

## The New Math of Grassroots Community Work (1+10 = 50,000: In Four and One-Half Months)

*This narrative is written by Peter Biehl, father of Amy Biehl, who was murdered in South Africa in 1993. It chronicles the Biehl family's effort to honor Amy's life and her commitment to social justice. Following her death, the family created the Amy Biehl Foundation. Co-author Rolene Miller never met Amy. With her own commitment to social change, Rolene began MOSAIC — a program addressing domestic violence in South Africa by training township women as community workers. She describes MOSAIC's genesis and how the Amy Biehl Foundation provides support for the program's continuation. Many parallels and coincidences resulted in the intersection of Amy's dreams, the Amy Biehl Foundation, and MOSAIC.*

**By Peter Biehl and Rolene Miller**

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South Africa's searing climate of unrest and upheaval took a violent turn in April, 1993 with the deliberate assassination of ANC(African National Congress) leader, Chris Hani, in the driveway of his home. Within hours of Hani's death, members of our family reached Amy by telephone

in Cape Town and expressed fierce concern for her safety. She was incredulous. "My God, how can you be worried about me? Chris Hani is dead!"

Amy knew that Chris Hani was Nelson Mandela's vital link with the impatient Black youth of South Africa. Hani was credible to young people. His reassurances of victory at the polling place kept a lid on emotions. His murder by White extremists torched a wave of violence which engulfed the entire country — much of it directed at the White population, the "settlers."

Experienced observers have suggested that Amy Biehl might be alive today, were it not for the murder of Chris Hani.

### AMY BIEHL, HER VISION AND HER WORK

Stunned residents of Guguletu looked on as Amy Biehl, an energetic, young Fulbright scholar from California, died violently in the dust at the hands of a mob of young Black township men and boys. The youth, members of the Pan African Congress (PAC), returning to Guguletu from a march where they had shouted their slogan of "one settler, one bullet," saw a young White woman driving a motor car. She became the target of their anger. They stoned her car and stoned her. In shock as she lay there, she had asked "...Will someone please help me?" Within min-





utes, Amy's twenty-six purposeful years on this earth were over. Terror froze the moment — August 25th, 1993.

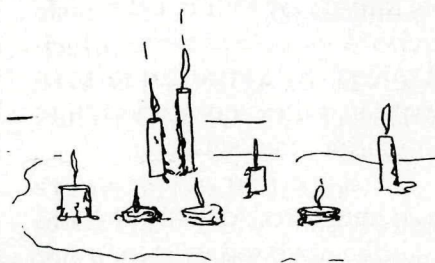
The following day Amy's identity was revealed. Front page headlines in South Africa and across the world expressed shock and horror. The Black community in general, and especially the many members of the Black community who had worked with and had loved Amy dearly, grieved her death. A large group of Black women, the township "Mamas"<sup>1</sup>, marched to the site of the murder, lit candles, sang hymns and prayed for their fallen sister. She had been their comrade in their struggle for a free and democratic South Africa. They were not PAC supporters, yet they were determined to demonstrate their courage borne of grief by holding a vigil in a PAC area. The women had taken charge — just as Amy knew they would.

Amy was drawn to Africa and the plight of communities on this turbulent continent. Her vision of a fair and better world became her passion. She was particularly drawn towards women's struggles in new social orders.

Instrumental in the development of a program to empower women to enter government in Kenya, she moved further south, to work in the newly independent Namibia, doing voter education with previously disenfranchised Black communities. So many pictures bear testimony to the pro-

grams she set up and to the visible camaraderie and loving relationships she forged with men and women in this country.

Finally, at the age of twenty-five, Amy focused her boundless energy on aiding Black communities in South Africa, and Cape Town in particular. She was in South Africa to encourage dialogue among women and to ensure that their rights were protected in the drafting of the country's new Constitution. She was based at the University of the Western Cape working in the Gender Equity Unit and networking extensively with students, key role-players, and ordinary citizens. She interacted, observed, drafted speeches, documented and wrote endless articles on topics related to the emerging democracy of the New South Africa.



Amy always believed in women's capabilities and their leadership potential. In South Africa, she noted that women were the backbone of the struggle and that they would carry the struggle to the ballot box. She knew that these township women would spearhead the process of healing and reconciliation. She was also aware of the lamentable absence of women in transitions to democracy in developing countries — in stunning contrast to their efforts and achievements in organizing change. Amy was committed to helping Black South

African women to empower themselves to assume their rightful roles and responsibilities in their homes and their country.

