# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2024, we proudly celebrated over a decade of dedication, passion and the spirit of Ubuntu (I am because you are – spirit of humanity) in our quest to reach out to children and youth in street-situations. Much has been achieved and much more still needs to be done in resolving the forever increasing predicament of homelessness especially amongst young men, young girls and young mothers, finding themselves in street-situations.

uMthombo carried out its programs aligned to its core mission, in transforming street-connected children and youth's lives by providing alternatives and better opportunities. Part of what shaped our work in 2024, was the continuous rise in numbers of street-connected community during outreach sessions. Thus, the last publication from Statistics South Africa (Stats SA, 2022) states that "55 000 homeless individuals were recorded with males at 70,1% and females at 29,9%, homelessness more prevalent in metropolitan areas". From 2022 to 2024, these numbers could have increased by at least 10% to 15%.

Furthermore, gradual deterioration in the city of Durban has also been a fueling factor coupled with illicit activities thriving in and around the CBD. The growing number of hijacked buildings in the CBD has also contributed greatly to the constant increase in people living in street situations, especially young people. An article by The Eyewitness News 27 August 2024 alludes to "Our teams have identified 76 buildings which are derelict, abandoned, hijacked, and overcrowded. Of these, 58 are privately owned, and 18 are government owned buildings." In many criminal activities that occur around the city such as robbery, mugging, break-ins, illegal occupation of abandoned buildings and drug dealings, have been a hinderance in bringing about positive change to mostly youth in street situations. Our data shows that many young street-connected males have either been arrested (6) or are fugitives (12) from the law and the public, making it impossible to conducted systematic intervention. To a minimal degree, for street-connected young women who have been involved in such, only two were arrested. According to Crime Stats SA, in the year 2024, "the Berea area had a total of 1017 criminal cases recorded in 2024, while Durban Central and Durban South had a total number of 5583 and 1217 crimes recorded respectively."

The other challenge that contributes to our work is the ever-growing issue of unemployment, poverty, exploitation of street-connected community and the influx of undocumented foreign nationals. On the 27th of August 2024, the Daily Sun reported that a multidisciplinary team swooped on illegally occupied buildings in the Point area in Durban. This operation was conducted in collaboration with the South African Police Services (SAPS), Durban Metro Police, Correctional Services, Department of Home Affairs, other law enforcement agencies as well as the Provincial Government. This operation resulted in the arrest of more than 123 undocumented foreign nationals.

Street-connected community is the most marginalized group, and their rights are most likely to be infringed upon in various ways by various sectors of society. Streets Rights (UK based), Centre for Child Law (University of Pretoria, South Africa) and uMthombo took an initiative in involving street-connected youth in a series of consultations to ascertain their experiences about their rights violations. A series of outreach engagements with street-connected youth enabled us to reach an understanding why it is important to engage in conversations around basic human rights. Further to this, the process involved street connected young people, street connected young mothers and their babies, each participating in two preparatory sessions as well as further two consultation sessions respectively. The findings from the groups illustrated different and similar experiences between the males and females living a street-connected life. More of the details will be shared on page 10 of this report.

In 2024, we also noted a rise in Community Based Organisations, trying to engage with the issue of street connected children and young people. As rapid urbanisation of townships and some rural communities, homelessness amongst youth is also becoming more visible even in communities that were traditionally regarded as family orientated and communal.

Despite inroads made in reaching out to children and youth in street situations, many young girls and young mothers continue finding a path out of the street situation to be a steep battle. Many adolescent girls and young women find themselves conflicted between making positive changes in their lives as well as remaining in these situations for a quick fix *(temporal escapes)* and/or illicit activities within their immediate surroundings. For many street-connected girls and young women, their innocent outlook has been taken as an added advantage by syndicates (drug or criminal) to use them for such activities.

Even though many have endured abuse in these types of engagements, they persist in doing so, for the little cash they can make. This gives the street-connected young-women a glimpse of freedom which they perceive to have.

The challenges experienced by uMthombo team, tested their resilience, grit, and determination. uMthombo team contributed their all in working towards dealing with these issues, despite personal challenges they've been facing.

Despite the challenges outlined in previous paragraphs above, a lot was achieved in 2024 which is reflected in the overall statistics and the subsequent narrative below.

| Overall Statistics 2024 | |
|---|---|
| Outreach Sessions Conducted | 83 |
| Total Numbers of Beneficiaries | 350 |
| Total Numbers of New Cases | 250 |
| Total Numbers of Returning Cases | 81 |
| Total Numbers of Active Cases | 91 |
| Total Numbers of Active-irregular Cases | 108 |
| Total Numbers of Once-off Cases | 138 |
| Total Numbers of Reintegration | 39 |
| Total Numbers of Awareness and Prevention | 6 |

## 2. PSYCOSOCIAL WORK

### 2.1 OUTREACH

Durban, a city once known as the hub for fun, tourism and a good destination for holiday makers, offering many attractions including beaches, gardens and theme parks. Businesses ranging from small local shops, restaurants, night clubs and hotels benefited from the city's tourism. Since the city is highly invested in tourism, maintenance was key in keeping it in a good condition. Streets were clean, buildings, parks and other amenities maintained and protected, making it easy for people to visit.

However, Durban especially the CBD has seen better days as its infrastructure is dilapidating rapidly in the current context. Some buildings in and around the city are crumbling, abandoned or lack maintenance. Drug dens, brothels, uncommissioned informal settlements and low-cost shelters have become fashionable in the city. This has then impacted negatively on our work with children and youth in street situations.

