

Social impact unleashed: getting

Downtown Johannesburg is plagued by many ills typical of similar spaces in cities all over South Africa. But it



Above: Street cleaning and gardening by Water for the Future; Below: The Downtown Music Hub is a cutting-edge music facility dedicated to supporting the growth and development of professionals in the music industry. Photos: Piwokuhe Motha; jicp.org.za

As the heart of South Africa's economy, the Johannesburg inner city has long been a symbol of opportunity. However, beneath the glittering skyline, a persistent issue plagues the youth: unemployment.

This unrelenting problem gives rise to social exclusion, shattered self-esteem and a ripple effect of negativity throughout the community. This article unveils a perspective on tackling the scourge of youth unemployment in the inner city, drawing attention to the transformative potential of addressing community challenges while providing gainful employment opportunities to its young population.

It demonstrates how social enterprises are reshaping the narrative surrounding youth unemployment, forging a more inclusive and equitable economic landscape.

To confront the complex challenge of unemployment head-on, the Presidency launched the Social Employment Fund (SEF) as part of the Presidential Employment Stimulus. In its initial phase concluding in June 2023, the SEF has successfully created about 50,000 new part-time job opportunities.

Urban regeneration is the key objective of the Johannesburg Inner City Partnership (JICP), a public benefit organisation that works to create socioeconomic prospects, foster social cohesion and contribute to the holistic betterment of the inner-city community. The Industrial Development Corporation, entrusted with managing the SEF grant on behalf of the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, awarded one of 28 SEF grants to the JICP to employ 1,622 individuals on a part-time basis. Nearly 70% of these participants are from the youth demographic.

The JICP has partnered with 12 social enterprise partners who, in turn, have a further 28 partners. This article sheds some light on the work they are doing for the common good.

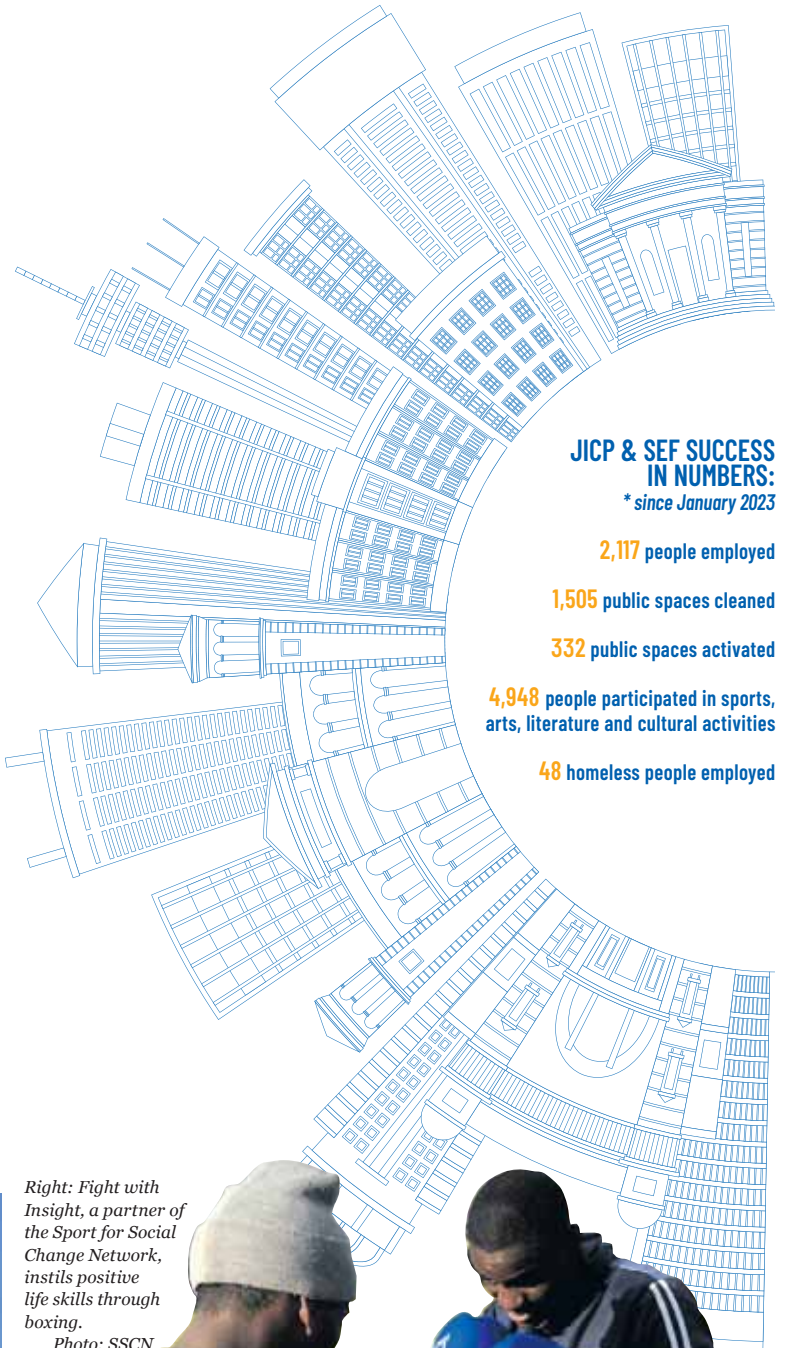
Through sports, arts, literature and cultural programmes, three of our NGO partners equip young individuals with essential life skills. The power of teamwork, discipline and leadership not only shields them from the perils of crime and substance abuse, but also nurtures their innate tal-

