	Q36: PRE < POST	Q20: PRE < POST	Q30
	Q28: PRE < POST	Q39: PRE < POST	Q21: PRE > POST	Q32

	Q29: PRE < POST		Q35: PRE < POST	Q38
	Q31: PRE < POST			Q40
	Q37: PRE < POST			

The first (most significant) group where the participants felt strongly about the change brought about by the training consist of the following questions:

- Q4: I will never give up, no matter what problems I have
- Q8: I know what causes stress in my life.
- Q10: I am able to face every day challenges.
- Q18: I handle conflict in a positive way.
- Q24: I know how to compile a monthly budget for myself
- Q34: I know how to seek for a job.

The second group where we have a 90% chance of the finding being true, consists of:

- Q7: I understand the importance of forgiving other people.
- Q9: I take responsibility for my own choices.
- Q15: I can change my communication style when needed.
- Q16: I am aware that there is a difference between cultures.
- Q17: I know what causes conflict in my life.
- Q18: I handle conflict in a positive way.
- Q28: I have the skills to help other people who are not informed about HIV/Aids.
- Q29: I believe that sex belongs within a marital relationship.
- Q31: I know what behaviour is acceptable in the workplace.
- Q37: I know what my personal weaknesses are.

The third group where we have an 80% chance of the finding being true, consists of:

- Q19: I think it is important to be on time for appointments.
- Q25: I have enough knowledge about healthy eating.
- Q26: I know the different ways of how the HIV virus can be transmitted to people.
- Q27: I understand the myths that exist about the HIV virus.
- Q33: I can compile my own professional CV.
- Q36: I have knowledge about my specific type of personality.

Q39: I know how to handle stress effectively.

The phrasing of the question of the fourth group (70%) as well as the group of no importance must be discussed before a next study. My feeling is that some of the words and some of the concepts used could cause confusion. If one looks at Q12 and 13, one would suppose that a person who knows what his communication strength is should also know what his communication weakness is. Yet the direction of the answers differs. In Q12 PRE > POST (70%), in other words, an indication that if a person considered that he knew what his weakness were, he changed his opinion of himself in this regard after training. For communication strengths, however, his opinion before and after training stays the same.

All the questions must be revisited in order to simplify the wording and thought must be given to certain aspects that there is a limited time to answer the questionnaire. For example, in order to answer questions like Q1 and Q5, some thought is required.

Categorisations of Open-Ended Questions

To determine whether this life skills training impacted the lives of the unemployed persons, the two open-ended questions' answers were categorised in themes and the number of responses was counted.

Question 1: How did the Life Skills programme at POPUP add value to your life?

Table 4 Categorisations of open-ended question 1

CATEGORISATION	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS MENTIONED THIS	EXAMPLE
Relationship with God	43	“everything is possible in the eyes of God”
Management skills (communication, stress, financial, time, conflict)	26	“Communication skills” “Time management” “Stress management” “Conflict management” “Financial management”
Purpose	29	“I’ve learned many, many things that really impact in my life and that change my perceptions in life”.
HRM	17	“Interviews” “Seek job” “CV”
Who am I	36	“I was just a hawker on the streets with nothing, they have changed me”
Forgiveness	12	“I made peace with things

		that went wrong in my life”
Values	21	“Love others” “Serve others” “Punctuality” “Respect”
Culture/Diversity	8	“Others are unique”
Choices and goals	15	“I feel rejuvenated. There is nothing that I cannot do”.
Health	6	“Healthy life from HIV” “Eat healthy” “Keep away from substances”

The table above indicates that 43 respondents stated that POPUP added value on a spiritual level, which specifically involves a relationship with the trinity God; 36 respondents indicated that they understand who they are better than before they came to POPUP; and 29 respondents indicated POPUP added value regarding discovering their purpose in life.

Question 2: What topics would you like to add to the Life Skills programme?

Table 5 Categorisations of open-ended question 2

CATEGORISATION	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS MENTIONED THIS	EXAMPLE
Abuse	14	“Children and women abuse” “Drug and alcohol abuse”
Health	8	“TB” “Cancer” “Abortions”
Sex	14	“Teenage pregnancy”
Spiritual	8	“Open a Bible school”
Relationships/Diversity	11	“Close gap between races”
Activities	7	“Sports day on Fridays”
Good behavior	14	“Suicide” “Anger”
Other	18	“Human trafficking” “Single parenting”
Nothing	45	

The table above indicates that 45 respondents think that POPUP does not need to add any module to the current life skills programme. The respondents indicated that abuse, health, sex, spiritual issues, relationships, diversity, good behaviour should be added to this training programme. They also pointed out that activities such as a sports day can be included to make it more fun for them.