The above-mentioned factors played a significant role on how we have developed and structured our interventions for the year 2024.


A growing trend has been noted, where adolescent girls and young women semigrate from living directly on the streets into none commissioned informal settlements and dilapidated buildings, as well as young men residing in temporary shelters (tents). At the same time, we still have a significant number of street-connected children and youth who still sleep on pavements & parks and would wonder in and around the city during the day. Upon our interaction, we have observed a high level of willingness and commitment from beneficiaries living in none commissioned informal dwellings, dilapidated buildings and temporary shelters. Whereas those that sleep on pavements and parks continue to have high drug addiction levels and minimal engagement in terms of participating in our programmes.

During 2024, an increased number of street-connected young women fell pregnant and gave birth while still living on the streets, which contributes to the never-ending cycle of street-connectedness. This was after numerous attempts were made to encourage them to start defining what could a safe space for themselves and their unborn babies entails. Despite these efforts many choose to remain in their current living conditions. We had a total of 16 young women who were regularly active in our programmes, that ended up falling pregnant, out of 41 (39%). Consequently, the children born and raised on the streets, in most cases tend to adapt easily and normalize such an environment. This exposes them to antisocial behavioural patterns inclusive of aggression, disruptiveness and sense of survival of the fittest, especially when provided with something to share. This has proven to become a barrier in providing a holistic psychosocial intervention in their aid.

Due to the overpopulation and lack of maintenance of the CBD, certain areas of the city of Durban are gradually falling into a category of being slums. The poor living conditions, health hazards, social indicators like crime and unemployment, inevitably characterize the city as a slum. Such conditions don't only affect the older street-connected people but also weighs heavy on the children being brought up in such an environment. This leads to the above-mentioned antisocial behavioural patterns, ill development and in some instance violent behaviour.

We noted 26 beneficiaries, who started avoiding engaging in our programmes due to being ashamed or embarrassed that they have relapsed, in the previous year. Even with this response from the beneficiaries, there was no negativity portrayed when engaging with them during outreach. Our constant presence on outreach created a platform for 8 of the 26 beneficiaries to ask for a second chance after realising the missed opportunity and wanted to try once more, to see if they could succeed.

In general, the level of honesty and openness has been slightly higher for females and lower for males. For many young men they will engage in all the pre-assessment activities and when reintegration is eminent, they will be hesitant to proceed and at that point will only start opening about their true situations. Eight of the males only expressed serious challenges of their home situation towards the completion of Drug Detoxification Camp, causing delays in facilitating, family mediation and reintegration processes.

With the young men that we have engaged with, a majority that show a willingness to return home find it difficult to do so. This is due to the fear of how their families and/or community will respond towards their return. Of these young men, five who found themselves being unable to return home were set up for independent living in places away from their communities to start their lives anew. Subsequently, they progressed to being part of the Practical Work Learning (PWL) Project in the form of a learnership, where they saw themselves being fully independent.

As the year progressed, we started to note once again an increment in the children's age, category 0 -12 years of age. The raise in young mothers, giving birth to babies while still living in streets –situations became quite evident in the second quarter of the year. This was coupled with young mothers either in the abandoned buildings and/or in illegal non-commissioned informal dwellings, bringing their children in these unsafe and unhygienic environments. The increased number of children was a result of intensified work that was done with young mothers on Outreach as well as the Street Rights Project that took place from June.

We noted a slight decrease of 11%, as compared to 2023 reporting period within the age category18 - 30+, across gender lines. What we also observed was that a number of our returning cases and some new cases within this age category had resorted criminal activities, giving them  a source of income to survive. Others in this age group also resorted in helping out formal and informal traders, receiving very minimal incentives (e.g. food, or mere R50.00, pay day, equivalent to -: 2.60$ ), which also preoccupied them and further entrapped them to street-connected lifestyle.

The normalization of street-life by thumber of e majority of the street-connected children and youth, has led to them not being open to change which delayed and/or affected their chances of reintegration. For those already reintegrated, lack of job opportunities, peer pressure and stigmatization remain the biggest contributing factors in the number of relapses, in this instance we saw 9 who relapsed. The fear of change is still a dominating factor especially amongst young women and young mothers, whenever they reach a point to take the much-needed steps to better their lives, they either disappear or hastily request to be left alone because they are no longer interested.

Gradually as the year took its course, we've been noting a rising trend in the number of drug related deaths reported amongst the street-connected youth, more particularly our beneficiaries. The latest drug concoction seems to be the causal factor to these reported drug-related deaths, where 11 beneficiaries lost their lives.

## 2.2 Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) Programme

Working with AGYW in abandoned buildings and illegal none commissioned informal dwellings, we noted a pattern during drug-tests, that they are mostly taking marijuana, alcohol and cocaine. Through this process we also observed that the young women use these drugs that are addictive but with lower withdrawal symptom effects. As a result, their participation became grossly compromised.

With the intensified work done with the young mothers who live in derelict buildings, they were encouraged and empowered to take the much-needed steps in continuing to realise their current living situations marred by drugs and anti-social lifestyles. This in turn negatively affecting their own personal development as well as the development of their children. For those that have made a decision to start changing their lives, but reintegration is not possible, they mostly move from living directly on the streets to live in informal dwellings (squatter camps) or abandoned buildings. This has contributed to 10 young mothers making more positive decisions of returning 13 of their babies and/or children to live with their families or extended family members, back home and away from the city streets.

