

Revitalising Congella Park

through the inclusion of homeless people

Background

Congella Park in Durban (eThekweni) is a 3.6 hectare park in the Congella industrial



area located to the southwest of Durban's City centre. The park is in close proximity to the harbour and large train handling centre that serves local industry. The industrial area also lies adjacent to the neighboring residential area to the west; Congella Park being situated between the two zones.

In recent years the park has been overtaken by homeless people and crime has been on the increase resulting in public safety concerns and a drop in local community usage of the park. The daily challenges have included littering, illegal dumping, vandalism, drug abuse and homeless occupation.

Commencement of the Project

Since 2016, eThekweni Parks Department District 7 Horticulturist, Jennifer Rampersad has been active in working on ways to upgrade and improve public accessibility of the Congella Park area. This has included the pruning of overgrown trees and other vegetation in the park to increase light within the Park. The homeless people previously took advantage of the overgrown condition of the park by becoming more established with crime and drug-related activity subsequently increasing.

The Congella train station was identified by the Municipality as a transfer point for drugs and by the time the Municipality redirected its attention to the park, there were already

several hundred homeless people resident in the Park.

Major clean-ups were done every month during 2016-17 with support from Durban Solid Waste, Department of Social Development, Department of Home Affairs, Safer Cities, Umbilo Business Forum (UBF), Denis Hurley Centre, I-Care, Diakonia, Metro Police and SAPS.

Adopting the Congella Guys ("Khangel guys")

After numerous clean-ups, Law Enforcement, Metro Police and SAPS patrolling and regular monitoring of the Park, most of the homeless people moved away to other areas, some found jobs and returned home. In the end there were 12 people who refused to move. The Municipality took the opportunity to start an innovative socially-



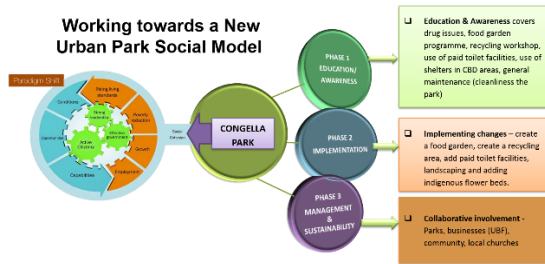
centred project involving the inclusion of the



remaining homeless people in the maintenance of the Park.

Urban Park Social Model

A new Urban Park Social Model for the Congella Park Project has emerged as follows:



First Phase: Education & Awareness.

This includes helping the homeless people with drug and health issues, providing shelters in the City centre and training re: how to keep the Park clean and tidy.

Second Phase: Implementation: creating a food garden, recycling area, pay toilet facility, landscaping and landscaped flower beds. **Third Phase: Management & Sustainability.** Involving local stakeholders through collaboration between Parks, local businesses e.g. Umbilo Business Forum (UBF), communities and churches.

Present and Future

Congella Park is moving towards becoming more accessible and inviting to the public. The food garden and the toilets have been completed and the recycling station is nearing completion. The local homeless people have received training in maintaining and securing the Park and are working in close collaboration with municipal staff. Phase one and two have been implemented; the project has now entered phase three.

Future opportunities

Congella Park has offered an opportunity to test a new model of park management that addresses key social development challenges such as homelessness. The project forms part of the new thinking in the management of public space in urban centres. Learning from the Congella Park Project offer an opportunity to develop a set of guidelines that could be replicated in other urban park environments, especially where the welfare of homeless people and local community safety and security is concerned.

