

**DECISIONS
FOR LIFE**
ORGANISING YOUNG
WOMEN



“Sharing our Stories and Strategies”

DECISIONS FOR LIFE TRADE UNION CAMPAIGN

www.mywage.co.za



The 'Decisions for Life Trade Union Campaign is part of the Decent Work, Decent Life for Women Campaign coordinated by the International Trade Union Confederation. The Campaign targets young working women and young women seeking employment.

In South Africa the trade union federations, COSATU FEDUSA, NACTU and CONSAWU participate in the DFL Campaign and the writers of this publication are almost all from trade unions affiliated to one of the 4 federations.

We would like to thank all the women who are participating in the DFL campaign, the trade union staff and members who have made the time and effort to mentor and support young women participating in the campaign, the staff of the LRS, the Canadian Auto Workers and the ITUC for making this publication possible.

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
The Cape Town DFL Campaign Team: Attracting young women to the trade union – the Public Library Forum Experience.....	4
“Non-threatening public spaces.” - Kashiefa Achmat	4
“Connecting women in and beyond the workplace – my role as a distribution tool.” - Yandiswa Mayekiso.....	5
“Moving from Times New Roman – a participant’s view.” - Kirti Soma.....	6
“Timing and Planning! The essence of a successful programme” - Merle Thomas-Mkhonto	6
“A facilitator experience of the Public Library Forums.” - Safea Solomon	7
“Learning materials that connect to the heart.” - Penny Hlakula.....	8
“Making Ends Meet – the importance of a budget.” - Arlene Serelina	9
“In life-without directions you will be lost.” - Stephanie Lategan	10
“The thread that got woven” - Lauren Uppink	11
“Don’t be alone - be part of the network.” - Sofia Ludvigsson.....	12
Durban DFL Campaign team promotes “Workplace Wellness Campaign for young working women”	13
“Wellness is not only an absence of diseases.” - Nompilo Shange	14
“Know your status, live positively.” - Mary Dlamini.....	15
“Shine like a blossoming flower.” - Noxolo Mpinge.....	16
“Standing Strong” - by Lungile Mbili	16
“Mastering the basics to live a stress free life.” - Phumla Sibiya.....	17
Johannesburg DFL Team promotes “The Right to Choose to use a Femidom” Campaign	18
“We are sexual beings.” - Mohau Mabena	19
“Choosing a femidom is also about choosing to be healthy.” - Palesa Mokodutlo.....	19
“Educating myself before educating others.” - Julia Msibi	20
“The Power of Change.” - Busisiwe Mnisi	21
“The femidom – a condom for women.” - Bertha Mathoko	22
Durban DFL Campaign Team’s struggle for “Decent Work and Employment Contracts”	23
“My contract – my solid rock.” - Nosipho Mpinge.....	23
“Never burn your bridges.” - Nelly Mbili	24
“What is a contract of employment?” - Phumelele Mngadi	24
“Understanding different types of contracts.” - Nontokozi Khumalo	25
“So in summary”! - Hlengiwe Makhathini	26
Creating a safe space.....	27
Participant’s thoughts about the writing process	27
Using the free writing technique	28
The joy of working together	28
Writing creatively.....	29
The skills I am leaving with	29



INTRODUCTION

Our Decisions for Life (DFL) Trade Union Campaign has been running since the middle of 2009 and since the start of the campaign we have had many exciting experiences. Together we have engaged in innovative education, organising and recruitment strategies. We would like to share our experience of building the DFL Campaign in South Africa with other young women and trade union activists concerned with making the trade union a home for young women.

At the end of July 2012 through the support of the Canadian Auto Workers Social Justice Fund a few representatives from different unions in three of the DFL Campaign Teams had a very special opportunity to spend three days quietly reflecting on the work we have done and what we have achieved. This reflection helped us to both value our own contributions as well as share our many experiences and lessons with others. Throughout the DFL Campaign we have used the powerful tool of writing to assist us with analysis and reflection and during the three day writing workshop in July we produced the short pieces of writing in this book.



The Cape Town DFL Campaign Team: Attracting young women to the trade union — the Public Library Forum Experience.

“Non-threatening public spaces.”

- *Kashiefa Achmat*

As the Cape Town DFL Campaign Team we have embarked on an exciting project to attract young women job seekers in the community to the trade union by organising public library forums. All forums are organised in local public libraries in different townships or suburbs, where the DFL team initiates a relationship with that library. The idea is to connect with young women in a space that is close to their homes and where they can feel free to participate. We try to create a space that encourages young women to have discussions with each other about issues that affect them. The forum is also a good networking space where young women can share and exchange information on the challenges they

face and also the decisions they have made in relation to the workplace, trade union and home. Young women do not find these spaces threatening. They are free to participate on their own terms and they are free to leave when they want to. All activities are focussed on the needs of participants and we encourage young women to give us feedback on the design of future forums. Our aim is to encourage them to take full ownership of the space and to feel that they are in a safe space. The sense of feeling free in the space allows for more open and honest discussion about the trade union movement, and we encourage young women to ask questions and voice their opinions. We hope that most of the women

who participate in the public forums will join trade unions when they get employed because they will understand the value of being a trade union member. One of the challenges faced most by trade unions today is declining membership. Part of the reason for the decline are high retrenchments, and also the fact that most young women are employed as contract workers and enjoy no benefits. Many employers have also become very intolerant of trade unions. Some workers get dismissed if the employers discover that they have joined trade unions.

The library forums introduce prospective workers and non-unionised workers to a trade union-facilitated space, a space where they can feel

safe. This helps participants understand the role played by trade unions in the workplace as well as reasons for joining. Building relations with the public libraries is an example of trade unions and local community structures working together in improving the lives and conditions of young people.

We are hoping that through this process the community will learn to value the union because of the role it can play in the community. We also hope that unions can be seen as strategic organisations that focus on issues beyond the workplace. This is one way that the union can grow its membership and influence. We think the public library forum is an effective recruitment strategy.

“Connecting women in and beyond the workplace — my role as a distribution tool.”

- Yandiswa Mayekiso

There are many ways to reach out to people and get them to involved in programmes like the DFL Public Library Forums. I classify myself as a distributing tool for the DFL Campaign. As an employee of the post office responsible for distribution on a daily basis, I ensure that every box or letter leaving the post office has a flyer of our campaign or an invite if there is a library forum happening. I put the invites and flyers on the counter for customers to pick up. I do not miss an opportunity to speak to young women who come to the post office for different services.