For some young mothers, the access to social grants in the form of Child Support Grant and Social Relief Distress Grant, have been able to move into informal settlements. This also provided an opportunity for them to register their children in informal day care centres, paying nominal fees. For some this also allows the young mothers to have time for further engagements in psychosocial interventions and explore job related opportunities. Assistance with monthly food packs was also provided in such instances.

On the contrary, for those that live directly on the streets also using highly addictive substances with stronger withdrawal symptoms (heroin and crystal meth), their level of participation has been adversely being affected. This has influenced their level of participation in the programme, leading to some of them being irregular in attendance and others seen only once. Those who start off as active cases end up being negatively influenced either by their peers or the environment they live in, leading to their despondency.

In total, 108 AGYW were interacted with, of which 29 were young mothers with 55 babies, living in the actual streets of the city. Twenty-two babies were voluntarily taken by the same 29 young mothers to be cared for by extended family members. 10 young mothers mentioned in previous paragraph who have moved to non-commissioned informal dwellings made great strides in working towards rebuilding their lives. The young mothers became part of the 41 group that were prepared for the independent living project, including 2 who didn’t have any children.

In total amongst the young mothers living on the street and those living in abandoned buildings they had 68 children. By the end of 2024, six young mothers from the 39 were again pregnant expecting their second or third baby.

From January to December 2024, thirty-three AGYW from the previous year (2023) and eight young women that were newly identified, became part of the preparation for drug detoxification and life skills processes. This made it to be 41 young women and young mothers who were dealt with intensely and intentionally through our interventions.


The pre-assessment and preparatory sessions conducted were inclusive of-:

- 70 Outreach sessions conducted to build and strengthen our relationships as well as deepening the level of trust.
- A total of 119, one-on-one sessions also conducted to dig deeper and fully understand the AGYW's situation as well as find ways to encourage them to change.
- 6515 meals provided to ensure full participation from beneficiaries.
- 31 Individual Pre-Assessment and camp preparations sessions
- 18 Group Work session
- 23 Streets Rights Consultation sessions
- 4 Camps conducted

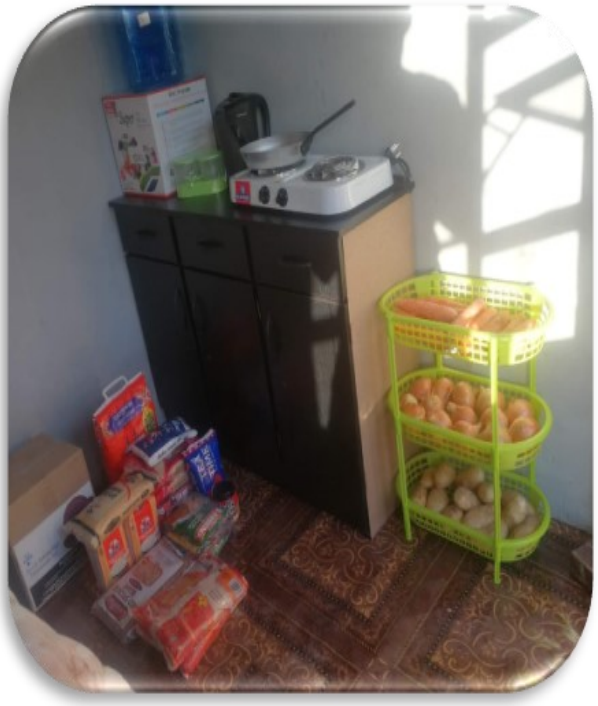
During these process, seven young women made positive decisions of leaving the street-connected life and returned to their respective homes. Out of the 34 that was remaining, five continued with the process to its completion stage, enabling them to be part of the Young Women Independent Living Project. 29 are still struggled with drug addiction and are at different levels in terms of their journey towards recovery. Amongst the 29, three disappeared with their whereabouts unknown.

In total 7 were reintegrated back to their families and five were assisted and setup for independent living space.

### 2.3 Young Women Independent Living (YWIL) Project

From the 41 active cases of young women and young mothers, 11 were identified as in a serious need to be setup for independent living. This eventually led to 4 young mothers and one young woman being reintegrated into independent living space.

Upon completion of all phases of the project, the 5 young women saw themselves settling in completely new environments, where they began to define themselves in a new way. Having gained this newfound freedom, without complexities of the street-life, they began a journey to start identifying some of their personal new aspirations.



This has not been without any challenges from the past life in the streets and elsewhere but for over 5 and 9 months respectively began to deal with these situations in a new way.

The five young women that were set up for independent living in 2024, remained under the full support of uMthombo for 9 months. Due to a lack of openings in the learnership project, the young women were unable to be enrolled but they are part of the candidates waiting list. Through constant engagement with them during weekly mentoring and monitoring sessions, they were encouraged to explore job opportunities or entrepreneurial means. This prompted the young women to take initiative in starting a small laundromat, servicing other tenants that they live with, within the same rental spaces. uMthombo explored this initiative further and secured resources for the young women to formalise and grow their initiative. Due to interpersonal challenges amongst the young women and being overwhelmed by new realities of life, this initiative needed to be reviewed. Much more support structure and coaching into such a venture still needs to be thought thoroughly for future implementation.

The four young women who were enrolled in the UIP (Urban Improvement Precinct) learnership programme in 2023, remain fully independent. They can pay for their rental rooms, monthly groceries and meet their other needs. Currently, two are still part of the UIP learnership and are being monitored through the Practical Work Learning sessions. The other two have found different jobs and they continue to be independent.

