

“#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety” Overview of a social media initiative championed and owned by Youth

Background to the initiative

Young people are the future of a country. However, young people can also turn into a volatile group, engaging in risky behaviour or becoming perpetrators of violence. Violence by young people has become a major concern in South Africa. If young people are not given the chance to grow up with a vision for a positive future, the opportunity for productive work and an income, or to take a positive role within their communities, many young people are driven into a cycle of violence and criminality. Yet, it is important to acknowledge that young people are not born violent. To the contrary, they have a huge potential to drive positive change. As social entrepreneurs, local heroes, youth leaders or politicians young people have the power to become advocates for change. The current National Development Plan (NDP) for South Africa, in its chapter on “Building safer communities,” places emphasis on active citizen involvement and co-responsibility, especially of youth, in addressing and resolving the root causes of violence and crime.

“#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety”¹, is an initiative *that is about strengthening* young people who are empowered to positively influence their vision of life and further their career paths. The initiative is aiming to explore the potential of **new media** to enable young people to engage in political processes. It is furthermore about

activating youth’s motivation and enhance their skills to be agents of change for safer communities. The initiative is supported by the “Inclusive Violence and Crime Prevention for Safer Public Spaces Programme (VCP)² and local key partners such as the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (DoCS), the South African Police Service (SAPS) and Community Police Forum (CPF).

“The concept”



In the Gauteng Province, a unique model has been developed over the last 15 years to specifically mobilise and involve young people in violence and crime prevention, in the form of **Youth Crime Prevention Desks (YCPD)**³. These volunteer-based structures, based at police stations, were introduced as a joint initiative of the Gauteng Provincial Department of Community Safety and the South African Police Service (SAPS) focusing on furthering education and empowerment of young people addressing the pressing issues of increasing crime and violence in South Africa’s communities.

The *main objective* of “#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety” was to strengthen the

²Find out more:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RvnQdnvRjY&feature=youtu.be>

³ Find out more:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_8kNR-5ViY&feature=youtu.be

¹ The young people participating in this initiative came up with this name after a brainstorm session during the Kick-Off Workshop 4-6 February 2014.

effectiveness of YCPD structures by utilising the interest of young people in information and communication technology (ICT) and social media to promote the work of the YCPD, generate dialogue between the youth and government and develop their skills in using new technology. The innovative use of social media platforms and a broadened access to information through ICT (e.g. smart phones) showcased great potential to enhance the participation of the youth in democratic processes. It also developed their skills further and built strong, resilient citizens, who are able to engage meaningfully in society and compete successfully on the job market. **"#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety"** formed part of a global pilot initiative implemented in two YCPD clusters in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, South Africa, namely Tembisa and Katlehong. Over a period of 8 months (until August 2014) this initiative:

- empowered youth desk members to effectively use social media to strengthen communication amongst themselves and with the wider local youth community
- strengthened the representation and engagement of youth in local government safety policy-making and planning processes through the innovative use of social media
- facilitated dialogue in which representatives of local government engaged with youth desk members and young people in order to improve local crime and violence prevention policies/plans.

Media experts were brought on board to facilitate the workshops and mentor the participants throughout the project duration. A monitoring and evaluation system was put in place.

This **video** (<http://youtu.be/jlvxiZh0Bsc>) is a snap-shot to provide better insight into the initiative.



The #EKSE Team at the Kick-Off Workshop

How far #EKSE has reached

As a pilot, **14** Youth Desk stations (incl. Provincial) and **31** Youth Desk members were part of the #EKSE initiative and received communications- and social media training over the past 8 months. However, across Gauteng, there are approx. **2000** Youth Desk members spread over the five regions of Sedibeng District, Ekurhuleni Metropolitan, West Rand, Johannesburg Metropolitan and Tshwane Metropolitan. In regular meetings, the #EKSE members are sharing their acquired knowledge with their peers broadening the initiative's reach immensely.

#EKSE Youth Crime Prevention Desk members were participating in **2** radio shows so far. Kasie FM in Katlehong has a listenership of approx. **177 000 listeners**. Voice of Tembisa reaches approx. **120 000 listeners**.

Organising skill trainings, awareness campaigns, drug and substance abuse prevention talks, school searches, a visit to a local old-age home and social sport events are activities implemented by the



#EKSE youth desk members since the project's inception. Tembisa reached more or less 500 community members, mostly youth, while approx. 300 people were involved and reached through events in Katlehong.