ents, unearths their potential and amplifies their future prospects.

Boundless City's after-school programme, housed inside the iconic Anstey's Building on the corner of Jeppe and Joubert streets, encompasses a library and art activities, thus expanding opportunities for children in collaboration with another JICP partner, the Literary District. In addition to establishing free libraries, planting trees and training SEF participants to maintain them, the Literary District supports educational prospects for youngsters in both organisations.

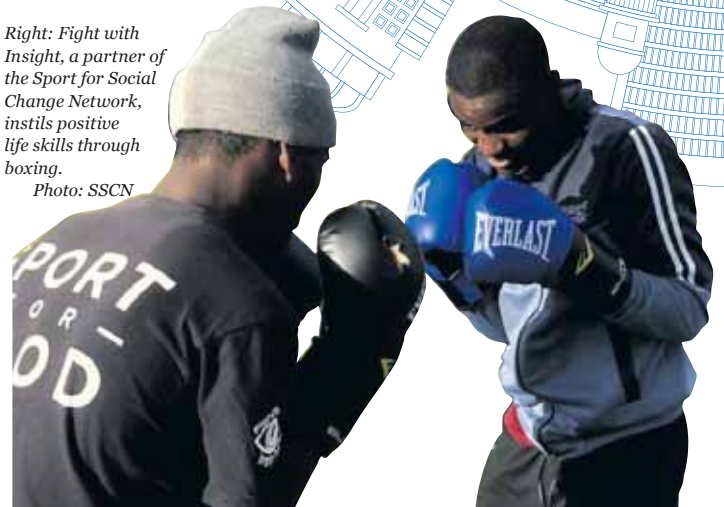
Boundless City is also breathing new life

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Right: Fight with Insight, a partner of the Sport for Social Change Network, instils positive life skills through boxing.

Photo: SSCN



inner-city Joburg youth working

is getting better with the help of remarkable partnerships aimed at its young residents. By **David van Niekerk**

into the basketball court in Ernest Oppenheimer Park, integrating public art and enhancing park maintenance and safety measures. By providing a gathering place for the city's youth, this programme supports a longstanding community initiative for basketball enthusiasts, fostering discipline, accountability, and community spirit.

Sport for Social Change and its NGO partners, through their after-school programmes, not only impart sportsmanship in various disciplines like street racket, squash, skateboarding and boxing, but also provide lessons in gardening, life skills, and chess.

Testimonies from grateful parents bear witness to the transformation of their children, now more respectful, responsible and disciplined thanks to this initiative.