**2.4 Streets Rights Project**

uMthombo engaged in collaborative efforts with Streets Rights based in the United Kingdom alongside Centre for Child Law in Pretoria, South Africa. The aim was to identify the rights violations currently facing street children/youth in Durban and to identify those that the children/youth feel most urgently need stopping.

The process began in June, where we identified participants on outreach that will be part of the consultations. Two groups were identified, which were 12 young mothers with their 15 children (F13 & M2). The second group comprised of 14 male participants.

Street children and young people in Durban face severe and multiple disadvantages. The consultations revealed the challenges they face daily, including poor living conditions, harassment from the police, the impact of substance use/addiction, the threat and reality of their children being removed from their care and the inadequacy of NGO support. The consultations revealed many similarities between the young mothers and boys/men in terms of their living conditions and limited employment opportunities. There were also stark differences in terms of their relationships with the police, their children and drug use. Many spoke of general feelings of despondency and powerlessness in their lives, and this appeared as a thread underlying much of what was said.

We grouped the participants into two sets by gender to enable us to strongly pull out their different experiences. In general, the young mothers either have their children with them and have to be careful around being visible in front of authorities as their children are often removed from their care, or their children have already been removed from their care. The mothers living in abandoned buildings and informal settlements. The young men were mostly drug users (heroin and crystal meth dependent) and living in tent shelters.

The majority of participants were over the age of 18 but had been street-connected since they were children. This is a general trend in Durban currently with older teenagers and young adults being more present on the streets. Although the older age of participants was not something we intended for at the outset, it led to reflective focus group discussions with eloquent and clear answers to the questions. With younger children we would (likely) have needed to adopt a more creative activity-driven consultation style which would have required more subjective interpretation at analysis stage.

Some of the voices from the street-connected youth during the consultation: -

*Scrapyards owners take advantage of us when we sell cardboards, you find that the owners make three times the money they pay street connected people for their labour. Street connected people are also taken advantage of, where we get paid below minimum hourly wage for piece jobs, which is not fair. They treat us like we are stupid, or we do not use critical thinking*

(Boy, Durban, September 2024)

*Paying for children's transportation to school is a struggle for me, buying school lunch for my child is also a challenge. I use child support grant to survive, and I also get money from temporary jobs. I usually work at a laundromat, and it is difficult because we work for long hours for low wages*

(Girl, Durban, September 2024)

*My problem is the way they (people supervising the municipal tent shelter he was placed in) do things in the municipal tent shelter we live in. They take people from the streets without conducting any medical examinations to find out if they have any form of illnesses or diseases, and they place these people with us. This puts us at risk of contracting these illnesses or diseases. Sometimes they place people with TB or people who have defaulted from their ARVs. Our health is not considered in that place. They treat us like people when they need us, then they treat us like animals when they do not need us*

(Boy, Durban, September 2024)

*My grandfather and I had issues, and we did not get along. So, took everything that I owned and prevented me from going to school. I also prevented myself for living the life I wish because of my lack of direction in life*

(Girl, Durban, September 2024)

*You are abused verbally and treated like you are less than human. Another challenge is the enforcing of bylaws by the police, who take our possessions and throw them in the back of the truck and in these possessions, there are valuable things such as identification documents. You are too busy trying to protect yourself, as they beat you when they find you sleeping in public spaces, so you do not concentrate on the ID that is being thrown in the back of the truck.* (Boy, Durban, September 2024)

*[The consultations were] exciting, but it also brings a lot of emotions. Personally it brings a lot of emotions, we go through a lot with people who claim to be trying to help us but we end up not receiving help, but this one has given me a lot of hope. Especially when seeing that there are still organizations that focused on such things and give us such platforms allowing us homeless people to be heard. Most people just take pictures and present according to their assumptions, they do not know about the streets. The session was nice but it brings a lot of emotion*
(Boy, Durban, September 2024)

The above process was part of the first phase of the Streets Rights Project. The participants from both groups saw themselves reflecting on their different situations. The second phase which will commence in the first quarter of 2025, will address the findings that were ascertained in the first phase. This will be done through a workshop between the participants and various stakeholders, with an aim to create an action plan guided by a legal framework and advocacy to foster change

## 3. Development Work: Early Intervention, Awareness Raising and Prevention

### 3.1 Community Engagements

In our community networking efforts, we managed to build relationships with two new organisations, 1 is based in the INK (Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu) area, namely Siyabadinga Youth Development Organisation and City People Organisation based in the Durban CBD. We continued our great collaboration with 4 networks partners namely (Katsi Youth in Action, Groutville High School, Urban Improvement Precinct Durban and Operation Sukuma Sakhe), who we have engaged with for over 5 years.


uMthombo continued to work with the Urban Improvement Precincts Company (UIPCO) Durban from January to August 2024, as an implementing partner for our learnership project. This unfortunately had to be halted due to new administrative protocols of the business partners and the local municipality change of administration, after our May 2024 National Elections.

Assistance and support to Groutville High School, remained a key offering in our Early Intervention, Awareness Raising and Prevention undertakings. Providing psychosocial support to learners that displayed signs of misusing substances, as well as behavioural issues, meant that 57 of learners were somewhat prevented from falling into prey to drug addiction.

Two awareness campaigns were conducted in the above-mentioned school. This came about the school's relentless effort to fight against drug misuse within its own premises and surroundings. The second campaign related to promoting a healthy, clean and safe school environment.

