

THE GINSBERG YOUTH COUNCIL EXPERIENCE

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I'd like to start by briefly giving a background of the Ginsberg Youth Council. The Ginsberg Youth Council was formed on the twenty-seventh of November 2000. The purpose of its formation was merely to address the problems that our youth in Ginsberg are faced with, namely HIV AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, unemployment, teen pregnancy and crime. The council started off after a series of workshops that were conducted by a Johannesburg based organization named the Interfaith Community Development Association.

The problems faced by the Ginsberg youth were identified by the youths themselves. Nobody said to them that these were their problems. They were the ones who knew that they had the problem and they were the ones who resolved to start the council to address them. The youth council is still operating in Ginsberg and has embarked on a number of projects, namely the HIV AIDS and life skills education programs. We have staged the Youth Religious Conference for the Eastern Cape youth with the Steve Biko Foundation, and have embarked on a number of cultural activities. Some of the tourists who have been to Ginsberg will tell you that we like to boast of our culture and that our tourism and environment desk welcomes tourists with a number of activities. Of course the most important of them all is the schools intervention program, which is geared at addressing the problems that our local school is currently experiencing.

When we heard about us coming to Australia and we read about the title of the paper, 'Learning From the Past, Thinking About the Future' we immediately identified with it because one of the most important projects that we are currently embarking on is the Ginsberg Social History Project.

Why do we want to reclaim this history? In fact, what is history? How can you define history? One person said: 'It's easy. It's his story and I'm saying it's his story, not mine. I'm her and you know it can't be my story when I'm her. It's his story.' We think that when you have your own definition of something you begin to understand it a little better. In the Ginsberg Social History Project we define history as a dialogue between the past and the present in preparation for the future. Now why do we need to reclaim this history? What happened to our history? Our history was, and still is, deliberately distorted by our former colonial masters and it is projected in a very bad light.

Black people or African people were portrayed as a barbaric, uncivilised and sub-human species by the authors of our history. You must remember that we never got to write our own history. Our history prior to the colonisation of South Africa was never written and as such what we read and what we studied at school was the history of other people.

While the colonisers set out to civilise us and to humanize us as black people through their Christian religion, which they imposed on us, our quick

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survey of our history reveals that black people were the most generous, loving, respectful, law abiding human species. Our social life as black people was, and is categorised by the concept of **obon too** which means humanity. This is our traditional reputation as African people. Just to cite a case and point, the black people of South Africa have suffered the most untold and inhuman and degrading treatment, yet interestingly enough we are the ones who are advocating reconciliation. That we are able to forgive is just one example of how **obon too** works in our culture.

Our own history survey also reveals we were economically independent. We had our own cattle/livestock and our own land for our sustenance. But, as Doctor Mangcu said this morning, the pride of the black people was taken from them through the battle of the gun and through the Christian religion. People were forced to work on the mines and were forced into dependency. So we were left with absolutely nothing but hands to bake with and our sweat to sow. The previous regimes' repositories not honestly or accurately reveal this information.

We are able to get the proper account of our history from our great Grandparents whom we have probed. This is where oral history – that is history by word of mouth - becomes important. It is mostly through oral history that we today, are able to know about and to understand our history prior to colonization. We at the Ginsberg Youth Council recognise that oral history is the most important part of research in the work that we are doing for the Ginsberg history project.

In recognition of the fact that the history of black people in general is not a true reflection of their historical past, the people of Ginsberg resolved to embark upon research for their own history so that they could rediscover their own identity. When I was on my way to Johannesburg from Eastlander, my Aunt said that you must always remember where you are coming from. It is important because if you don't know where you are coming from then you don't know where you are going. So we as the youth of Ginsberg align the Ginsberg Youth Project as a social history project, as a means and a way to get our identity back.

Ginsberg has suffered the same injustice as the rest of the black nation, in that its rich history was not documented and the little that was, was distorted. The case in point is that the Ginsberg people were described as a bunch of drunkards and obese people but our search revealed otherwise. Once we had our research and we had collected our oral history, we discovered that Ginsberg had and still has the most beautiful and memorable history and that it produced a handful of people with both national and international stature and, as Doctor Mangcu has said earlier, these are not just stories.