

Mobilising North West for the National Legal Case for CHWs

By Karla Witbooi

Release date: 17 January 2022

Since the CHWs achieved their permanent employment status in Gauteng in July 2020, CHWs all over the country were also inspired to deepen their struggles. This inspired the initiative to mount a national legal case to engage the SA government to make all 70 000 CHWs throughout the country permanent employees of the Department of Health. The initiative is lead by a broad coalition of organisations organising CHWs in the different provinces. In Gauteng Khanya College is assisting to organise CHWs in North West and Mpumalanga.

The CHWs in the Northwest had begun to work with the Gauteng Forum since 2017 and had formed an Interim Forum and elected an interim committee to lead the struggle of CHWs. Since then they have recruited about 1500 CHWs to join their Forum and fight for their rights. But this has not been an easy struggle, often CHWs have been threatened by Department officials During this time CHWs in North West were supported by Khanya College and the Gauteng Forum.

In October 2021 the North West Interim Forum together with the Gauteng Forum and Khanya College embarked on the campaign to participate in the recruit CHWs to join the national legal initiative for all CHWS in South Africa to be permanent.

In the North West the CHWs were divided. Some of the CHWs belonged to several unions that were not representing them and only took their subscriptions. The CHWs never got any information from the unions regarding their grievances and they continued to get a stipend of R3650.

The CHWs have been signing fixed term contracts since 2016, a precarious existence. When they got Persal Numbers in 2016 the CHWs believed they were going to be permanent only to find that they were still on contract. They had no permanent employment with no benefits. At the time they were working with households on a daily basis and assisting the elderly and visiting chronic patients.

In October 2021 the North West joined the national campaign to make all CHWs in the country permanent. By December the North West has recruited 2014 CHWs to participate and sign the petition to join the national legal case.

This article was submitted in January 2022 and first published in the Forum News January 2022 edition. You may republish this article, so long as you credit the authors and Karibu! Online (www.Karibu.org.za), and do not change the text. Please include a link back to the original article.