4 Post 16 sessions were undertaken, totalling to 81 group sessions conducted, where 37 beneficiaries (Females=5, Gender Defined Differently=1 & Males=31) participated in these sessions. The group was made of 25 (5=F, GDD=1 & M=19) who were street connected youth and 12 males from our community networks regarded as At-Risk young people. Significant learnings from conducting the Post 16 sessions gave insight into how we can plan future interventions, since we are now faced with various dynamics within the context we operate upon as highlighted in the psychosocial section.

### 3.2 Network Partnership

#### 3.2.1 Siyabadinga Youth Development Organisation

Siyabadinga Youth Development Organisation from ward 38 in the northern townships of Durban, in the INK area came on board as a new stakeholder in 2024. Their main focus is to identify and refer At-Risk children and youth who are misusing substances to relevant stakeholders for psychosocial interventions and drug rehabilitation programmes.

Through Siyabadinga Youth Development participation in our programme, we were able to engage with 160 community members from ward 38. A total of 52 young people presented themselves for screening processes and to be assisted with their drug addiction. 16 did not return for the follow up session, where the first pre-assessment was a key indicator to determine the level of willingness to start a drug reduction process. 36 participated in different pre-assessment phases eventually leading to 23 who reached the drug detox phase.

In total at the time of drug detoxification phase, 29 at-risk young people also relapsed upon further assessments due to the inability to gradually stay away from substance intake. The scenario above highlights how easy it is for at-risk young people to continuously remain misusing drugs, due to how readily available these substances have become, peer pressure as well as lack of consistent support.

By the end of November, eleven at-risk young people further relapsed, during the drug medical treatment phase. this left Twelve who fully completed the process and were at a better state of mind, physically and emotionally. Unfortunately, one young person relapsed after a full month of being free from the misuse of substances.

### 3.2.2 The Mayor's Incentive Project

The Mayor's Incentive Project (learnership) led by uMthombo and the UIPCO, strengthened the relationship between uMthombo and Operation Sukuma Sakhe *(Operation Rise and Build)*, which is the provincial government arm to assist municipalities in addressing community based social ills. Operation Sukuma Sakhe referred 59 at -risk unemployed youth from the INK area, that were enrolled into the learnership project, which lasted for three months, helping young people to be exposed to a working environment. This also automatically contributed to at-risk young people's ability to search for prospective employment, after completing this learnership, and having concrete evidence that they have some sort of experience in a working environment.

This has had a major impact in the country's unemployment status, since 359 young people, for a full quarter of a year were involved in a constructive activity. For most this was a milestone opening up a much-needed opportunity, becoming productive members of society and contributing meaningfully to both their lives and of their families. This project also contributed positively to the reduction of unemployment rate in eThekwini Municipality that was seen declining a bit in Quarter 3 (Q3) of 2024.

According to the Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) released by Statistics South Africa, cited by eThekwini Newsflash released on the 18th of November 2024, "eThekwini achieved an impressive milestone, adding 69 000 jobs in Q3 alone and 102 000 year-on-year. Significant progress has also been made in reducing youth unemployment, which dropped from 39% in Q3 2023 to 31% in Q3 2024. While challenges persist, these figures highlight the City's strides in creating meaningful opportunities for its younger population." Despite the above-mentioned progress, the major issue still very much exists where at present, youth unemployment rate in eThekwini is currently sitting at 31% as per 2024 November statistics.

### 3.2.3 Katsi Youth in Action

uMthombo continues to maintain a good relationship with Katsi Youth in Action in collaboration with KwaDabeka Community Health Care Centre. 36 young people were taken to this health facility and have accessed drug rehabilitation medication. Thirteen cases out of the overall 36 were identified to be having other health issues and were assisted to access relevant treatment and medication.

This collaborative initiative continues to provide essential services especially to the most vulnerable who often feel ashamed to visit healthcare facilities due to self-stigmatization. Upon young people being assisted to access the facilities, a stronger bond between the patient and the healthcare service provider exists. This has been evident since uMthombo receives regular reports from the healthcare facility, regarding the young person's progress as well as young people attending follow up medical assessments and treatment.

### 3.2.4 City People Organization

In the last quarter of the year, uMthombo also started building a relationship with City People. This is an organization focusing on assisting homeless people currently residing in the municipal temporary shelters. This organisation is responsible for mending 3 temporary shelters within the city, where 11 of the beneficiaries we work with reside.

Upon our interaction with the 11 beneficiaries, we wanted to forge a collaborative and formal working relationship with the newly appointed service provider of these shelters. This collaboration has been seen as an opportunity for uMthombo to supplement our services for a much more impactful outcomes that will benefit children and young people we both encounter in the city streets. There are further collaborative engagements that are still essential to undertake at a higher level with City People's management. At this stage, the intra-sectoral collaboration between both organizations' social workers, will pave a way forward.

## 3.3 Awareness Campaigns

### 3.3.1 School's Awareness and Prevention Sessions

122 learners displaying signs of misusing substances were identified by the Groutville High School Disciplinary Department, whereby uMthombo was requested to screen and provide psychosocial interventions. A meeting between the school management, parents/ guardians, uMthombo and other relevant stakeholders was held, where the issue was further presented with the aim of finding possible interventions and solutions.