Amy was also aware of the level of violence in South Africa, especially the endemic violence perpetuated towards women in the form of domestic abuse. She discovered the widespread abuse of women in the dormitories of the University of the Western Cape. She encouraged women students to empower themselves through election to dormitory governing bodies to gain parity with their male abusers. She educated and encouraged women students to resist the violent sexual harassment which was compounded by the traditions of paternalistic tribalism in the culture. She gave her time, knowledge and possessions to friends and colleagues in a constant effort to help them improve their quality of life.

Amy observed and battled the terrible violence, domestic and other, in the townships and squatter camps around Cape Town — a violence born of frustration and anger fomented by the injustices of the apartheid system of the Nationalist regime. She died providing transportation to Black women students of Guguletu who had to deal with unreliable transportation to and from the University of the Western Cape.

## THE AMY BIEHL FOUNDATION

Conceptually, the Amy Biehl Foundation was born within hours of Amy's death.

"Our family neither

<sup>1</sup> "Mama" is a term of respect and endearment often applied to the strong and mature Black women of townships and squatter camps.



wanted to lose contact with Amy nor see her work and her motivating purposes dropped or abandoned. There was no choice for us but to continue working for her in her name."

Officially, the Amy Biehl Foundation was created, in February, 1994, when it was granted tax-exempt status as a California Charitable Corporation. It was clear to us that the Amy Biehl Foundation must be committed—in significant part—to the process of empowering women, and that its charter must give some emphasis to Amy's unfinished work for human rights. With a modest endowment but with a clear sense of purpose, the Foundation set out to identify Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and individuals whose work and purposes were consistent with Amy's, and with whom a modest grant investment would accomplish or facilitate the greatest possible results.

For obvious reasons, the search was initiated in and around Cape Town, South Africa. The first exploratory, fact-finding trip was made by Peter and Linda Biehl in July, 1995. As a result of this trip, several grants were made in support of impressive works to improve the human condition in South Africa.

Once such grant was made to a promising new NGO program called MOSAIC — TRAINING, SERVICE and HEALING CENTRE FOR WOMEN. This program was targeted at empowerment through training, serving and healing women — especially abused women — in Cape Town. The name MOSAIC was chosen to sig-

nify the bringing together of women of all colors, communities, and life experiences to support each other within a therapeutic, holistic organization.

"We arrived in Cape Town the week before commencement of the pilot program designed to train women community workers to help abused women. We held hands with the first group of trainees and their trainer on their first day in class. We spoke to and observed these women of MOSAIC and found within them the wisdom, purpose and strength which Amy had spoken of so frequently. We believed that our daughter would have loved this program and this simple fact made MOSAIC an obvious choice for support from the Amy Biehl Foundation."

#### EVENTS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF MOSAIC

At the time of Amy's death, Rolene Miller searched for a meaningful methodology to empower and to help the women of South Africa.

Born in Johannesburg, Rolene taught primary school after receiving her Teacher's Diploma from the Johannesburg College of Education in 1964. She then married, moved to Cape Town, had children, and attended the University of Cape Town (UCT) where she received a Post-Graduate Diploma in Special Education with emphasis on clinical remedial teaching. Up to this point her focus had been on children and their learning problems. She felt that many children's re-

medial problems were linked to psychological issues, so she returned to UCT and in 1983 earned her Bachelor's degree in psychology.

"At this point my career focus shifted to an interest in women's situations. I counseled women as a volunteer for Life-Line, a telephone counseling organization, and came to know that there were no services or organizations in Cape Town responding specifically to women's needs."

With her new interest in women's issues, Rolene returned to UCT and graduated with a social work degree in 1992. In her final year of training she was placed at the National Institution for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NICRO) working with the victim care team and Co-ordinated Action for Battered Women (CABW).

"I counseled abused women in shelters and gave workshops on abuse to women in factories. Through the work with CABW I learned about the shocking statistics on abuse — 1:4 women were abused by their male partners. I was deeply concerned with the extreme shortage of Black social workers in the poverty communities of Cape Town. I believed that a professionally administered program to train Black women in skills and knowledge to help abused women was vital for the healing of the society. I knew that the training had to be within the feminist framework, that of empowering women to help themselves improve their lives."

