# Counselling Initiative in South Africa's Orange Farm Township Addressing Mental Health Needs



In Orange Farm township, South Africa, a counseling initiative aimed at addressing the mental health needs arising from apartheid, crime, and violence is making significant strides. The program, held in a community center an hour south of Johannesburg, was developed by Zimbabwean psychologist Ncazelo Ncube-Mlilo. Known as "COURRAGE," the initiative is part of Ncube-Mlilo’s charity, Phola, which supports over 10,000 individuals annually in Johannesburg's townships.

Each Wednesday, the program brings together 30 women for group counseling sessions that focus on transforming trauma into stories of survival and strength. On May 14, 2024, residents participated in sessions themed around reframing hardship and fostering resilience. Notable is the story of Palesa Hlohlolo, who shared her traumatic experience of waking up in a body bag after being mistakenly presumed dead during a shooting.

Ncube-Mlilo, leveraging her background in working with HIV/AIDS orphans, developed Phola to offer culturally sensitive therapeutic tools, emphasizing the expertise within communities rather than relying solely on professional therapists. The counseling sessions range from addressing domestic violence to dealing with family members' drug use.

Despite the large-scale need for mental health services in a country struggling with high unemployment and violence rates, state clinics predominantly cater to acute mental conditions due to the lack of resources, leaving daily mental health challenges largely unaddressed. Phola’s initiative represents a critical effort to fill this gap, with support primarily from international donors, as government funding has ceased due to budget cuts. Participants of Phola have been known to establish their own support groups, further testifying to the program’s impact on fostering community strength and resilience.