Tailor-made psychosocial interventions were put into place by uMthombo to address and deal with the drug issue faced by the specific group of learners as well as the school in general. Out of the identified 122 learners that were drug tested, 59 tested positive for different substances. The 48% learners who tested positive for drug misuse were then mandated by the school management to participate in the planned psychosocial sessions. They were required to test negative for all substances by the end of the school's third term. Failure to do so would result in more stricter measures taken by the school.

With the above-mentioned interventions learners were divided into small groups and attended eleven psychosocial group sessions, from February to August. During these sessions, drug tests were also conducted to monitor the progress made by learners in their process of abstaining from misusing substances. Twenty-two learners from the group managed to test negative for all substances by the end of the third term, while the remaining 35 continued to test positive for only one substance which was marijuana. For the 35 learners, great strides were made where all of them managed to abstain from other highly addictive substances, reducing it only to one. Much work is anticipated when the school term resume in 2025, in monitoring and testing these learners. Two male learners continued to misbehave and eventually were expelled due the nature of their misconduct.

UMthombo's involvement in the activities of the school has led to the following key strategic undertakings.

1. The assessment of the Health Promoting School Initiative. This led to Groutville High School obtaining a national certificate from the National Portfolio Committee of Health within the National Department of Health.

The National Assembly Chairperson for the Health Portfolio Committee presented this certificate during the Tobacco Control Awareness Campaign which was hosted by the same school.

2. The National Assembly Chairperson for the Health Portfolio Committee presented this certificate during the Tobacco Control Awareness Campaign which was hosted by the same school.

**3.4 Post-16 Programme**

Thirty Seven participants including 12 at-risk young people from Siyabadinga Youth Organisation were involved in the Post 16 Sessions. Fourteen (M=13 & GDD=1) participants could not complete the drug reduction guidelines. This involved the same participants showing no signs of reducing their drug intake when tested on specific intervals. The same cases will now be reviewed as we engage with them further during the continuous assessment phases planned for 2025.

The remaining 23 (5=F &18=M) participants, accounting for 62% of the initial targeted group, completed all the phases, from pre-assessment, substance reduction phase, medical drug detox, self-introspective healing phase, and life skills session. All beneficiaries as per our last assessment by end of January 2025, were still independent, drug free and able to meet their basic needs.

Despite the high unemployment rate experienced in the country, 12 young men managed to secure employment opportunities. With a higher unemployment rate still currently experiencing, some of the young people explored various entrepreneurial opportunities. In these instances, 4 young men joined their family businesses, assisting wherever possible. The 5 girls are part of the Young Women Independent Living Project as highlighted in the relevant section above. The 2 remaining males have not yet been successful in securing any form of employment but are stable living with their families.

### 3.5 Learnership or Internship

uMthombo and the Urban Improvement Precinct Company (UIPCO) Durban continued with implementation of the learnership project within eThekwini Municipality, specifically in the CBD and the Prospecton Industrial Area. The number of interns that were enrolled in the learnership programme from January 2024 was sitting at 165, which included 51 former uMthombo beneficiaries who have been part of the learnership project from the previous 3 years. Ten former street connected young people were added by the end of April 2024, totalling the numbers to 175 interns.

A further opportunity arose end of April to embark on a joint project with the UIPCO involving the eThekwini Municipality Mayor's Office (Mayor's Incentive Project). Internship opportunities were offered to 300 unemployed youth to be part of a 3-month learnership project. Due to the demanding nature of this project, 59 interns were added totalling an overall of 359 interns to be placed. This offered an opportunity for the youth to be exposed to a working environment whilst working towards improving their livelihoods. The additional 59 were at-risk young people that uMthombo had directly worked with through Operation Sukuma Sakhe.

The intern's visibility around the city streets became a supplement to the already existing measures put in place to monitor and report any suspicious criminal activities. This contributed to a success of two major Durban tourism events, ensuring safety and security around spaces where there were visitors. Part of the interns' roles and responsibilities were to ensure that uncollected solid waste is reported, and the city precincts are always safe and clean.

The Mayor's Incentive Project concluded end of July 2024, while the already existing projects with the UIPCO in the Durban CBD and Prospecton industrial area, were sustained. For the young people in the Mayors Incentive Project, who could not proceed beyond the term of the learnership, they were kept on a database for subsequent vacancies as and when these becomes available.

uMthombo's primary role as an implementing partner, was to be responsible for Human Resource matters; conducting work preparedness sessions, contract signing, mentoring & monitoring, work supervision sessions as well psychosocial interventions to interns as and when deemed important.

### 3.6 Social Relief Projects

#### 3.6.1 Early Childhood Development Centres

- 4 Early Childhood Development Centres (ECD) were supported with monthly breakfast packs consisting of various types of cereals and sandwich spreads. Serving a total of 274 children.
- 1 Child and Youth Development Community initiative serving 60 children and young people.

