

## **PROTEA SOUTH SENIORS CITIZENS CLUB**

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The population of elderly people is gradually increasing. Statistics South Africa, covered the population growth of persons above 60 years old at 5.43 million in the year 2020. Senior citizens often face challenges such. Such vulnerability is not a popular day-to-day topic in communities, and remains an underlying issue that has not been highlighted in society.

The elderly in Protea have gathered to build up programs and activities that will help them maintain their health and fitness. The late Nhlanhla Mwale, Co-founder of the club saw an opportunity to create a platform, to facilitate social cohesion and keep elderly women active. The organisation was formed during 2009. On 26 June 2014, the club was registered with the Department of Social Development (DSD).

It is at Protea South, Multipurpose centre in Soweto. Its main objective is to ensure that the elderly keep physical and mental fitness, learning, building skills, and having a space to confide with other members. "We are running away from the boredom and abuse at home," Tsilane Tshabalala said. The women further explained that they are sometimes abused by grandchildren financially. "Exercising helps us avoid illnesses such as dementia," Thembi Komane added.

The organisation consists of committee members from different parts of Soweto despite their profession in life. Persons above 60 can be permitted to join the organisation. After every 3 years, members gather to nominate and elect new individuals to be board members, these members ensure the sustainability of the club. The structure consists of a management team made-up of 7 members. Executive Chairperson Rebecca Tloubatla, Deputy Chairperson: Moipone Kgathiba, with Tiny Maboya, as the secretary and Babra Mkhawana serving as the Deputy Secretary. Treasurer, Sophie Kgaladi along with additional members. Rosemary Gwamanda (Bereavement), Musindiwa Munonde (Coordinator).

The daily program from Monday to Wednesday, elderly people within the organisation start their activities with a prayer at 10:00 AM before they get to their favourite part of the day, Aerobics at 11:00 AM. Skills such as knitting & crocheting are part of the daily activities, they serve as a tool used to fundraise for the club.

"We are currently not receiving any funds," Daina Ndaba explained, "We use the money we fundraise to buy food and other necessities." The executive Chairperson, Rebecca Tloubatla, former teacher added that, members are divided into different skill categories. "We also have those who do bid work and patch work," these activities are crucial for the purpose of allowing senior citizens to develop the skills and socialise.

Tshabalala, mentioned that there is a time when members also organise trips and travel across neighbouring countries, to explore and clear their heads. “we have been to Cape Town, Mozambique, [a] Portuguese Island,” Tshabalala said; “however, we haven’t traveled since COVID-19 pandemic.”

Daina further explained that during the opening of the new year, members set up local trips to have lunch. “We also have closing parties and we celebrate our birthday on one date,” Ndaba said. The senior citizens use money from their SASSA grants to pay for these trips.

The organisation collaborates with other senior citizens clubs around Soweto during the Hlanganani Event and through these gatherings, they play games like football and indigenous games. They also share ideas on how to grow their organisations. The organisation is currently working with the Beauty Hub Academy which offers body treatments ranging from massage to manicures. The chairlady also added that they are working with Alma Clinics which plays a role in tracking the health of elderly people.

“We were part of a campaign about the awareness of elderly people,” Tloubatla said. The campaign Elderly Awareness Day was held at Protea Glen on 7 June 2022. The organisation was invited by Shiela Lekekiso from the DSD. Rebecca added, “The campaign was led by JMPD and the Department of Health.”

The organisation has been struggling to get access to funds, due to the loopholes caused by a shortage of documents such as a letterhead, which is required for compliance in the application process. The current Chairperson has worked on getting the necessary documents and she believes soon they will be submitting the application for funds.

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