Rolene concluded that she



had to formulate a program to address South Africa's daunting challenge of improving the human condition of its most disadvantaged majority — Black women.

According to Rolene "higher education, such as a 4-year degree in social work is inaccessible to the majority of community women. It is expensive in terms of time, academic requirements and money. A research project conducted at the University of South Africa (UNISA) in 1987, noted that 21,000 Black social workers will be needed in South Africa by the year 2001. In 1987 there were just over 1,800 trained Black social workers.

I believed that the university system could not produce enough social workers to meet the demand within the above time-frame. Academic pressures are extreme and many students drop out. Many required readings contain concepts written in academic jargon which students, especially those speaking English as a second language, find difficult. In addition, social work training at university is not gender focused nor does it sufficiently address cross-cultural issues. I also believed that university training is not geared to the adult learner, and most of the students who would have the life experience necessary to empathize with their women clients would be adults."

Rolene devised a one year, inexpensive and innovative training program. In 1993 she visited women's organizations in England, Canada and the US to in-

vestigate services. She returned to Cape Town and registered MOSAIC as an NGO in November, 1993.

For many reasons, the types of services that she had visited in the other countries, were inappropriate for South Africa. MOSAIC had to meet the needs of the communities it was going to serve. Township "mamas" who needed help could not afford to visit traditional agencies located downtown and far from their homes, so services had to be free and easily accessible.

Most abuse happened after hours and over weekends (the "weekend specials,") when most "traditional" agencies were closed. This meant that the community workers ought to be located in their own communities readily available to abused women, who knew them, were referred to them; and available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Community workers who lived outside the townships and squatter camps in which they worked lacked credibility and respect in these communities. They also lacked the relationships, networks, and knowledge of the opinion leaders in these communities.

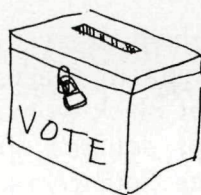
Virtually all social workers in South Africa were White and did not speak the African languages. This meant that women could not communicate their problems in their mother tongues. The apartheid system had divided the communities so com-

pletely that there was little or no understanding by White social workers of the cultures of Black clients.

Social work caseloads in traditional agencies were so enormous that women who needed help had to wait for hours before seeing a social worker, who then gave inadequate help which turned women away from using any form of social services.

Women's organizations and agencies which Rolene visited abroad most often focused on specific areas of services delivery. Because of local conditions, MOSAIC wanted to offer as many services as possible within a holistic therapeutic framework. Although the program focus was specifically on women, men also needed to be educated about abuse and its effects. This would take the form of educational presentations on abuse offered in venues frequented by men and women, such as churches, day hospitals, community centers. (Anyone can be abused. However research statistics in South African showed that approximately 90% of those abused were women, and 10% were men.)

In South Africa, individuals and corporations do not receive tax relief for donations to charitable organizations. Because we wanted to be — and establish accountability: all records of training and practical work application had to be extensively and carefully documented and filed; Every day's lessons evaluated; and regular contacts maintained with Mosaic sponsors and supporters. This was all fundamental to the responsible functioning of the organization. Maintenance of the





group in the form of caring for the care-givers was of primary importance and had to be built into the program. MOSAIC had to heal the healers. Black South African women had always experienced crippling oppression through race, culture, class, and gender and had borne the brunt of the devastating effects of racist apartheid. No organizations existed in South Africa or abroad which could provide a precedent for MOSAIC. MOSAIC formulated a completely new concept in training and service delivery to meet the specific needs of the communities it intended to serve.

Throughout 1994 Rolene developed the pilot training program for MOSAIC community workers. The pilot course consisted of: five months of full-time classroom training: dynamics of abuse; women and the law; women's health; feminist counseling/ workshop/ support group facilitation; assessment and evaluation; educational presentation, managerial and leadership skills. For a further 5 months the program included professional supervision of the community workers in training as they put their newly acquired skills into practice in the different communities.

In July, 1995, the first group of twelve trainees from ten different communities in and around Cape Town were selected. Two trainees, themselves abused, did not meet the standards required for service delivery and dropped out of the course. Ten trainees completed the program and graduated as MOSAIC community workers in June, 1996.