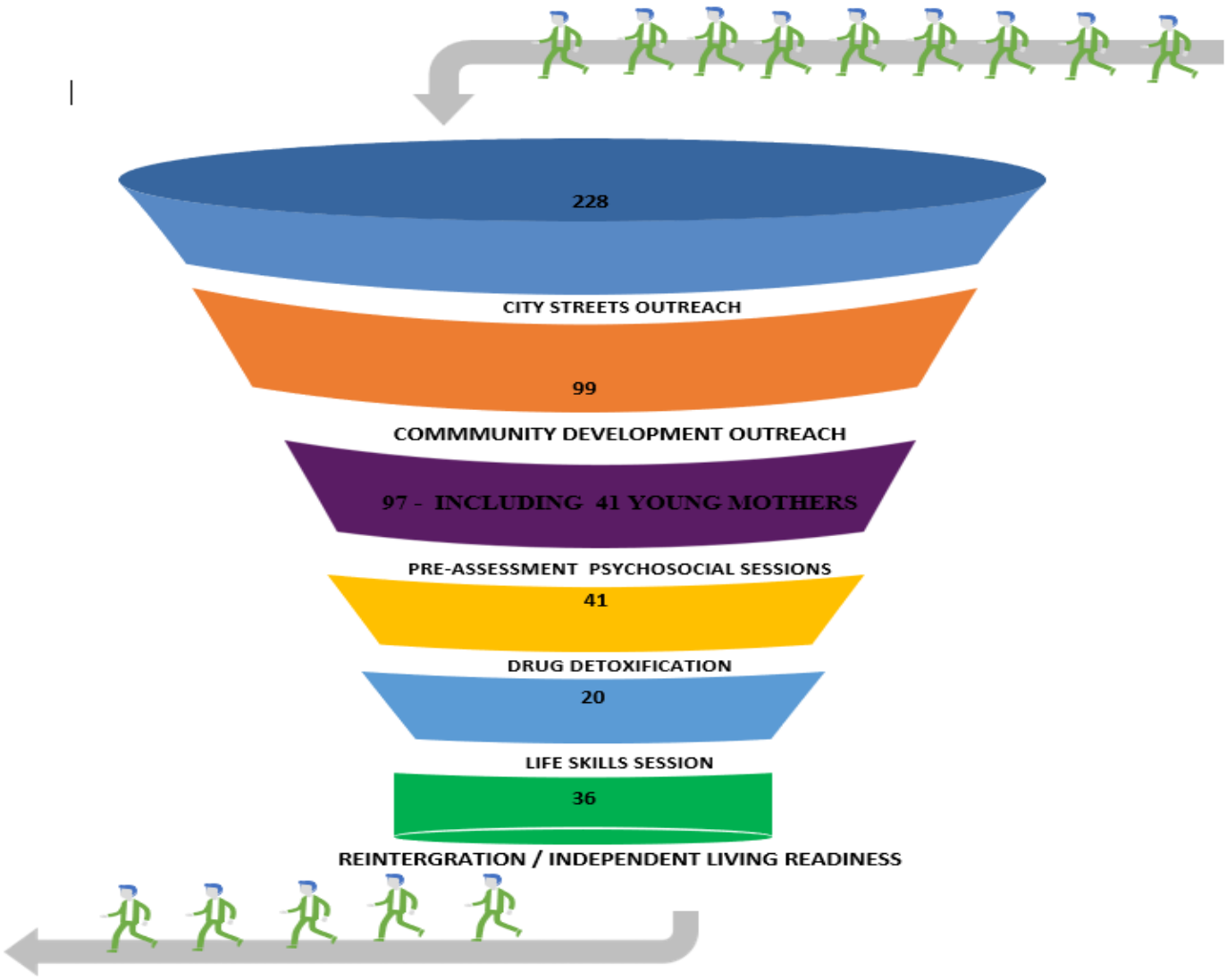
### 3.7 Nutrition

| Programme | Meals |
|---|---|
| **Outreach** | **6 515** |
| **Pre-assessments and Camps** | **1 095** |
| **Young Women Independent Living Project** | **2 850** |
| **Total number of meals** | **10 460** |
| **Monthly Food Packs** | |
| **Number of family units (2-3 members)** | **15** |

**15 monthly food packs costing 1060 ZAR *(19,5 USD, 25 GBP, 20 EUR)* per month and per family**

As stated in the introduction, poverty is one of many contributing factors to people ending up in street situations Although, the government has put measures to deal with this social ill, many individuals still remain vulnerable due to multifaceted natured of our social ills. Therefore, uMthombo's Nutrition Project will continue to supplement the measures already put in place to support families and individuals identified as in need.

## 4. CONCLUSSION




The graph above only illustrates the systematic and intentional engagement at varying phases with young people in street- situations. Building strong relationship of openness, honesty and trust, strengthen efforts in ensuring that, slight chances of willingness to see another point of view to transform, leads to significant life changes steps over time.

These transformation moments happen between the pre-assessment phases and therapeutic life skills sessions. Some of the young people will take great strides and realise the urgency needed to change their life course, and necessary assistance will be offered to facilitate and expedite mediation and family reunification processes. In this instance 16 (5 = F and 11= M) were reintegrated back to their families between a week to three months of our initial contact with them during outreach. For the 5 young women found in this situations, early identification and intervention processes, averted being consumed into a street-connected habits.

