

# Creating safe spaces for gender-based violence victims - support and empowerment

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Following the successful launch of the We-Dare (Women's Equality: Digital Access and Rights to Expression) pilot programme in Gauteng late last year, the project is to be expanded to women in vulnerable communities across the country.

The We-Dare network is a collaboration of academic institutions and NGO partners across Africa, primarily in Nigeria and South Africa. The first community pilot comprised of partners of Gibbs, Cadena and the 1000 Women Trust. It aims to observe, interrogate and proactively impact on the systemic issues that surround gender-based violence.

The Gibbs Centre for Business Ethics (CfBE), led by Rabbi Gideon Pogrand and Professor Mollie Painter of Nottingham Trent University, is a key member of the network and has been since inception.

Dr Theresa Onaji-Benson, research manager at the Gibbs Centre for Business Ethics, said one of the goals of the We-Dare network is to "actively engage in initiatives that provide women with a safe space to address issues of patriarchy and culture, and to allow for broader discussions around GBV issues to develop.

"A lack of basic technology, the absence of support by community members and the economic dependency of women on men as breadwinners all adversely affects women's ability to report GBV," she added.

## **We-Dare Community Pilot Programme**

The first community pilot was sponsored by Hollard and Nando's. The project was held between 22 November and 2 December 2021 to coincide with the 16 days of activism, and engaged with 100 women in the Wattville community of Benoni.

The focus was on creating safe spaces by convening women around sewing workshops, where they were taught to sew their own reusable sanitary pads in order to help them out of period poverty and give an option to earn an income. In addition, the women discussed women's reproductive health issues. These workshops created forums for women to talk about gender-based violence, where they can tell their stories, receive support and trauma counselling and access digital resources made available to combat gender-based violence.

The workshop was able to raise awareness around human rights and address gender bias, provided the women with access to data and skills to use digital resources such as WhatsApp, entrepreneurial skills development, and financial literacy provision through We-Dare's corporate partner Hollard. Hollard is supporting the We-Dare network in piloting this unique approach of creating safe spaces to support women. Through their innovative Streetwise Finance programme, Hollard has also offered financial literacy training to the participating women.

Hollard strongly believes that financial independence and economic empowerment are key in enabling more people to create and secure a better future. This campaign is part of Hollard's contribution to the national fight against gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF). The Streetwise Finance programme provided basic financial skills around budgeting and effectively delineating between needs and wants for financial planning.

## **We-Dare Objectives**

The intervention is multi-dimensional and aims to achieve a number of goals at the same time, Onaji-Benson explained. These include addressing the many socio-economic issues linked to gender-based violence, including women's dignity,

period poverty, female hygiene and skills empowerment.

The second season of We-Dare community pilots will be rolled out in specific communities across the country, beginning with vulnerable groups in the Hillbrow area, and in partnership with specific community leaders. The goal is to source for larger funding to be able to up-scale these successful pilots to reach the maximum number of communities. Corporate organisations are encouraged to actively participate addressing the scourge of GBV in our society.

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