Amy and Rolene never

met. Yet, both observed the same phenomena in the lives and plights of Black women in the townships, squatter camps and rural areas. Both were activists in different aspects of the women's struggle in Cape Town.



### **FULFILLING THE DREAM — MOSAIC'S COMMUNITY WORK TRAINEES**

At the same time that Rolene formulated her vision for MOSAIC and Amy was at work in the Western Cape, disadvantaged women — working as domestics or restaurant dish washers or being unemployed — dreamed of becoming social workers. They knew that they had the intelligence and the ability to learn how to help their neighbors improve their conditions but they never had the means to realize their dreams.

Hilda Mtshazi of Khayelitsha had literally cried with frustration as she spend hours ironing clothing for her employers. Lulu Mzomba from Guguletu, Noxolo Guma from Langa and Ntabi Motspai from Nyanga lived with the certainty that they would never be given the opportunity to fulfill their potential and become professionally trained community workers. Dawn Keytle from Mitchell's

Plain and Bertha Esbach from Elsies River had engaged in voluntary work all their lives but did not have the skills or knowledge which they desperately wanted. Alice Khochlakala from Mbeke-  
weni, Jean Maqula and Caroline Tsetsana from Khayelitsha longed for meaningful involvement with the abused women in their communities and had long since given up their dreams of being able to help them. Shiella Buso of Nyanga realized the importance of education but had no ways of obtaining this. She, too, nurtured the dream of

becoming a social worker without believing that this would ever be realized.

It was known by Amy and Rolene, but regarded as amazing by the Amy Biehl Foundation that women could nurture such lofty and incredible dreams in the face of such punishing violence, oppression, and domestic abuse. Silent strength and hope in the midst of total disenfranchisement.

### **JOINING PATHS**

An announcement advertising the MOSAIC training course was sent to community organizations in May, 1995. Approximately 50 applicants responded. Interviews took place in late May/early June of that year.

Of the various selection criteria applied in the interview process, the five most significant were:

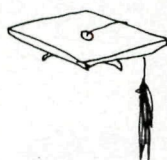
1) Candidates were required to read and write English (as instruction was to be in English and not all candidates were of Xhosa-speaking backgrounds);



- 2) Candidates should reside in as many different communities to ensure the broadest coverage of the Cape region;
- 3) Candidates should be capable of financing their own transportation to and from class (MOSAIC had no funds available for this purpose);
- 4) Candidates were given priority if they appeared to be "natural" community workers, sought-after for help in their communities even before training and skills development; and
- 5) Candidate families had to be capable of supporting them in their work (even if called out at night or during weekends).

In early June, 1995 a friend of Rolene's informed her of the existence of the Amy Biehl Foundation.

"I had used my own savings to register MOSAIC in 1993, to have the lesson plans drawn up in 1994, and to employ two part-time social



workers and a community worker to help network, do a needs assessment, and get MOSAIC on the welfare "map" in Cape Town. At this point there was virtually no funding left. I was running MOSAIC alone."

To start the training program, funding had to be found. It was estimated that it would cost R6,000 (approx US \$1,600) to train each trainee. Corporate and individual sponsors were asked to support a trainee for R5,500. All

trainees were contracted to pay R500 (approx US \$150) for the year's course so that they knew that they had bought their course and it was not a disempowering charitable handout. This was to be paid back when they could afford to do so. It was felt that they should receive modest remuneration for the supervised work which they were doing in the field during the practical half of their training. Therefore, part of the trainee sponsorship money was earmarked for trainees: They received R100 (US \$30) each week.

Rolene sent a proposal to the Foundation. She had been aware of the tragedy of Amy's death through the media and had heard of the valuable work which Amy had done in Cape Town. She thought that the Amy Biehl Foundation might be interested in sponsoring a trainee.

Shortly before Peter and Linda Biehl's departure for Cape Town in July, 1996, "We received a proposal requesting funding for the fledgling pilot program to train MOSAIC community workers. We were excited. The proposal was interesting and in a field of concern for Amy. Within a week, Peter and Linda Biehl met and spoke with Rolene and met the women of MOSAIC on their first day of class. Peter and Linda handed the women of MOSAIC a cheque for sponsorship. It was an emotional day for all."

The spirit of Amy was ever present as the MOSAIC/Biehl paths crossed and joined. She remains the guiding light in a relationship of love and respect grown closer and stronger

throughout the year.