Distribution of information materials is important in any campaign and through my workplace I can play an important role in strengthening the DFL Campaign.

As the campaign team we work closely with librarians and encourage them to participate in our library forums. But we cannot only rely on librarians to encourage library users to participate in the forums—we need to do our own part through advertising. That is where my role as a distributing tool comes in.

The Public Library Forums provide young women with information as well as a supportive environment to discuss and share information. We use posters, pamphlets and other means of communication at our disposal to let communities know about this campaign. Being a wise person means reading and gathering as much information as you can, and then discussing and sharing this information with others.

“Moving from Times New Roman — a participant’s view.”

- Kirti Soma

If we only use the font “Times New Roman” we are likely to make most readers fall asleep and lose interest in continuing to read. As a young woman when I participate in the library forums I would like to be excited by the information and learn new skills. If you give me a pamphlet on “Applying for a Job”, a boring page in one kind of font will not keep me interested. Perhaps things like cartoons or pop up pages would make the information feel more attractive and would allow me to feel that I can engage with the information.

Not all content needs to be presented in the written form. Content issues can be very interesting if they

are put across in the form of a role play, for example. With just two people you could stage a scenario where one person as a director and the other is a young person applying for an internship. Activities like this are important in library forums where the young women might be from different backgrounds and where they might speak different languages.

Young women would like to see the Public Library Forum content equipping them for the working world, family life, student life and if they ever wanted to enter a relationship, marriage or engagement. One strategy that works in the Public Library Forum is the sharing of experiences, where young women learn from each other.

“Timing and Planning! The essence of a successful programme”

- Merle Thomas-Mkhonto

We are always rushing to start an event or maybe taking too long to end an event. Timing is very important and we discovered this when we were planning the public library events. After we had decided on the target group we had to decide on when to have the event, how long it would take, when we would start and when we would end the event. This meant that as a team we needed to keep the communication between us flowing.

My focus was on the Athlone Public library. I was assigned to work with a union member from a different federation and because we were familiar with the constituency we were inviting and I was familiar with the Athlone area, we chose to host the forum on a Saturday morning. Saturday mornings is a time when young people visit the library. We gave ourselves enough time to plan the event and even though we are from different trade union federations we worked well

together because we focussed on what we were trying to achieve. We communicated via email and kept our ideas flowing, focussing on working as a collective.

After deciding on the date and time of the event we then collected relevant materials. We arrived at the library early enough to set up a table. We worked very well together as a team providing young women with information about the kinds of things they need when looking for work and encouraging them to join the trade union. We were disciplined in speaking about the benefits of joining a trade union without necessarily promoting one particular union. Planning our materials and discussion before the time helped us to keep this discipline.

Many young women flocked to the information table and signed up for the DFL Campaign.

“A facilitator experience of the Public Library Forums.”

- *Safea Solomon*

As a participant in the Cape Town DFL Campaign Team, I would like to share my experience as a facilitator of our Grassy Park Library Workshop Session, held in March 2011. My intention is to share with you the importance of carefully identifying the target group.

The theme and title of the workshop read as follows; “Career Information and Research Workshop.”

The workshop was held on a Friday afternoon so as to reach our target group i.e. young job seekers, particularly young women. My responsibilities included planning, organising and facilitating the workshop with the assistance of two other participants of the DFL team and a university graduate who participated as a volunteer. As a team we developed a structured programme for the day, and had a small budget to cover the costs of hiring the meeting room at the library, the printing of materials, some snacks for the participants and transportation costs for the team member conducting the negotiations with the library management, as she was unemployed at the time. We distributed an information booklet which was carefully selected by the broader DFL Campaign Team. Our aim with the information booklet was for it to be both educational and to serve as a tool for seeking employment and career information. Our broader aim was to popularise the trade union as a home for young women.

We tried to make sure that the content of the information booklet suited our target group, i.e. job seekers, matriculates and concerned parents aiming to assist their children find employment. As members of trade unions the Public Library Forum offered us the opportunity to meet with potential members in a non-threatening environment. The workshop included speakers from various trade unions talking about the kind of organising work they are involved in. We also had a number of enjoyable “ice-breakers” so as to give the target group a sense of belonging and fulfilment. The aim of the workshop was to empower young women to feel more

confident about going into the world of work, to offer information on alternatives to formal employment, to create an awareness of the kind of protection young women could have as part of a union, and to raise awareness of “self-love” as a way of building confidence amongst young women, a confidence that could encourage them to become part of the union. In essence as a team we were happy with this event; using this as an example we have gone on to organise a number of other forums in different communities. In conclusion, you might not always have the numbers or profile of participants you would like as public libraries are open spaces, and you cannot determine before the time who will attend – so you will need to allow for some flexibility in your planning. We did keep an attendance register and since then we have invited the young people who participated in the library forums to other DFL events.

Examples of themes covered in the Public Library Forums

- Decisions for Life Campaign – introducing the campaign and its relevance for young job seekers.
- Tips on choosing careers – an interactive presentation highlighting relevant information and websites.
- Finding a job – an interactive presentation on what to look for, where to look and how to look.
- Tips on preparing a CV.
- Tips on preparing for an interview.
- Introduction to the DFL Decent Work and Contracts pamphlet.
- Introduction to the DFL Sexual Harassment pamphlet.
- Taking control of your body – introducing the female condom.
- Discussing strategies for dealing with unemployment - volunteering, internships, learnerships etc.
- Discussing experiences of trade unions - what trade unions can offer young women.

“Learning materials that connect to the heart.”

- Penny Hlakula

“If you talk to a person in a language she understands, that goes to her head. If you talk to her in her own language, that goes to her heart.” - Nelson Mandela.

Learning materials are an important part of a learning event as they are one of the most important connections to the participants. As the DFL Campaign Team our process of developing learning materials began with us sharing our experiences of being learners using learning materials in different contexts. By doing this we put ourselves in the shoes of our target group, the young women we are trying to reach out to. When deciding on the learning materials we first started with clearly defining our purpose for the Public Library Forums. We then needed to think about where we would find the information we needed, to help us develop the learning materials. We found there were different sources of information – the books in the library, magazines, newspapers and the internet. We mostly made use of the internet, as there are different websites that offer instant access to the kinds of information we needed for the learning materials.

