

Gauteng Community Health Care Forum Office Bearers 2020 Year Report

By Patricia Makhubu

Release date: 15 December 2020

This year was a difficult year from the beginning and there were many overlapping issues from the previous years that the Gauteng Community Health Care Forum (the Forum) office had to deal with. This included: the grading campaign; the registration of staff for the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF); the un-contracted Community Healthcare Workers (CHWs) from 2016; the outstanding Forum subscription contributions; the provincial mobilisation campaign; and outstanding salaries from 2016 for those comrades who were verified but not paid.

On 24 January 2020 the Office bearers (OBs) had their very first meeting of the year, where they did a planning framework for the schedule of all activities and trainings needed to be done by the organisation. The OBs also discussed the issue of how to bring Forum members into the life of Forum as active participants.

On 8 February the Forum had its first Committee and Monitors meeting, though only 22 clinics were represented. In this meeting we touched on the issues of subscriptions, outstanding salaries, the grading campaign and clinic revivals.

In March the Forum office tabled and divided the job descriptions of the two organisers employed by the organisation. It was during this month when the COVID-19 pandemic reached South Africa.

In the second week of March we engaged with different working class organisations under our supporting structure, Khanya College, and came up with a plan of a coronavirus awareness campaign to take to our communities. It was during the week where we were suppose to have our first Sub Committee meeting, but we ended up having a workshop on COVID-19, and sharing strategies on how we were going to deal with and conduct the awareness campaign into our communities.

We managed to supply CHWs with bleach to make sanitisers in the time that followed because during that period the government was unable to provide CHWs with all the necessary protective gears. During the national lockdown the Forum office was very busy, as it also created a survey for CHWs to find out how they are doing as frontline workers, and about how the situation in their clinics is regarding the personal protective gears.

Things went very tough and sour from May; the office began receiving cases of CHWs infected with COVID-19, and these issues were dealt with accordingly via the legal advisor, com Khadija Dawood, who held several workshops regarding the issues of occupational health and safety and Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act (COIDA).

In June we lost our fellow comrade Tshepo 'the Saint' Matoko. Tshepo was loved by many for his commitment to the struggle of CHWs and the working class, and will be dearly missed, and fondly remembered always.

During this period we also engaged in other campaigns, such as the boycott of the re-opening of schools. It was during this time that the first group of pupils were ordered to return to school by the Department of Education, even though the numbers of those getting infected were rising sky high.

In July the Gauteng Department of Health (GDoH) announced that CHWs will be absorbed onto the permanent system, but without being graded on a salary level. All they said the first time of the announcement was that we are permanent, and on probation, level 2. To respond to this, the Forum had a workshop on the contract being offered and the letter of appointment given by the GDoH). During this period the OBs engaged with the legal advisors to query this contract in relation with the Public Health and Social Development Sectoral Bargaining Council award and the Labour Court judgement from Judge Benjamin.

In August and September we had more workshops about the GDoH contracts with the Sub Committees. The Sub Committees also held meetings, where each Sub Committee discussed issues related to each portfolio (legal, media, finance). The office also engaged with CHWs in the former 'Transvaal' region, (Mpumalanga and North West provinces). In Mpumalanga we engaged the CHWs about their campaign of un-contracted and unfair dismissals. We also accompanied them to their regional offices to submit a memorandum. In the North West we engaged with them about helping them mobilise for their permanent contract campaign ventures.

On 3 October the Forum office called on the un-contracted CHWs around Gauteng to pursue their campaign to become permanent like the rest of the Gauteng CHWs. On 7 October the un-contracted CHWs picketed outside the GDoH in Johannesburg and rendered their memorandum. During this period everyone (all members) were given a petition to take to their clinics and get as many signatures in solidarity with our fellow sidelined comrades. From our experience with this un-contracted issue the Forum office decided that the organiser should venture into other areas like Tshwane and mobilise more CHWs who are still affected by this situation. So far the response has been great. On 10 October the Forum office issued subscription statements to all of the members so they could settle their debts.

As of November, we still have many hanging and developing issues. The Forum office urges the Committees and Monitors to give a hand on all of these issues and avail themselves to build this organisation to have a solid foundation. OBs needs your support as you decide the present and future of the Forum.

This article was submitted by Patricia Makhubu (Chairperson of the Gauteng Community Health Care Forum) on 3 December 2020. 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.