A Tweet-reach report in June states that the #sm4ycpd (that is the hashtag established by the #EKSE group and stands for #social media for youth crime prevention desk) has reached 2884 accounts and has received 5364 impressions (views). The tweet up chat at the 3rd Workshop received 310 tweets and Retweets in total in just 1 hour. 1902 people in total liked the Youth Desk stations participating in #EKSE so far.

Marching to Madiba Magic

Prior to International Mandela Day on the 18th of July, the #EKSE! My Voice, My Safety participants collected #67Ideas on how to make their communities safer. They used Facebook, WhatsApp, Mxit as well as face-to-face dialogues to bring together many opinions from their fellow community members.

During the last workshop in May, Tembisa cluster voted the clean-up of Motheong Park as their favourite idea. Katlehong decided that painting and cleaning-up the Illinge Secondary School would be their contribution to Mandela Day. Both clusters agree that these projects however should be more **sustainable** and not only done once a year. As a result, they decided to regularly engage in up-keeping activities on these chosen projects.

The implementation of both ideas was beyond successful in Tembisa and Katlehong. Tembisa Cluster Youth Crime Prevention Desk was joined by dozens as

they marched to the rhythms of the International Brass Band which set off from the police station and made their way to Tembisa's Motheong Park. They cleaned-up and reclaimed the park for the community – a space that criminals had taken over. The youth had great support from SAPS, the Department of Community Safety, Ekurhuleni Municipality and private businesses who were all on board and contributed on the day.



Also Katlehong Cluster Youth Crime Prevention Desk members had their work cut out. The school they chose was in dire need of a scrub-up – never mind a clean-up. There was graffiti everywhere and the walls were filthy. Cluster Chairperson Thoko Radebe and her team had searched high and low to organise equipment for the clean-up. They had support from the school's principal, the ward councillor as well as a local company that sponsored the paint. The team also roped in the Ekurhuleni authorities to supply gardening equipment to clean-up overgrown bushes in the schoolyard and even convinced them to donate bottled water to ward off dehydration on the day. However, the heroes of the day were the community members who came out in their numbers to support the Youth Desk.





Mxit Reach on board

#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety has started a partnership with Mxit Reach, an NGO that is using the innovative technology built by the South African-created mobile social network Mxit. Their goal is to provide tailor-made mobile solutions for servicing community needs.

CEO Andrew Rudge has met all the #EKSE members during the last workshop where the idea developed to build an App that can serve young people in the communities to find solutions to the safety issues they are faced with. The 1st step was a brainstorming session with Mxit Reach and all the partners to discuss various features and functionalities of the App. The creative minds of Mxit Reach are currently busy developing a few solutions to present to the #EKSE!-Team at the end of August. This App is aimed at being inclusive serving the safety sector as a whole including all relevant stakeholders and youth.

Celebrating **#EKSE! My Voice, My Safety** with a Final Learning Event

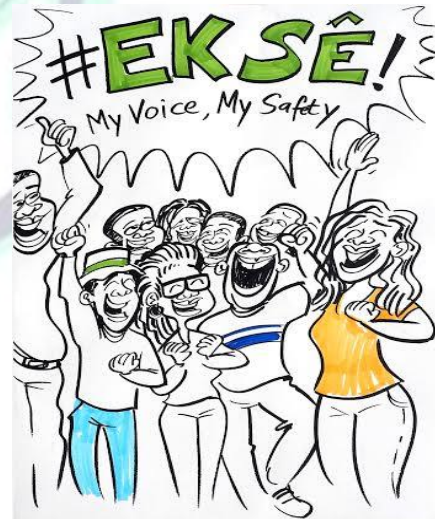
The initial pilot phase for #EKSE ends at the end of August 2014. Having in mind further roll out of the pilot, the project's

Steering Committee and the workshop participants are hosting a final Learning Event on the **22nd of August** at the

Gilloolys Farm in Johannesburg. The main objectives of this event are to

- showcase the achievements and learnings over the past year
- Celebrate the completion of the new media training by #EKSE Youth Desk members
- Introduce initiative and results thereof to high-level politicians and initiate further roll out

The event is set out to be *different, innovative, interactive* and not-to-be-missed. An exhibition space will allow visitors to explore the project's journey and get an insight into all the activities. A panel discussion and Tweet Up on the topic of youth and violence prevention will be the highlight of the afternoon. It will be an opportunity for young people and government authorities to engage in a vibrant dialogue addressing safety issues in South African communities.



 **Gauteng Youth Crime Prevention Desk**

 **@gpyouthdesk**