We already knew of the MyWage website, which is an internet/web based resource and a partner of the Decisions for Life (DFL) Campaign. We first looked at what information MyWage had that we could use for developing our materials and we then looked at what else we could add. We made use of the National Youth Service, National Youth Development Agency, Umsobomvu Youth Fund and local government websites. Whatever information we found and made use of in developing our materials,

we made sure that we referenced the source, as this gives recognition to the work of the original author/writer. This we learnt is a good code of practice in any kind of writing or research exercise. Before we put together the learning materials, we had to take into consideration the levels of literacy and the language mostly known to our target audience. This was mainly to establish how the target group would receive our materials and the levels of engagement we hoped to have. We discussed the possibility of having the materials produced in more than one language, but settled on English with an agreement that we would do translations in the forums where necessary. (Translating some of the materials might be possible in the future)

We had to think about the form in which we were going to provide the learning materials. We mainly used the following;

- Information packs/booklets where we provided an overall brief of each topic and then provided more detailed information for further reading
- Magazines, newspapers and colour pens for drawings and fun exercises, with the idea of encouraging creativity.

Learning materials are supposed to be easily understood, and are supposed to create an enabling learning environment in order for participants to freely participate to their maximum ability. Reflecting on your own learning as young women is an important starting point in understanding the learning needs of your target group.

“Making Ends Meet — the importance of a budget.”

- Arlene Serelina

I was part of the first DFL Public Library Forum at the Grassy Park library. As part of the DFL Campaign Team, one of my first tasks was to work out a budget and to make sure I had sufficient funds for the forum. The budget for the forum had to fit into the broader DFL budget. There was not a lot of money and I had to work within a minimal budget.

In our first meeting with the librarian we were told that we had to pay a fee to use the public library meeting room. Even though I had budgeted for the R150 the librarian requested, as a team we agreed that we should negotiate with the library and explain that we saw the forum as a service being provided to the community. The librarian agreed to waive the fee for the venue which meant that we had an extra R150 to use for the event. Even though it was not a huge amount it was an important process - we established a closer relationship with the library, and we also managed to save R150 to use for other expenses.

Printing of materials e.g. posters, pamphlets, booklets etc. is another cost that should be added to the budget for such an event. I did not have to handle the cash for this activity as the supporting organisation had the facilities to do the printing and they were able to invoice for the costs related to the printing.

Another organising and budgetary cost is catering. Our session was three hours long and as part of

creating a welcoming atmosphere we decided to give our participants snacks and juice. I looked at the different options and most economical way to do it. The amount of money I allocated for this was determined by the estimated amount of participant we were expecting at the library forum. This can be a bit tricky as the forums are public events and you can never be sure of the number of people who will attend.

Organising the forum and negotiating with the library can take a great deal of time. For the DFL Campaign Team members with full-time jobs it was not always easy to take off time to do the negotiations and planning. One way to address this could be to ask student volunteers or unemployed members of the team to assist, which would mean adding transport costs to the budget.

From this experience there are a few general things that one needs to keep in mind when organising an event like the DFL Public Library Forum. Firstly you need a budget; secondly you shouldn't accept the first amount that you are quoted - you need to get different quotes; thirdly try to negotiate for better prices by explaining what the purpose of the event is – in this way you are also popularising the event; and lastly, make sure that you keep all receipts.

“In life-without directions you will be lost.”

- Stephanie Lategan

In this article the writer speaks about Public Library Forums as safe spaces

Did you ever wish you could look into a mirror or read a map to find some sense of direction or to find an answer? Have you ever felt that the whole world is turned against you and you need some assistance? As young women we struggle to find support with the difficulties we face at work, home, church etc. When faced with making decisions about our lives we need support from comrades, community and our families.

How do I access or get the necessary support? Within DFL we are a group of women who are out there ready to give support, advice and help with referrals. These are the reasons that make the DFL an important campaign. Young women have the platform to freely speak; it is their “safe space”. For example, at work you might be sexually harassed by your boss and at home you could be facing the challenges of being the only breadwinner. At work you need to act very professionally and at home you need to be strong, you cannot cry because you must keep the family together. At DFL you can cry and scream it all out! We also do a therapeutic exercise called Tai Chi which helps the

body and mind to relax. The DFL Campaign Team will not necessarily be able to offer a job or give money, but as fellow young women we will give you our full support and encourage you to be part of DFL activities.

It is this spirit of support that we are taking into our library sessions. Our first step is for the DFL Campaign Team members to be able to work together, to communicate and share information with each other. In the library forums we recognise the importance of trusting and supporting each other. For example, if it seems that your partner is struggling with a presentation you can give her a smile or a “thumbs up” as signs of encouragement.

As the face of the trade union movement the message we want to bring out in the Public Library Forums is: “You never walk alone”. There is help and support out there. As trade union representatives we are just a phone call or email away. We want to inspire and encourage young women looking for work that they can have a future filled with confident decision making, a space to share their life lessons and experiences with others and the protection and support of others.



“The thread that got woven”

- Lauren Uppink

In this article the writer speaks about the creation of the Sexual Harassment booklet, a resource used in the Public Library Forums

There are many stories in this world, every one like the thousands of fine threads that are woven intricately together to form a rich beautiful tapestry. My story is just one of many threads, like all others that may seem insignificant when read alone. But when woven together, entwined with the stories of other women, it finds its purpose. My story has a distinctive colour that adds to the beauty of the final woven masterpiece, but is a similar quality and length to all others, without which, the tapestry would not exist.

Our personal stories, like the threads, may seem very different, but are all made from the same things. There are similarities in our stories that show us that in the beautiful chaos of being women, we can find small ways in which to relate. It may be a habit that our partners share, or a hobby we like to do, or it may be the way our boss brushes his hand against our arm. That is why, when we are brave enough to share our stories with other women, we search for the similarities. We look for them so that we can connect, share, identify or place ourselves in other women's shoes. When we are brave enough to do this we can offer advice, empathise or understand just enough to be a source of strength or support to each other.

