

COMMENTARY

"1+10=50,000"

By Kenneth O. Lutterman,

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The MOSAIC project is a most impressive effort to deal with one of South Africa most serious problems, it is not only a most fitting continuation of Amy Biehl's work, it is like her work, engaging the problems at the community level where change must take place.

While I have not met Rolene Miller and do not know of MOSAIC first hand, I did spend a month in South Africa this Spring visiting schools and departments of social work, visiting Guguletu where Amy Biehl was killed, visiting health officials and community centers in the Cape Flats, visiting our South African "son" and his family in Mamelodi—a Black township now a part of Pretoria, and visiting universities and the South African Department of Health. I learned first hand about the reality of violence and spouse abuse.

South Africa demonstrates the kind of commitment to building a new community that Amy Biehl lived for. It is shown not only by Nelson Mandela, but also by many so called "ordinary people" who have testified before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the massive violence they and their families and friends had suffered and that had not given up hope or become vengeful. It was amazing to see, hear, and meet people in South Africa because there is a new day

coming.

But the reality of violence is still all around. Apartheid meant the separation of husbands and wives for 11 months of the year while they worked in the mines and lived in all male "hostels". Rapid urbanization has uprooted the traditional tribal family structure. Unemployment of 40-50% of the population means that poverty is extreme, and crime is very high, Add in alcohol and drugs and it is not surprising that there is a great deal of spouse abuse. We were told that, just as in this country, violence against wives, and women in general, is a very serious problem. We met one person who had been abused in the past and was now working at a community center in the Cape Flats area to address the problem of spouse abuse. She was working with, and trying to train the police to deal with spouse abuse as well as working with abused women. Is there a need for a program like MOSAIC? Absolutely.

The South African Ministry of Health has asked for help in developing community mental health programs, because virtually all mental health services have been limited to hospital care. There was essentially no community mental health program under the prior government. The impressive draft "Health Plan for the Western Cape," which includes

Guguletu, calls for the development of community care. The draft health plan calls for developing and training community workers. The kind of persons being trained by MOSAIC would be most useful as a part of that plan. In the past, over 80% of the mental health funds went to about 20% of the population. Changing the system will not be easy, in part because of the lack of trained social workers and other mental health workers.

In the community health clinics most of the staff are nurses. There are very few physicians and virtually no social workers in the health clinics. The 1974 Health Act actually precluded social workers from providing mental health care. While social work in South Africa played a very important role in opposition to apartheid, it has not developed a strong program in community mental health. At the University of Western Cape, Belleville, — the ANC or Freedom University as it is called—there are programs in Public Health that have been engaged in community development at the local level for over a decade. These efforts involve Whites, Coloreds, and Blacks. We were very impressed by the kinds of interactions that we observed between people of differing ethnic groups. In the schools of social work, the student body has changed over the past 4 years from essentially all white, to being majority (often 70-80%) non-White in almost every department of social work that we visited. However, the faculties in most universities remain predominantly White. It will take time to train non-White faculty

who had previously been excluded.

Clearly there is the need for training community workers to advocate for women, and to provide support that MOSAIC provides. Women have so few resources and yet they play the most critical role in helping children to learn and to grow up to be effective men and women. The linkage of MOSAIC with the University of Western Cape is an important strength of the program. I can only commend their efforts and wish them success. This kind of community development is most important.

However, one must also remember that spouse abuse is also exacerbated by the larger systemic problems of mass unemployment, poverty, ill health, and literacy. While the government is beginning to address these problems, they are also very difficult. When we were in Guguletu we witnessed the shooting of three persons who were riding in a taxi because of what is called the "taxi war" between various taxi "companies" over who gets to serve particular townships. Violence appears to be endemic in this situation of poverty and hopelessness that many people find themselves in.

The new Constitution is a marvelous document. The people are wonderful. The problems they face are enormous. People like Amy Biehl and the Biehl Foundation, and the MOSAIC workers, can make a difference. □

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