4.2 Qualitative Results

The trustworthiness of the interviews as well as the coding and themes will be presented below.

4.2.1 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is more defensible when more than one coder is used (Maree, Creswell, Ebersohn, Ferreira, Ivankova, Jansen, Nieuwenhuis, Pietersen, Plano Clark, & van der Westhuizen, 2007). A specialist in qualitative research also coded the data in order to increase the trustworthiness of the developed codes.

4.2.2 Coding and Themes

The following reference system will be used to report the qualitative data derived from the interviews:

Category: Life Skills

There is a clear indication that the following sessions and themes of the life skills programme added value to the lives of the interviewees.

“The life skills was so helpful to me. Because I was having a lot of issues before I came to POPUP. I had low self esteem ... We also had lessons about good diet. I start following it. And it is working for me.” (Interview 6)

“But the life skills part helps me to realise that I accept Him in my life, I will always be a child of God.” (Interview 9)

“God is calling me to preach. I realized that I did have a calling.” (Interview 1)

“My life has a purpose. My life is now worth living for.” (Interview 14)

Category: ABET

Regarding the ABET training students experienced it as very valuable to improve their English language skills as well as their Mathematical skills. They mentioned the correct use of tenses, sentence construction and public speaking. They also indicated that their self confidence grew as a result of being able to express themselves and their feelings clearly.

“Now I end up talking to people, it doesn’t matter how many there are. I can express my feelings and use correct tenses. It is a great achievement to me.” (Interview 13)

Category: Technical Training

Regarding the technical training a number of categories were highlighted by the students. From the responses it appeared that there is a lot of appreciation for the new knowledge and

skills that students acquired through the technical training sessions. The training in terms of finances specifically manifested, for example:

“That guy teaches me you can’t get money for free. That guy learned me a lot about money. He motivates us.” (Interview 1)

A number of participants also voiced their appreciation for the computer training course, as well as the sewing course.

“I like the class [computer training] because it is only 12 guys. The teacher has a minute with you alone. When you struggle...they help you.” (Interview 1)

On a more philosophical level it seems as if the students have learned that there are possibilities and opportunities available to them, for example:

“To me it means a lot. I have learned that everything is possible.” (Interview 1)

Category: Relationships

Relationships surfaced as a major theme in the restoration of the lives of the Popup students. There is evidence to suggest that they experienced significant growth in their *relationship with God, with other people and with themselves*.

“You know when I got in here, I didn’t have a relationship with God. God is with me now. I have realised that I have a purpose...My relationship with God grew.” (Interview 1)

“We (my friend) talk on Facebook. They see my faith is everything. I tell them I have a good life now. I am not going to do the same things anymore.” (Interview 1)

“Before you can call God you must know Him and that means you must receive Jesus Christ in your life. Then you will have a good relationship with Him.” (Interview 8)

Category: Emotional Healing

There is evidence that many of the participants found peace and purpose in their lives, through the emotional healing sessions. From the interviews the challenges that these students experienced at home were clear. They found it especially difficult to forgive the family members that disappointed and abandoned them during their lives. They expressed the fact that they learned to depend on God at Popup and not to depend on earthly things. They found the emotional healing sessions uplifting, especially once they grasped the power of forgiveness. They also mentioned that through God’s forgiveness they came to experience peace.

“As they telling us about Emotional Healing, I came to know to heal myself spiritually.” (Interview 4)

“God is calling me to preach. I realized that I did have a calling.” (Interview 1)

“...I came here heartbroken...I even want to commit suicide...the emotional healing part, I realised everything is there for a reason” (Interview 1)

“...you learn to forgive all the people that have done bad things to you. Now I can make an impact in their lives.” (Interview 2)

“He will comfort you and He will help you to forgive....God will give you peace.” (Interview 13)

“Forgiveness is the key to emotional healing.” (Interview 9)

Category: Devotions

The participants expressed their gratitude towards the Devotions at Popup. It was evident that they experienced a deep connection with God during the prayer and worship sessions. Overall they found it very valuable and felt that they learned how to listen to the Will of God during these sessions. Allistor’s discussion on “To be or not to be” was very effective.