Sex is traditionally a controversial topic. We don't like to talk about it, or we are told not to. Sex in biology class is one thing, but learning about the emotions and complexities of sex is not something we have free access to. It certainly was not something I spoke about much when I was younger. The physical act of love or lust between two breathing, feeling people contains so many emotions and is shielded by privacy that we find it hard to talk about. And this is when we consider sex as a good, fruitful, positive experience. If we can't find ways to talk about sex in a good way, how will women, or men for that matter, be able to talk openly and honestly about issues such as rape or sexual harassment?

When sex becomes a negative unwanted act, or we are threatened with unwelcome sexual attention,

the freedom to seek advice or comfort, or talk about sex at all becomes constrained and stifled.

Sexual harassment exists and is perpetuated because women just like me feel ashamed to have experienced unwanted sexual attention. If you're like me, you feel even more ashamed to talk about it. We ask ourselves "Should I feel flattered?", "Surely it is OK if my boss thinks I am attractive?" "Did I encourage it?" "Was it my fault?"

The women I know don't talk about sexual harassment because we don't know that other women have similar stories. We think that we are the first person to experience such a situation because our mothers, grandmothers, sisters and friends have supposedly never had them. But perhaps they did have them, but much like me, and maybe you, they were too ashamed to speak out.

The Decisions for Life Campaign Team developed a booklet on identifying and dealing with sexual harassment so that we could stop this cycle. We wanted to show young women that many of them have very similar stories. We realised that the most important thing to do when developing the booklet was to make sure that the stories within it were real; that readers could identify with the writers, and be encouraged that they too could tell their story.

Developing the booklet became a resource or tool for both the women writing it, and for those that would come to read it. To write and share our own stories showed us as women that we could be vulnerable, share our stories, and through sharing help others to share theirs.

I eventually told my story, one that I had never had the courage to tell. A story that I never dared whisper was now printed in ink. I found a way to allow my thread to be woven into the greater story that is the female experience. Woven among the stories of other women, I found that my story, and our collective story could be told, and that others too could find the strength and space to do the same.

“Don’t be alone - be part of the network.”

- Sofia Ludvigsson

As the DFL Cape Town Campaign Team we try to get feedback and keep in contact with participants in the Public Library Forums. We are considering starting a Facebook group with the name “DFL Cape Town” to popularise our activities. The Facebook group has the potential to exist long after an event actually takes place, helping to keep campaign alive and creating a safe space within the social media framework. To complement our email communication with participants in the library forums, we are setting up an

online space to post updated and relevant information, and to strengthen ways of keeping dialogue alive and providing support and encouragement. To be able to speak out about a topic, using for instance a “writing wall” in a blog forum or the “like button” on Facebook is a fast way of interacting for me as a young woman today. I can share my thoughts and show my standpoint, and all of this gives me a sense of being part of something bigger together with others.





Durban DFL Campaign team promotes “Workplace Wellness Campaign for young working women”

Many young working women face high levels of stress, unhealthy working environments, the constant threat of being sexually harassed, the dangers of substance abuse and generally a sense of feeling disempowered. Contract workers who are part of the DFL campaign speak about being expected to be available to work overtime whenever there is a need.

“A manager can approach you before you end your shift and insist that you must continue with another shift until the following morning. It is easy for one to work for 24 hours. If you turn down this request you are seen as either lazy or not serious about your job.

You could lose your job or if you refuse you might not be selected to work overtime ever again and the longer hours you work the more you can earn. The long hours have a serious impact on your health. The problem of pushing yourself to the limit is a common problem and even if you are pregnant you try to hide it.”

Living with HIV is another serious challenge:

“Due to the stigma attached to people living with HIV, women do not tell their employers that they

need to go for regular check-ups or even that they need to collect their medication from the local clinics. We end up defaulting on our medication and getting sick very often. When you are sick very often the employer then just dismisses you.”

The challenge of addressing both physical and psychological wellness in the workplace has been a consistent discussion in the DFL Campaign. It is in this context that on 20 August 2011 the Decisions for Life Durban Campaign Team launched a “Young Women’s Wellness Campaign” with a day of activities and techniques to assist young women to take control of their wellbeing in the workplace and in the home. The programme activities ranged from techniques to cope with daily workplace stress to dealing with HIV in the workplace and campaigning for young working women to take control of their bodies. The articles written by young women from the Durban DFL Campaign highlight some of the key features of the Wellness Campaign.

“Wellness is not only an absence of diseases.”

- *Nompilo Shange*

Wellness in the workplace is about physical, mental and psychological wellbeing. By participating in the DFL Wellness Campaign I feel I am dealing with daily challenges in the workplace and this is helping me. This does not mean that all my problems in the workplace are now resolved, but I feel happier and look forward to going to work. I work in a restaurant and I believe that a happy worker will be able to make a customer happy.

When working with customers' needs one has to be welcoming, nice and balanced. Customers come to the restaurant for different reasons. Some come because they are hungry and want to grab a quick meal and eat quietly without any interruption. Others come because they want to get out of the house, see people, eat and have a healthy conversation. It is difficult to reach these customers if you are unhappy and hate your work. As a waiter you are the first person they come into contact with when they enter the restaurant.

Some customers are so desperate for a conversation they immediately tell you all their frustrations and expect you to listen and engage with them. In most cases customers like this only expect you to listen, as they usually have their own answers to their own problems. It becomes difficult for you as a person to process this if you are also struggling with your own issues and you would also like to be listened to, especially in relation to your financial wellness.

As young women we work hard to earn our salaries, but in most cases we do not enjoy our salaries as we have many people dependent on this one salary. We

are forced into debt and we end up being unhappy at work because creditors are breathing down our necks. If employers realise that when employees are paid and treated well, we are more likely to be happy at work, and they will see that this will result in good performance in the workplace. The Wellness Day in August helped us understand the importance of knowing your own HIV status and we discussed how to encourage others to know their status. I now feel more equipped to discuss the issue of HIV with my colleagues, and to engage our management in organising wellness days for all employees. These can be the steps towards developing a HIV/AIDS policy in my workplace.

Both the employer and employee should take employee wellness seriously. The DFL Wellness Campaign is helping us to build good team spirit with our fellow workers. Through our DFL discussions we are able to assist our fellow workers if they feel they need someone to talk to or to get advice, and sometimes we are also able to counsel them. All of this helps to reduce stress and assists us in dealing with conflict in the workplace. Through the campaign we are creating a platform for employees to dialogue with the employer on things they do not like. For example, we are encouraging our fellow workers to tell the manager that they do not like the manner in which he speaks to them and in turn advise him to be polite and respectful to his employees. This is the recipe for a healthy working environment and good working relations. Wellness can mean many things! All these things are important in making both the employer and employee happy.