### 1+10=50,000 IN FOUR AND ONE-HALF MONTHS

After completing the classroom training, ten MOSAIC trainees began to work in the communities in which they lived. From February, 1996 Rolene supervised them twice weekly and filed their written reports of the services rendered to clients and community members.

Statistics recording the kind, amount and nature of services as well as the numbers of people given therapeutic help and participating in educational workshops were meticulously kept. A student of the University of the Western Cape used MOSAIC statistics and report documents for her research thesis (to be completed in 1996), on the effects that the MOSAIC training course has had on the lives of the trainee community workers.

Working together with community police, priests, nurses and doctors, teachers and principals of schools, MOSAIC trainees educated men and women on issues of abuse. They spoke at police stations, churches, schools, day hospitals, clinic and community centers. They educated men and women informally in taxis, trains, doctors' waiting rooms, at funerals and friends' homes. They counseled women referred by other abused women who had been counseled. They conducted workshops on abuse, and facilitated support groups for women for whom the concept was entirely new. They accompanied raped and abused women to police stations, hospitals, and sup-



ported them through court procedures. They referred men and women to other organizations when appropriate. They worked day and night and especially over weekends when women had time off from work and were able to see them.

Word about MOSAIC spread quickly and requests for services increased daily. In four and a half months of professionally supervised field practice, ten MOSAIC community work trainees reached over 50,000 men and women in their different communities.

As the numbers increased, it became necessary to recruit assistants to help the trainees with their workload. From May to July, 1996, assistants were found by the trainees to serve as apprentices, thus becoming oriented to the work of MOSAIC. The formal training course for these assistants

began in August, 1996.

Because the assistants had MOSAIC community workers to train them, the assistant training program will become a modified version of the pilot training course and may be cut down to five or six months. This is a more manageable period of training for most women. The eight week intensive training in feminist counseling will remain the same.

### WHERE TO FROM HERE? — LONG TERM GOALS

On the 29th of June, 1996, MOSAIC's trainee community workers graduated in a joyous celebration at the University of the Western Cape. We sent a fax addressed to the women of MOSAIC that was read during the graduation ceremony. Amy's presence was clearly felt.

All of the graduates

wanted to remain as MOSAIC community workers despite the lack of funding for salaries. We devised a plan so they could continue to receive the token remuneration they had obtained in training, and open a loan account in each of their names until funding was obtained. We also plan to employ MOSAIC assistants bringing up the number of service providers to twenty-five. We think it is necessary to employ more workers to meet the demands for services and expand into other areas of Cape Town which desperately need help. Two graduate community workers will be trained as trainers during the assistant training program. Eventually they will be experienced enough to run the course in Xhosa. Another training course for community workers will be offered in 1997. The essence of the training program is its flexibility





and the ease with which it can be modified to suit the needs of the community which it serves.

In July, 1996, eight respected and committed members of the community joined the Board of Directors of MOSAIC. Two members of the original Board elected to remain on as members. This newly augmented Board will steer MOSAIC confidently into the future.

MOSAIC community workers are instruments of peace and messengers of compassion. MOSAIC knows that together with the Amy Biehl Foundation it has changed lives for the better. It has made a difference.

### THE MEANING OF THIS WORK FOR THE BIEHLS AND THE FOUNDATION

The opportunity to help the women of MOSAIC fulfill themselves and help their neighbors in ways which are so critically needed is rewarding to the Biehl family and to everyone associated with the Amy Biehl Foundation. "Discovering potential Foundation grant candidates takes us down roads traveled by Amy in the pursuit of her work and her dreams. This permits us to learn more about Amy and her many interests through encoun-

ters with people who knew her or worked with her. The fact that Amy would have cared strongly about MOSAIC makes it easy for us to care. But it is human to care about a program like MOSAIC and the undaunted women who make it happen."

Likewise, it is human and natural that the women of MOSAIC should care deeply about Amy and her death in their country. Their work expresses Amy's belief that much good can be done if people simply get along and work together. □

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*Amy Biehl (second from right) successfully balanced her many passions, including a special interest in the role of women in southern Africa.*

## STANFORD

March 1994 Volume 22 / Number 1

### 'Hell on Wheels'

Amy Biehl raced through life, embracing her commitments with an unbridled energy that gave meaning to her death.

*By Phil Taylor*





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