“Devotions for me were a blessing. ...every day I am feeling His presence.” (Interview 6)

“Devotions for me was spiritual healing ... devotions pick me up and then I am happy again.” (Interview 7)

“Devotions are like a refill...I am thinking I am fulfilled.” (Interview 13)

“...it is very important to start the day with prayer. (Interview15)

“The devotions are like you are eating everyday from the Holy Spirit.” (Interview 1)

“In the devotions I have learned that we must not only pray when we are in a difficult situation but also when we are happy.” (Interview 5).

Category: Change

In terms of the participants experiencing a “change” as a result of their experiences at Popup, it became evident that change occurred in their personal convictions and in their personal lives:

“You must open for God to come in. And for the Holy Spirit to come in. You are the only one who can allow the Holy Spirit to come inside me. He came into my life to change me for the better.” (Interview 12)

“So actually I can say Popup changed my life. And through Popup I start doing good things in my life.” (Interview 2)

Many of the participants also expressed the fact that they have the intention to act as a catalyst for change in their families, circle of friends and community.

“I told them (my family) to go to church. So they could experience God.” (Interview 1)

“We (my friend) talk on Facebook. They see my faith is everything. I tell them I have a good life now. I am not going to do the same things anymore.” (Interview 1)

“Now I can make an impact in their lives.” (Interview 2)

“We must make a difference in our community.” (Interview 2)

One of the participants has already started to act as a “substitute mother” to some of the orphans in her community.

“...the kids who don’t have parents. Sometimes I make a meal and just call them. You know, some of those children even call me mom. I thank God because He wants us to love. Sometimes we don’t love ourselves but we love the next person and the next person and then the community.” (Interview 13)

Another reported that she intends to continue with volunteer work after the completion of the programme.

“I started volunteering. You go to schools and facilitate...I will share my testimony with them.” (Interview 15).

“My younger brother saw was here yesterday at POPUP. He said he want to do life skills. He saw the change in me because I have applied what I have learned in life skills.” (Interview 11)

Category: Social and Medical Services

The participants expressed a deep appreciation for the social support and care that they receive at Popup.

“When I came here, I didn’t have any meal at home. But now things are better. I could tell everybody. Two of my friends apply. They (are) just waiting for the opportunity.” (Interview 1)

“I like speaking to the counsellor ... or the social worker, without paying a cent.” (Interview 7).

Regarding the medical care, students had positive experiences regarding the eye clinic, dental care and other medical services.

“You know, the lady at the clinic, she is so caring...she told me more about high blood pressure and the reason why I should take medication” (Interview 13).

“Sister Kate is so good. You can go to her anytime and ask whatever you need. She will explain it to you.”

General comments:

The participants learned to trust in God.

“Everything starts with Him. That is what I learned here. You must have a prayer platform ... Don’t concentrate on cars, houses whatever. Just pray and leave it to God. That is the most important thing I have learned here.” (Interview 7)

Self-confidence has improved.

“... I was very shy ... Now I can see that my public relations improving. I can stand in front of people and I can tell them whatever I need to tell.” (Interview 12)

The participants appreciated the food served during lunch at POPUP.

“I want to thank POPUP for the food that they provide to us ... and for some of our learners this is the only meal for us for the day ... the food that we are eating here is healthy food and well cooked.” (Interview 9)

An awareness to become a city changer has been created amongst the participants. They share the knowledge that they have gained during the life skills programme with family, friends and communities.

“I am from a village in Mpumalanga. So maybe I can go to the school there and tell them about POPUP.” (Interview 12)

Personal testimony is an effective way to impart knowledge and hope.

“They tell us at life skills how their lives was. How scattered it was but God manage to bring all that broken pieces together and gave them a meaning. So that is how we are given hope.” (Interview 11)

5. Conclusion

This paper provided an overview of the perceptions of unemployed people on the value of a Christian based life skills training programme, both from a quantitative and a qualitative research design. The evidence from this research project suggests that the perceptions of the participants were favourable/positive. Through both the quantitative and qualitative results it is clear that participants benefitted a lot in terms of their spiritual growth, emotional and physical wellbeing, medical condition and employability. Their employability improved noticeably, as a result of them gaining general life skills, as well as more specialized technical training. The majority indicated that they learned a lot of new skills, that their confidence have improved, that they are committed towards becoming change agents in their respective communities and that their hope in the future has been restored through learning to trust in God. It is recommended that the programme be extended to provide hope to more people, also from outside the geographical borders of Tshwane. It would be beneficial if future research could also be conducted with participants after completion of the course, in order to determine if the skills mastered did indeed improve employability. This information could then be used to improve the content of the training offered.

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