“Know your status, live positively.”

- Mary Dlamini

When we talk about knowing your status, people immediately assume that we are talking about HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the DFL Wellness Campaign is for young women to see the importance of knowing one's overall health status - and not just one's HIV/AIDS status.

The illnesses affecting us these days are mostly diagnosed by testing, scanning and checking. Therefore taking time to do these tests is important. Through the DFL Wellness Campaign we are trying to show employers that they can be proactive by setting up health facilities in the workplace. Our role as union members is to get employers to develop or review their current policies in order to ensure that wellness is reflected in the company policies in a manner that does not discriminate or marginalise workers. Our dream is to extend this campaign to other sectors in order to give all young women a chance to learn and live healthy lifestyles and to get employers to create conditions that promote healthy lifestyles. The infection and diseases affecting workers, especially young women and their families, can be managed or cured. Knowing your status can assist you to eat well, exercise and can motivate you to keep your stress level low. If you get diagnosed with diabetes, hypertension, depression or HIV before getting sick, it will be easier for you to manage the illness and live a positive life style. All chronic illnesses can be managed if treated and diagnosed early.

Through the DFL Wellness Campaign we, as trade union activists, are elevating the issue of wellness and encouraging young women to take care of themselves

and their bodies. We are encouraging young women to do pap smears and get tested for HIV and we are seeing proof that workers are willing to test. In our August Wellness Day we invited a young woman living with HIV/AIDS to give her testimony on living positively, and this was successful in encouraging other young women to test, as well as in challenging the issue of social stigma. I have learnt that when your status is known and discovered early you have an opportunity to lead a healthy lifestyle and in turn build a healthier family and community life. In the August event the SACTWU Worker Health Project gave us ideas on how we can encourage workers in the workplace to take responsibility for their health.

Since the August event we have also been actively promoting the femidom and breastfeeding as part of healthy living. Through the campaign unions are getting an opportunity to see the value of not labelling or stigmatising certain kinds of illnesses but of seeing the importance of dealing with wellness more generally. We are now also more aware of the need to deal with the issue of increasing substance abuse amongst young working women. The DFL space has been important in helping us raise issues about wellness in our unions.

In conclusion the DFL Wellness Campaign is a very important campaign as we are dealing with the lives of and bodies of individual workers. If we do not take care of our bodies and health we will not be able to work or take part in other trade union campaigns. Wellness needs to be taken seriously and made a priority. I wish to end with a slogan that says: “A person has one life - take care.”

“Shine like a blossoming flower.”

- Noxolo Mpinge

I used to be very shy. It was very hard for me to confront someone about anything. I used to suffer in silence because I did not like to show people that I was angry, even when they hurt me. The DFL and more particularly the focus on Wellness gave me an opportunity to find myself and learn from others. I no longer carry all the stress that I had. I push it away and bring in a positive energy that allows me to voice my issues - and today I shine like a blossoming flower as I do not internalise things and suffer alone in silence.

It is four years now since I became a young mother, a young worker and recently also a student and I do not get enough time to relax. If I did not participate in the DFL Campaign I would not have noticed that I am overloaded, as most women my age have to deal with the same load and are forced to cope with this pressure. Wellness is very important for me because wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices to support a more

successful existence. Being aware means that we are continuously seeking more information about how we can improve ourselves and our environment.

There are different types of wellness e.g. occupational, financial, medical, spiritual and social. Social wellness is about having positive interactions, enjoying being with others, helping others, feeling at ease during work and communicating your feelings and needs to others. To improve my social wellness I practice self-disclosure; I know my personal needs and I make a specific effort to talk to the people who are supportive to me. I have one body, one mind so I need social wellness. It helps me to connect with other people and share my stress with them, which helps me to release my stress. Thus everybody will see me smiling, happy and stress-free. I feel proud when I see a person who I helped also become a blossoming flower. “A candle never loses its light by lighting another candle.” Helping each other is a good thing.

“Standing Strong”

- Lungile Mbili

As a working person we spend a lot of time at work and it is like our second home away from home, a place where you should feel comfortable and happy. Having a Wellness Programme is not a luxury but something that you should have access to and be able to enjoy.

As the DFL we support healthy lifestyles in the workplace and this can include your financial health. As a young person you can find yourself in debt and you might need assistance. This would be part of workplace wellness. A Wellness Programme should include services like medical screenings, weight management, HIV counselling, testing and treatment, pap smears and also treatment for depression as our stressful lives often lead us into depression.

A Wellness Programme in the workplace benefits your mind, body and soul enabling you to continue with your journey in life. You are also more likely to work productively and freely. You are able to deal with your problems and you are more likely to focus on your job. Wellness is especially important if you deal with customers every day because when you are worried or stressed you get irritated and this leads to bad relations with the customers. If you have a Wellness Programme in your workplace you could get proper support and this will assist you at work. Our wellbeing is very important. Each one of us is special and we need to take care of ourselves. We are inviting you to take care of yourself and join our DFL Wellness Campaign.

“Mastering the basics to live a stress free life.”

- Phumla Sibiya

Wellness should be put onto the agendas of all the trade unions. I would like young women to enjoy the same awareness that we are experiencing as part of the DFL Wellness Campaign. It is very important to take care of your body, as it carries you while you perform your duties at work. As women we do not put time aside to relax, socialise and visit the clinic for routine check-ups because of our busy schedules. We jump when our children are sick and take them to the doctor - but if we are sick we only look for treatment when it is very late.

The August Wellness Day taught us that we need to start taking care of ourselves before we can care for others. We need to master this basic rule. We do very little to prevent and take care of ourselves. We heard testimony from Thulile Motsamai about living a positive lifestyle. She was very good at promoting this, and after her testimony I felt confident to do the HIV test. Her story as a young worker helped us see that HIV is not a death sentence and that there is life after HIV. She encouraged those who tested negatively to ensure that they stay negative.