The Music in Schools programme, run by the Downtown Music Hub, provides much-needed income for talented artists and introduces learners to the enchantment of music. Bridging gaps in schools where resources are scarce and music education is often overlooked, these classes expose students to different musical genres, diverse instruments and the fundamental building blocks of music through interactive games.

Though marred by pockets of neglect, urban decay and environmental blight, the inner city holds untapped potential for economic growth and job creation. Harnessing the boundless energy and creativity of young people, five of our partners seized the opportunity to revitalise neglected spaces, transforming them into places with the potential for vibrant urban activity.

Urban Space Management, a nonprofit organisation involved in urban management, has coordinated the employment of locals in multiple inner-city improvement districts. Through this infusion of manpower, the streets are cleaner, illegal posters are removed and minor repair tasks are completed, ultimately enhancing the inner-city public environment.

Clean City SA is on a mission of street cleaning, education and action. In addition, its #OneBagOneTrader pilot project equips informal traders with individual refuse bags, diminishing the waste around their trading stalls.

Constitution Hill tends to the maintenance, landscaping and cleanliness around this precinct, and also extends a helping hand to SEF participants through mock interviews and comprehensive help with writing their CVs.

Water for the Future is dedicated to cultivating a sustainable green economy that revolves around the source of the Jukskei River in the inner-city neighbourhood of Lorentzville. Through innovative recycling practices, repurposing invasive plants and the sale of its products, including handmade woven screens, the organisation exemplifies the untapped potential in environmental sustainability.

Makers Valley Partnership, in collaboration with local partners, actively enlists unemployed youth to address illegal dumping hotspots, ingeniously transforming them into inviting seating areas and blossoming gardens. Furthermore, it conducts workshops on water conservation, food rescue and clothing upcycling, not to mention its



Basketball at Ernest Oppenheimer Park, which is part of the Boundless City SEF offering.

Photo: Boundless City

contributions to waste management and the provision of urban agriculture produce to the local community.

Empowering homeless and vulnerable communities with gainful employment opportunities marks a pivotal stride toward breaking the vicious cycle of homelessness. By weaving together skills development programmes, social enterprises and community support networks, a comprehensive framework has been forged, empowering individuals to reclaim their lives.

The Johannesburg Homelessness Network, through its initiative of establishing urban vegetable gardens on sites across the city, has sparked new opportunities. This project

Nje generates funds to sustain these community centres.

Additionally, it has launched a sewing project through which teenagers craft and sell bags, empowering them with entrepreneurial skills and economic agency.

Amid the persisting challenges of youth unemployment in the inner city and beyond, the inspiring initiatives highlighted here demonstrate the profound impact of the SEF programme.

These projects collectively radiate hope and showcase the insightful principles that underpin the Social Employment Fund. These principles are: (1) there is a massive demand for addressing social ills; (2)

acknowledging that unemployed individuals in a community are valuable resources in tackling complex societal challenges that the labour market alone cannot resolve; (3) acknowledging that community-based organisations have the passion, dedication, willingness and ability to deliver as implementing agents; (4) providing sufficient support to these organisations; (5) achieving scale by harnessing the extensive community networks that these organisations already have; and (6) part-time employment and skills transfer enable previously unemployed individuals to transition into full-time employment or generate their own income streams. **DM**

“These projects collectively radiate hope and showcase the insightful principles that underpin the Social Employment Fund”

extends a lifeline to the homeless, connecting them with social workers, reuniting fractured families and even facilitating employment for some in nearby gardens, thanks to newly acquired skills.

Mould Empower Serve, better known as MES, is a Hillbrow-based nonprofit that stands at the forefront of change, actively involving SEF volunteers in its facilities. By catering to various vulnerable groups, including preschool children, schoolgoers, at-risk youth and struggling families, MES instils a sense of hope in those who need it the most.

Dlala Nje, which translates to “just play” in isiZulu, operates two community centres in Ponte City that provide safe spaces for young children and teenagers to learn and to play. Through its renowned inner-city tours, Dlala



Above: Street cleaning and recycling get done by Urban Space Management.

Photo: USM