

History of the Manenberg Aftercare Centre.

Life for children in Manenberg is often dramatic; many of them soon get drawn into competing street gangs with drug and alcohol abuse. Half of the younger generation have not finished school, and only one out of five adults have completed high school. This explains the high unemployment rate of 36% (in the population aged 15 – 64 years), which is higher than in the country as a whole (25%).

The Manenberg Aftercare Centre (trading as Holy Family Child and Youth Development Centre) had its beginnings during the FIFA World Cup in June 2010. Fr Wim Lindeque, then parish priest of the Catholic Church in Manenberg, met with some parishioners concerned about the fact that many children would suffer hunger and neglect during the unusual 6-week school holidays that accompanied the World Cup. Many of the children in Manenberg receive their only meal of the day at school, so the extended school holidays in the middle of winter were a big challenge.

With the promise of a small donation from a benefactor and support from the parish, a holiday programme for children between 2 and 16 was planned under the leadership of Ricardo Cupido, a parishioner and experienced youth worker. Friends and colleagues of Fr Wim Lindeque who heard about the project contributed generously, and the children received two meals and a snack for the full 6 weeks. They were also entertained and supervised by members of the community, including some of the youth from the parish.

Subsequently, an after-school care centre was initiated, building on the holiday programme. Ricardo Cupido was employed as Centre manager, and community members were engaged as facilitators. Assisted by the expertise and support of the Amy Biehl Foundation, the programme became well-established, and the number of children grew to around 120 per day. After a year the partnership between the Amy Biehl Foundation and the Manenberg Catholic Church came to an end because of differing priorities and the very specific needs of the children of Manenberg.