At the Wellness Day and at follow up activities we also discussed how as young women we can use the femidom, which can help prevent both HIV and pregnancy. With this information we are learning to negotiate safe sex and we feel strong in our belief that that we are the owners of our bodies. In my workplace we have approached our manager and asked him to procure femidoms for the workplace as we have a lot of women workers. He promised to look into it in the near future.

In my working life I work with a boss who does not respect us as workers and as women. He does his

best to make us feel useless and stupid. Participating in the DFL Campaign gave us the strength and the wisdom to approach him. He has not changed, but has learnt to think before he speaks. This has made going to work easier - I used to hate waking up and going to work because I knew that I was not valued.

Feeling more valued means that I now know that life is important. I wake up early every day to examine my breast to check for lumps – I am taking care of my wellness.

Wellness also includes issues like financial fitness, an issue that cannot be addressed by doctors and nurses. As young women our attraction to a glamorous lifestyle can make us get into debt. If we get credit from a department store we use it all and do not think about our budget. Most of the time we buy things we do not need and cannot afford because we like looking nice. Sometimes the stress we have is caused by the debt we find ourselves in. This is a challenge that we need to continue addressing.

I think employers and trade unions need to bring wellness closer to the workers in order to ensure that we are a healthy workforce. As workers we also need to decide what kind of life we want to live. Until we are able to get employers to bring these services closer to us we need to make time to take routine check-ups in order to live longer and to be healthy. It is important to know your status in order to know what steps you should take in order to take care of your wellness. We are planning to open a website for young women to discuss issues of wellness. It can be very effective as most young women enjoy social networks. Don't let real life pass you by, and remember we only live once. Don't only live for today, think about your tomorrow.



Johannesburg DFL Team promotes “The Right to Choose to use a Femidom” Campaign

“Speaking about sex, sexuality and the choices we make over our body in a union co-ordinated space is a unique experience and helps us feel that the union is interested in our needs as young working women”.¹

The right to choose to use a femidom has become a rallying cry in the DFL Campaign. Campaigning has included education and awareness-raising of the benefits of femidoms for young women. We

are also engaging managers in companies and public health institutions about the importance of popularising and making femidoms accessible. Lobbying for femidoms to be made available in workplaces in the same way that male condoms are made available and placing this on the collective bargaining agenda is another angle to the campaign. We see this as one way of putting “young women’s issues” on the collective bargaining agenda.

1. View of a participant from the Durban DFL Campaign Team

“We are sexual beings.”

- *Mohau Mabena*

In belonging to the DFL Campaign I have realised that we are sexual beings, sexual beings that need to look after ourselves at all times. Through the campaign, as young woman we are more aware of our rights, especially our right to make choices about our lives and about taking charge of our own sexuality. With the femidom campaign we began to see how you can respect yourself, love yourself and get your partner to see that you will not be careless with your life. We carry many responsibilities as young women or as girls and one of these responsibilities is to be free from sexually related diseases, STI's, HIV and unwanted pregnancies. In the olden days our mothers were not having protected sex because many of them did not have access to prevention methods like femidoms, and ended up with many children. Today we have more choices.

Being part of the DFL Campaign, as a woman I am making sure that the femidom is popularised. I am

spreading the message that we have the right to be safe. At home I am making sure that the girls in my own family carry femidoms in their bags so that they always have access to a femidom.

In our trade unions attention is given to male condoms. Male condoms are found in some of our companies, clinics and hospitals. I am part of a trade union and we have started having meetings where we discuss female condoms so that we can start giving them the same attention as the male condoms.

As this new generation we have to protect ourselves. Safety is the key to avoid the statistics of women with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Women take charge. It's in your hands.

“Choosing a femidom is also about choosing to be healthy.”

- *Palesa Mokodutlo*

As woman we must stand up and find answers to our many challenges and that is why we have the Decisions for Life Campaign. I decided to take a turn in my life when I joined the campaign. I am who I am because of it. As a young working woman I have decided to change my life by living healthy. I have realised that prevention is better than cure. I have to start by looking after myself. Through DFL I have become more conscious of this, particularly when we started doing exercises like Tai Chi and talking about eating properly. I took this seriously and began to understand how you can avoid chronic diseases like high blood pressure.

Being healthy is also about making choices – for example, the choice of getting pap smears, mammograms and using a femidom. In this way you can deal with cervical cancer, breast cancer and HIV. My concern is that our government does not care a lot about us as women because since the femidom was introduced it has not been well distributed or advertised, while the male condom is well advertised. We have health facilities, pamphlets and a government health calendar with days focusing on different health issues and we need to use this and ensure that our unions are involved in these activities.

2. http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_does_'Qui_facit_per_alium_facit_per_se'_mean

“Educating myself before educating others.”

- Julia Msibi

Information and understanding are key to everything we do in our lives. Educating myself and educating others means that we have clear information and an understanding of what we are doing. The DFL workshops and discussions have been very important in assisting me to feel comfortable with the femidom. As union leaders we try to be responsible and accountable for everything we do. Promoting the femidom is part of taking responsibility for ourselves and our bodies and encouraging other young women workers to do the same. We are learning about the femidom, we are experiencing it, enjoying it and most importantly talking about it - this is what it means to be both educated as well as to educate others.

As union members we cannot do all the education ourselves, and so we are building relationships and partnerships with organisations and institutions that have expertise on the femidom e.g. the clinics and hospitals. Together with these institutions we are assisting young people to understand, to be familiar with and to feel comfortable with the femidom.

Our regular DFL meetings assist us in monitoring the campaign. We are focussing on the choices and decisions young women make and encouraging them to see the femidom as a choice.



“The Power of Change.”

- *Busisiwe Mnisi*

Change is about taking ownership, making a decision for life and doing this through the power in you. In this way you can make changes in the trade union, in the workplace and you can change the way people think. This is the power of the trade union-led Decisions for Life Campaign.

Women participating in the DFL Campaign find themselves in a good space and it is in this space that we discuss issues like the femidom, what it is, how to make it more popular and how to share our experience and thoughts about the femidom with our fellow young women workers and colleagues.

One of my fellow DFL comrades did a presentation on the femidom at the shopping mall where she works. 80 women workers from the shopping mall attended the presentation and participated in the discussions. She started by speaking of her personal experience of using the femidom and women found this very interesting and started engaging enthusiastically. At this presentation two other women reported having used the femidom. After talking about her own experience she asked women what they feared most about using the femidom and they had this to say:

- That the femidom makes lots of noise during sex.
- You have to insert it a long time before having sex.
- It is not attractive.
- The lubricant has a smell.
- It is not user-friendly.