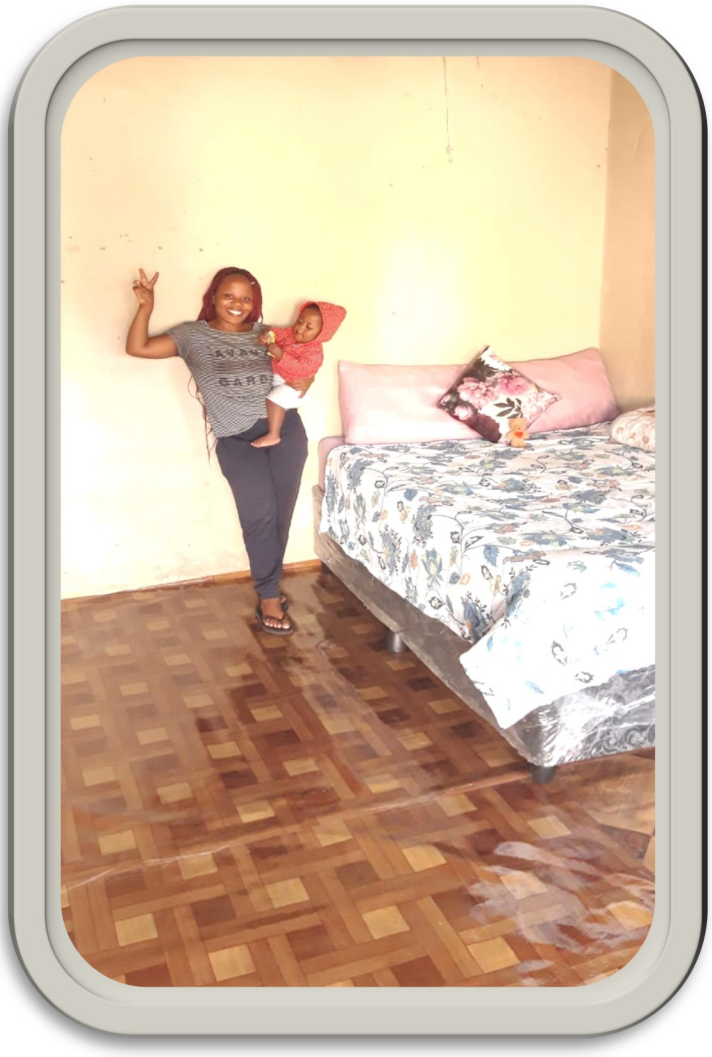
The eleven young men, for various reasons, completely running away from the accustomed livelihood in the streets, into seclusion makes sense. Mostly have relocated to deep rural family homestead, bring much needed peace after being clean for a month or two. These escape moments are also helpful in deepening one's sense of being on their own, with a distance support, slowly find a way in building themselves anew.

In closing the most fulfilling outcome has been with our young mothers who have against many conflicting emotions, decided to take their children back to family members in their respective homes. In our efforts to break the cycle of negative exposure to unwarranted and often psychological and emotional impairment of children in street-situation. The young mothers understanding for safety of their children needs, proved to be a key point of engagement. This resulted in 33 young mothers agreeing to reintegrate 55 of their children to their immediate or extended family members.

***Stories : The Journey Continues As Young Women Rebuild Their Lives***

**Ncamie's Story**

Ncamie became part of the Young Women Independent Living Project (YWIL) in May 2023. She was reintegrated into an independent living space with her girl child. She started selling snacks in a nearby school as part of a step towards her independence. After she saved enough money, she took her child back home to live with her parents. In December 2023, she was enrolled into the UIP Learnership where she is still currently working, and it has been over a year and four months. Ncamie's growth has been impressive, her tenacity and being able to save up money, once again proved worthwhile. In February 2025 she completed her Security Course and currently working towards saving more money towards another certificate in CCTV Operator Course. uMthombo will sort to partly assist her with registration costs since it is a more expensive course to undertake.



**Buhle's Story**

Buhle arrived in the streets of Durban in early February 2024 alongside her baby boy and father of the baby. The couple had been living in shelters and sometimes on the streets in Pietermaritzburg (80km away from Durban). Both were searching for employment opportunities and had left their respective homes due to family dynamics and the pressure of being unemployed. With no job prospects in Pietermaritzburg they ventured to a bigger city, in which they found themselves in a bigger turmoil. Settling in the city of Durban (eThekwini) came with harsher realities and with a baby to take care off. Within the same month, two weeks after their arrival, our Outreach Team met up with Buhle, and was then introduced to the Young Women Independent Living Project. Buhle subsequently introduced her boyfriend to us, who was then also enrolled in the Post 16 program. Both successfully participated in these processes until completion. They were then reintegrated into an independent living space in April 2024. The boyfriend (Tebogo) got an opportunity to participate in a learnership and was able to support Buhle and the little boy Karabo. After Tebogo had saved enough money, he took both Buhle and Karabo to live with his family back in Mpumalanga Province. Currently, Buhle and Tebogo have been trying to make a living by selling snacks as informal traders and working towards starting a small eatery in a local taxi rank, where they will be selling meals to commuters and taxi drivers.

**Phili's Story**

Phili and her one-year-old baby girl were identified on the street in late January 2024 and immediately became part of the YWIL Project. She was set to live independently with her child in April 2024 after a series of pre-assessment and psychosocial interventions. Phili was addicted to drugs mainly rock cocaine , crystal meth and marijuana. After a series of drug reduction sessions, she proved that she wanted a better life for herself and her baby. Her commitment to attending the planned psychosocial sessions and realization of the lost time endured through her struggles, she was determined to start all over again. Phili holds a Diploma in Accounting, she had managed to find work as a bank teller but lost that through drug misuse. Coupled with various forms of emotional abuse and after her first child was raped, she gave into drug abuse, eventually leading her to street life and being pregnant while still living on the streets. Upon completion of the YWIL sessions and being clean and drug free in two months she moved into an independent living space with her baby. A month after she had settled into this space, Phili saw an opportunity within the homestead she was living in, where she started a small-scale laundry business. She was rendering the service to local tenants who were her employed neighbors, enabling her to make enough money to start supporting herself. In November 2024, Phili felt ready to take the next steps and had adjusted to staying without misusing substances for eight months, she then decided to move with her new found boyfriend and start a new life in a different area around Durban.