

## THE OBS SOCIAL ISSUES JOURNEY

*"Housed residents blame us for the crime."*

*"There are more and more people coming to live on the streets of Obs because they are being fed every day."*

*"The litter from those living on the streets is disgraceful."*

*"Homelessness is not a crime but the result of a failure in society."*

*"Those living on the streets are addicts, they need help."*

*"I don't feel safe in the public spaces of Observatory any more."*

*"It is not safe to live on the streets – I have been raped three times."*

*"There are so many people with serious mental health issues in Obs – because of proximity to mental healthcare service providers – but why don't they help these people?"*

*"There will always be poor people."*

*"The system has failed us all."*

*"What is happening in Obs is just a reflection of what is going on in wider society."*

*"I pay my rates and taxes and I don't like my neighbourhood looking like a refugee camp."*

These are just some of the voices that are heard in the diverse neighbourhood of Observatory – perhaps you also have an opinion that is not described above?

Observatory has always been known as somewhat alternative – and on 23<sup>rd</sup> October we did the alternative thing: we called a community meeting to discuss social issues in Obs, with a view to listening to all the voices and to coming up with a way forward ....perhaps even an innovative alternative to the usual talk / talk / quick fix solution / fizzle out and back into the same story again approach.

So, with the 36 people present at the Community Centre – and with the help of independent facilitator Andrew Boraine - we discussed going on a journey together. We agreed on some values and principles; we agreed that we needed an independent facilitator to manage the logistics of the journey; we agreed that Obs residents (both formal and informal) are all invited on this journey, that an Advisory Group would be formed to support the facilitator and we agreed that Obs residents were committed to making our neighbourhood a great place – where safety, respect, responsibility and team work were the order of the day.

Journeys take preparation. The first Advisory Group meeting is going to be held on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021 at 11h00 - 12h00 at the Community Centre. This group of Obs residents will advise the facilitator, communicate with residents etc. As the group is currently being formed, others are welcome to join.

Most journeys also require people to take action – so the first Action Group meeting will be held on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021 from 10h00 -11h00. We hope to act on a few of the suggestions stemming from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Oct meeting. Again please come along if you are interested in being involved in local actions tackling social issues.

All Obs residents are invited to join the journey. If you want further information, contact Carolyn Neville (carolyn@neville.za.net) or Kimon Bisogno (obsbastakitchen@gmail.com).

The train is moving – don't miss out on the exciting journey ahead!!

Here are the notes from the community meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2021:

### **Proposal for an Obs-led journey to address social issues in inclusive, fair and sustainable ways**

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These notes are a reflection of discussions held at a community meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2021. The meeting – attended by about 36 people – was convened by a small group of members from the community, including from the OCA and OBSID. It was facilitated by independent facilitator Andrew Boraine.

#### **Starting a journey**

These preliminary discussions are the beginning of a journey in which we hope many more people will become involved as we work towards finding solutions to various social issues in Obs. These notes are therefore the ideas of people at that meeting, but we expect them to develop and change as others get involved. People – and local organisations and businesses - may join in the journey as they would like to. The idea is to both consult broadly within Obs – and beyond – as well as to take actions together as we address local social issues.

To ensure balance and fairness, the proposal is that our journey is facilitated by **an independent outsider** who will work with an **Advisory Group** made up of Observatory residents. The Advisory Group's task will be to agree on objectives, design a roadmap, assist with fact-finding and mapping of stakeholders in Observatory and in the wider environment, guide the work of the facilitator, ensure accountability and help communicate with stakeholders.

In addition there will be **various action groups** which focus on particular issues. In this way residents can work on issues that interest them – and get to know people with similar interests.

And, of course, there will be various communications about the progress being made so residents who are not directly involved can **keep informed**.

At the meeting, the participants indicated in which ways they would like to be involved – and we intend that others who were not at the meeting do so too as the journey gets going.

## **The journey**

### **Motivation:**

A once-off public meeting, where everyone airs opposing views, is not a constructive way to solve problems. What is required is a balanced and inclusive journey (process) to arrive at fair, sustainable, and lasting solutions for all Observatory residents.

### **Aims of the proposed journey:**

The aims of the journey are as follows:

- To develop a shared understanding of the issues (both the symptoms and the root causes).
- To identify a common agenda (things that matter to everyone) so that Obs residents, despite possible differences, can work together to design and deliver agreed solutions that benefit everyone.
- To translate dialogue into action, because working together is the best way to build trust in action.
- To promote a shared inclusive Obs identity.
- To create space to reflect, learn and adjust the route of the journey and the actions along the way.

### **Values**

A journey together works best if we travel with shared principles and values. Those at the meeting identified the following as values they would like during our consultations and working together:

- Everyone is a resident, whether formally or informally housed
- Journey to be driven by Obs residents
- Inclusive
- Diversity – and recognition that difference is okay
- Sense of community
- Goodwill
- Respect each other
- Human dignity / Restoring dignity
- Fairness
- Caring
- Feel safe (during the journey)
- Honest communication and transparency
- Simplify communication to make it accessible for all
- Listen deeply

- Recognition that there is no “one size fits all”
- Search for the middle ground – compromises may be required
- Open to innovation (new ideas and new ways of doing things)
- Confidentiality around people’s stories
- Turn dialogue into action (make progress)

### **Issues to consider**

The following issues were raised at the meeting – but, again, are an initial set of ideas to which we expect other issues to be added.

- Grow the process over time; anyone can join the journey and come on board at any point.
- The proposed Advisory Group is not the only way to participate in the journey. The process will also require action and working groups.
- Map stakeholders in Observatory to ensure full participation.
- Small groups are better to be able to hear all voices.
- Communicate the proposed journey in a number of different (and simple) ways and obtain feedback.
- There will be a need to engage and influence stakeholders in the wider system (city-wide policies, politics, laws, regulations, etc.) along the way.
- It is helpful if there is a shared vision amongst participants at the beginning of the journey. But often, at the beginning, there may be many competing and contradictory visions. Don’t let this stop the journey from starting. Use the journey itself to build a shared vision along the way.
- Seek commonalities and work with Ubuntu.

### **Take action**

And finally a brainstorm of things that Obs residents can do now produced the following ideas:

- Develop a community database to raise awareness of what is on offer (For example: service providers are being listed on [obswhatson.org](http://obswhatson.org)).
- Recognise that “I” / “we” must act and do what we can.
- Organise community events and activities to create a sense of community.
- Provide emotional support for Obs residents.
- Hold debates within the community about how safety affects all residents.
- Create a Peace Garden.
- Engage in food growing in Obs.
- Encourage various meal providers collaborate and align their programmes.
- Sanitation issues: provide
  - rubbish bags and more frequent rubbish bag collection;
  - water to residents living on Village Green;
  - access to showers.
- Fire safety issues: provide
  - tools to fight fires inc extinguishers;
  - training on how to fight fires;
  - guidelines regarding fire safety issues.
- Set up a depot to collect eco bricks; use eco bricks in constructing shelters.
- Provide access to a computer for job hunting; increase access to library computers.
- Offer workshops on work / career opportunities; assist with job hunting / writing CVs; offer mentoring.
- Provide skills training within the community or link with organisations that provide skills training.

We hope to action some of these straight away.

### **Next steps**

The next steps are to convene two initial meetings:

- of those who would like to be involved in actions; and
- those who would like to be part of the Advisory Group.

We will contact those who indicated an interest in participating in either of these - but invite anyone else who is interested to attend. They will be held on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> November in the Obs Community Centre:

- Action groups: 10:00-11:00
- Advisory Group: 11:00 – 12:00