The rest of the discussion then focussed on learning to use the femidom and making it something attractive and erotic. We spoke about the misconceptions people have of the femidom, like the need to insert it long before having sex, that you can wash it and use it more than once and that it has a bad smell. The women at the presentation had a chance to touch, feel and smell the femidom and for many of them it was their first experience of engaging with the femidom. The discussion then shifted to other sexual and reproductive health issues like pap smears and the prevention of cervical cancer.

Through other trade union activities, our women’s councils and in our congresses we can demonstrate how as young women we have the power to control our own bodies and the power to deal with our health and life choices. We can do this by introducing the DFL Femidom Campaign into our unions. Women can often feel undermined in union activities but through the beautiful work of the DFL Campaign we can find our strength.

In our DFL meetings we do Tai Chi exercises to help us find ourselves and this can help to prepare us when we participate in union activities. When we speak about the DFL Femidom Campaign we should not be ashamed of voicing what we believe in. We must break this fear! Our trade unions have newsletters and pamphlets, where we receive updates. Part of breaking our fear is that we are writing about our campaigns in this union media.

“The femidom — a condom for women.”

- Bertha Mathoko

I am a member of the DFL Campaign and through the campaign I have learnt about the femidom. The femidom is a condom for woman. It is safe, comfortable and protects you as a woman from unwanted pregnancies, HIV and STIs.

As women we have many responsibilities and we need to be able feel free to take charge of our lives, live a healthy life and not worry about diseases and unwanted pregnancies. As a DFL woman I believe that prevention is better than cure; while we are busy running these campaigns women will be able to learn much more about health issues. Part of our work as a trade union is to approach our government

to fund and market the female condom in the same way that the male condom is funded and marketed.

Awareness-raising is an important part of our campaign and we need to keep doing this in our unions and also in companies where there might be many young women. Sometimes our awareness-raising deals with simple issues like how to open the femidom packet, how to make sure that the femidom has not expired and how to insert the femidom properly. All our awareness-raising activities normally end with contacts where further information can be provided, or where young women can access the femidom.





Durban DFL Campaign Team's struggle for “Decent Work and Employment Contracts”

“My contract — my solid rock.”

- Nosipho Mpinge

I had been working for three years for the same company and in all this time I did not sign an employment contract with the company. I did not even know what an employment contract looked like. It was only when one of my friends introduced me to this group of young working woman in the Decisions for Life Campaign that I realised that I had a right to have an employment contract. The Durban Campaign Team started a campaign promoting the employment contract. It was in this campaign that I saw an example of an employment contract for the first time.

When I realised that I had a right to a contract I decided to do something about my situation. I went to my employer to request my employment contract. The contract that the employer gave me was for a

six month period. The first thing I did was to read through it. I reread it until I felt satisfied that it covered all my needs and by signing my contract that day it became the terms and conditions of my life at work. In the contract it explained my breaks, my working hours, my maternity leave, my leave days, my salary, my duties and my benefits such as health insurance, leave days and study leave.

I now also know that there are different kinds of contracts, and the one that I have signed is a fixed contract which states when the contract starts and when it will end. Now I know an employment contract is like a solid rock that no one can break. not even my employer.

“Never burn your bridges.”

- Nelly Mbili

In life never only think about your situation today. It is important that you also think about your future. It is good practice that you always say a proper goodbye - in this way people will miss you and your reputation will remain intact. Life can turn round and you might find yourself back at the same workplace you just left. If you were in breach of your contract you will find it difficult to get employed again.

Sometimes as an employee you find yourself in a difficult situation and you think absconding

is the solution. But you forget that absconding can limit your opportunities of enjoying your benefits like your UIF or your employer's contribution towards your provident fund.

It is our duty as a union to educate our members that if they want to leave their job it is important to follow the right channels. In this way you have left a good impression of yourself, you could possibly get a good reference and you also have full rights to your benefits.

“What is a contract of employment?”

- Phumelele Mngadi

A contract of employment is the agreement between an employer and an employee. Every employer is required by law to provide an employee with a written contract of employment. It must be done no later than the very first day of commencement of employment. It is very important for an employee to first read, and then sign the contract. This vital document regulates the terms and conditions of employment between the employer and the employee. This contract will state what the employee is entitled to receive in

terms of company policy, company benefits and labour legislation and how the employee needs to behave in the company. The contract states when the employer can take disciplinary action against an employee. It also gives the employee a platform to deal with any unhappiness in the workplace.

After you have signed a contract of employment you have assurance that you are employed.

“Understanding different types of contracts.”

- *Nontokozi Khumalo*

In our DFL Campaign in Durban we started our work on employment contracts by discussing the definition of a contract, and then moved on to discuss the different types of contracts. We realised the urgency of taking up this campaign when in November 2011 we held a workshop with call centre workers and found that most of the young women working in call centres had no clarity or understanding of what a contract is.

Drawing on our discussions and using the DFL Contract pamphlet we identified the following types of contracts:

Fixed contracts: Whereby the terms and conditions are clearly written and the period is clearly stipulated in the contract. This type of contract is used for permanent, contractual and temporary jobs. For example municipal heads of departments are given contracts with a fixed term like a two or five year contract. In permanent jobs you get fixed term contracts saying you are permanently employed and termination will be under certain conditions.

Indefinite contracts: These are when there is no fixed period - you only get a start date and the contract is left open as regards the end date. From my experience this is the kind of contract found in the call centre. For this type of contract it is important to make sure that the contract is indefinite for both parties i.e. both employer and employee because most of the time the employer knows when they will end the contract.

Seasonal contract: This is whereby you become a seasonal worker and you only work during a peak season for the employer; for example when you work on a farm or in retail when you work during peak holidays. It is important that your contract is clear on whether you can re-apply for the job for the next season or if you can come back automatically. There is an example of orange farming at a farm in Durban-Marianhill whereby workers did not have

a clause in their contract which stated whether they needed to re-apply or just come back to work each year. For two years they came back and got their jobs but in the third year they were told not to come back because the new management felt that they needed to get new employees.

