

Seminar aims to stop violence

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IF all goes according to plan, Cape Town may be provided with a simple yet practical tool to eradicate violence in its streets, schools, homes and businesses.

These are the passionate sentiments of the CEO of YMCA (Cape Town), Llowellyn Syce, and his team, who are based in Observatory.

Syce and his team have been hard at work planning the upcoming *Street Soldier's Violence and Drug Intervention and Prevention Summit* to be hosted at the His People Auditorium in Goodwood, N1 City on 20 and 21 November.

Thanks to a partnership with the YMCA, Omega Institute and the US Consulate, participants can look forward to learning about a ground-breaking intervention model for youths that has grown in reputation in the United States.

Through structured dialogue, as well as through the provision of specific core ideals, people who have been exposed to any kind of violence in their lives or feel that they are at risk of this, are taught to say no to this abuse by adopting the right frame of mind and by making the right choices.

"People have this tendency to ask for more prisons and to put more police on the streets and maybe that does help up to a certain point, but at the end of the day any hope to bring about real change starts with the person," explains Mahako Etta, programme co-ordinator for the summit and volunteer at the YMCA.

Over 500 representatives from various NGOs, police departments, schools, local government structures and prison institutions have already been invited to attend the two-day workshop. Attendance at the workshop is free of charge.

And now parents of youths who are struggling with violence are also being encouraged to attend the summit.

Renowned international guest speaker and founder of the Street Soldiers violence intervention model on which the workshop will be based, Dr Joseph Marshall, views violence from a public health perspective.

According to his biography, Marshall was the first person to classify youth violence as a disease and his work in this regard has been acknowledged in the Surgeon General's Report on Youth Violence in 2001.

He is also the executive director of the Omega Boys' Club in San Francisco, a youth development and violence prevention organisation that holds true to the ideals of the Street Soldiers' strategy.

His programme entrenches into the mindset of participants that violence at a community or individual level is treatable and avoidable. It places the responsibility to reduce violence experienced in the lives of the youth on the shoulders of that very individual.

"The Street Soldiers programme calls for a complete change in thought patterns by those who want to minimise violence in their lives," adds Syce.

The programme has yielded favourable results in America, where groups of youths counselled by Marshall have shown remarkable progress in taking control of their lives.

These results, explains Etta, have gained a solid reputation and sponsorship for the programme, which is now for the first time being brought to South Africa.

Given this increased rate of violence within the Western Cape in particular, Syce says he is especially disappointed in the lack of response from local and provincial government in terms of financial support as well as interest for the summit.

"We are hoping that organisations we have invited will diligently want to work with the youth in particular to adopt the model they will hear about at the workshop," she said.

Under Marshall's leadership, Syce has already established UBOMI Youth Foundation, which will eventually take over general ongoing training and help sustain the Street Soldiers programme by providing additional training and support for those who wish to spread the word.

For more information on the seminar, phone Syce on 082 253 5613 or Etta on 073 540 6091.