

Organising CHWs in Mpumalanga

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The Mpumalanga Community Healthcare Worker Interim Committee with the support of the Gauteng Community Health Care Forum and Khanya College has deepened the campaign to organise CHWs. We are part of the national movement to build a national legal case to make all CHWs in the country permanent employees of their respective provincial health departments.

In Mpumalanga we started in October to mobilise CHWs in local clinics to inform them about the national initiative and network of organisations that is organising throughout the country. In Gauteng, Khanya College and the Gauteng Forum is assisting CHWs in Mpumalanga to organise themselves. We visited and spoke to CHWs in different clinics to explain to them about the national case. We encouraged CHWs to participate and sign the national case forms. However, there are many villages that we didn't reach because of distance even though we tried to communicate using social platforms.

In Mpumalanga there are about 289 clinics but in the time available we only visited 40 clinics. We tried to organise each clinic to elect representatives to work with us and mobilise CHWs to sign the national case petition forms. We created a Whatsapp group of representative in each clinic we organised. We collected 839 signed.

In the campaign we realised that we are dealing with people and have to be polite and patient and to treat them with care and kindness. Some CHWs attacked us with words in the meetings but we answered them with a kind voice, opening their eyes. This helped us to win the trust of CHWs to participate in the national campaign. We managed to take some CHWs from the darkness and bring light to them, teaching them their rights.

In many clinics CHWs face many challenges. The CHWs care for patients, take their high blood pressure, deliver medicine, collect data they are not recognised. Sometimes CHWs don't even have time to eat, or shelter from the rain and the cold, they are bullied and treated unfairly.

During the campaign we experienced problems with some trade unions interfering and misleading CHWs and also from the provincial Department of Health. Some CHWs thought that the unions will fight for them but we explained to the CHWs that the unions are not organising them or including them in the Public Sector Bargaining Council. That's when CHWs began to change their minds and signed the national case forms. The CHWs are angry with some unions for making promises to make them permanent. Some of the local unions have bad-mouthed us, accused us of being criminals, just wanting to steal CHWs' money and advised them not to join the national case. The DoH undermined CHWs, saying that they cant even read.

The important thing is that through organising in the local clinics we managed to show CHWs that the unions are not assisting them. It wasn't easy to win over CHWs to join the national case. We had to prepare information and arguments to persuade the CHWs and speak to them face-to-face. The CHWs asked us questions and we answered them. Then they began to believe us.

We will continue the campaign to mobilise CHWs in all the clinics in Mpumalanga because we don't want to see CHWs left out without forcing them to sign the national case forms.

We want the DOH to make all CHWs permanent with immediately effect. We want full benefits for all and quality healthcare for our communities.

We are proud of Khanya College and Gauteng Forum for standing with us.

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