It is also important to note that verbal contracts are just as valid as a written contract, but the difficulty is that these contracts are hard to prove if they are at any point contested. Fixed, permanent or a temporary contracts can be communicated verbally. Often you find domestic workers have verbal contracts.

As the trade union CWU we had an interesting case in the Durban Labour Court in relation to CWU vs Thlalefang Placement Agency, where the placement agency tried to use as their defence that no contract was ever signed with employees. The judge ruled referring to the *facit* contract - meaning that even though no contract was signed the employer was responsible for ensuring that the employee signs a contract. “*Qui facit per alium facit per se*” means “He who acts through another, acts himself.” The concept is a legal parallel to “*respondeat superior*”, which means that “a superior person (such as an employer) is fully responsible for the actions of a subordinate person (such as an employee)”.²

With the DFL Contracts pamphlet, after understanding and getting clarity on types of contracts you can then use the information to see if the contract you are signing relates to the type of job or industry you are planning to work in. For example, in our Decisions for Life Call Centre Campaign in Durban one of the candidates said: “If I knew the different types of contracts there are I would know what to look for in a telesales call centre agent contract. I signed a simple contract without clarity on how I will be paid and ended up being paid based on sales. As a result I made no basic salary.”

“So in summary”!

- *Hlengiwe Makhathini*

What is a contract? Not sure? This is often our story so please make a note of this and write it down!

- It is the agreement between the employer and employee that you are part of the company.
- Try to read it carefully, ask questions, make sure you understand it and then sign it before you start working.
- When you sign the contract you will know that you are fully employed by the company.
- You will also know all the conditions of work at the company.
- You have a place to go if there is a problem.
- You know your benefits.
- You have something to check to see if the employer is doing what he/she promised.
- Some employers force the employees to work overtime, such as working on public holidays. This may or may not be in your contract.
- You have the right to agree (or not agree) to overtime and you must check at what rate you are being paid.
- Your contract will tell you when you are supposed to be paid.





Participant's thoughts about the writing process

Creating a safe space

"I feel more at ease now about writing. I have more confidence in my writing knowing that I won't be judged for the way I write or for what I wrote. Therefore I am proud of myself."

"This process of writing was a bit nerve-wracking - just to think that I must write something and it's going to be read by quite a lot of people. What was encouraging was the way we were put at ease with what our fears were. It was written down and that

made me realise that it was not that hectic. I thought to myself why not write, and see what other people think is in my writing? Working in the group made it very easy, because as women we supported each other and we encouraged each other and realised it was okay if we got stuck. The fact that we as women supported each other gave me encouragement not to fear writing. Hearing other people's experiences with writing made me appreciate what I have."

Using the free writing technique

"Free write has improved my writing skills. It has given me the confidence to write without any fears. It is a very good exercise that gets one's brain to work and also to have a focus. I have learned the openness in free writing, you write exactly what comes to your mind and do not analyse everything. It also tells the person that will read your essay that you were honest when writing. Free writing is a good and beautiful way of getting to know what I really have in my mind as a person. I am very excited about free writing and wish we could do it often to get used to writing with confidence."

"I got the chance to really be me in the writing I was doing, even though at first I

was scared and a little clueless about what I was to do or what was expected of me."

"Free writing really opened my life. I came here without knowing about it. I was asking myself where to start. It really opened a door that was closed and now I can see the light. I thought writing was something that was so difficult, but when you're busy writing with your pen alone in your own space everything just comes out and you're really writing freely. It shows that you can write anything that comes in your mind and you don't have to think much because you put your mind and spirit into whatever you are writing. I am so happy that I came to this workshop because now I can see and feel that I can really do anything."

The joy of working together

"At first there was a lot of hesitation and holding back. However once we started it revealed what we thought and everything just flowed. What made it easier was when we shared our writing with a partner or group. And the comments we received from them were really helpful. It became clearer what free writing is all about. "

"The session when we grouped into pairs and read our writing felt great. You think afterwards, was that really my work? Could I have written something so freely? The empowerment of reading

it out aloud also did justice to the writing and this is something I will continue doing. I feel that now I will start writing in my journal every day like I did when I was young. Free writing gives me the power and enthusiasm to continue my journal daily!"

"I was happy and energised to be in this space. I am taking away with me writing skills, courage, empowerment and my new self. It's very nice and encouraging to know that we have such a big support structure and I leave this room knowing that I'm not alone. I have sisters and friends in three provinces."

Writing creatively

"When I look at how my story turned out it had elements of what I thought I had wanted to talk about and at the same time took quite a different path. This was due to the creative process which included the metaphors and symbols, the beats, and reading our prep work to others. Also the free writing process allowed us to tap into ourselves in a way that allowed me to access my more creative, less conscious, less

analytical side – which prevented me from relying so wholeheartedly on my analytical regimented process of constructing writing. In a way I suppose this process allowed me to follow a process of creating a place of writing before refining it. Rather than constructing a piece of writing. It has definitely given me a different view and methodology for telling stories."

The skills I am leaving with

"The workshop has prepared me to go back to my union and talk about writing with my colleagues. Writing usually stresses me out a lot."

"I feel like I can write my own life story. The writing exercises have really given me a new insight into how I look at my writing. I have realised that writing is more than taking minutes and reporting on my work. It doesn't have to end there. I can use my writing to share something (e.g. my feelings, my experiences). The workshop meant that I can start writing, go over it and refine it. I'm really impressed by my final re-write. I didn't think I could do it but I did."

"When I come to the first day of the writing workshop I still had some fears about writing because deep down

in my subconscious I thought there was some judge who will judge my writing. One of the exercises was to speak about what our fears are, and this helped. Secondly, we did a free writing exercise where we had to imagine it's just me alone who is writing and no one will look at it. It gave me a lot of confidence."

"This workshop means a lot to me as it has helped me release many bad habits, such as attending an event and being there in the room as a person, but letting my mind go elsewhere. Another habit I broke was being able to leave my worries where I came from. Another habit I managed to break was opening up rather than bottling everything inside."

Telephone: 021-447 1677 **Facsimile:** 021-447 9244

E-mail: lrs@lrs.org.za
No. 7 Community house
41 Salt River Road
Salt River
Cape Town
South Africa
www.lrs.org.za

DECISIONS FOR LIFE CAMPAIGN

www.mywage.co.za or Labour Research Service on 021 447 1677