



**Publication:** Cape Argus Late - Main  
**Title:** RESTART PROJECT HELPS HOMELESS TO GET BACK ON TRACK  
**Publish date:** 11 Jun 2024  
**Page:** 5

**Reach:** 10459  
**AVE:** R 39020.06  
**Author:** Staff Reporter

MANY buildings are standing empty, unused (and being destroyed in the process) or they are sold off to developers for luxury accommodation.

In January, with the eviction of homeless people being fast-tracked by the City I, out of desperation, started a project called "Restart".

I approached a number of buildings mostly owned or leased by foreign nationals. They are located in the CBD, Bellville and Maitland. These buildings have been converted into accommodation facilities.

Most of these facilities are high-rise buildings and have been converted into two or three 10-bedroom dormitories for short-term stays with the balance of the building being either two-person rooms or family rooms.

The rooms are all lock-up rooms with a basin and lodgers share kitchen and bathroom facilities per floor.

These buildings were converted into accommodation facilities to accommodate the growing number of Somalian and Congolese nationals in South Africa needing accommodation. The rental prices for the rooms are affordable at R2 000 and R4 000 a month. Similar commercial ventures in Cape Town cost from, on average, R8 000 a month and upwards for a double room.

I spoke to landlords about my predicament with people living on the streets and managed to get a few rooms reserved for Restart at seven of these venues.

SO AM I



CARLOS MESQUITA

## RESTART PROJECT HELPS HOMELESS TO GET BACK ON TRACK

The agreement was that I would source funding for each individual for the first month @ R750 a person (R1 500) for a two-person room and as of the second month the lodgers would find ways to pay for their accommodation.

We negotiate that payments by lodgers could be made either daily, weekly or monthly (due to the nature of work opportunities available to someone living on the streets).

We have, since January, provided

accommodation for 118 individuals.

We focused on the elderly and the disabled, mothers with children and those already employed or self-employed (employment ranged from gardening, housekeeping, security and recycling).

We opened up channels for lodgers to have access to four social workers, harm reduction therapy and a medical doctor. We also assisted some people to get their IDs and grants.

Of those accommodated, 62 of the lodgers are now employed/self-employed, 18 are receiving old age grants while 17 receive disability grants and are now paying their own accommodation costs.

We support them with clothing, toiletries and food when such is donated to us.

Not a single one had returned to the streets and we have had no complaints from the landlords.

Which goes to show all that these individuals required was a hand up.

I have tried showing the City that this type of "independent living accommodation with care" will be a great deal more effective and cheaper for them to consider than opening up their Safe Space, which their own figures show have been expensive failures.

Why do the City and the Province insist on keeping people living on the streets imprisoned in homelessness?

That is all they are achieving by limiting their accommodation facilities

for those living on the streets to safe spaces and shelters that accommodate people for three to six months in prison-style dormitories with no privacy or agency afforded them. The only programmes available are the nationally funded and abused programmes like PEP (Public Employment Programme) and EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme).

Why are the City and the province not able to repurpose some of their unused and neglected buildings?

One look at the brilliant proposals put forward by Ndifuna Ukwazi on repurposing the City, provincial car parkades, into mixed accommodation units makes one wonder why this City and the province are so against sensible proposals when they are being proven effective.

The problem we have experienced with Restart is that there are never enough rooms available.

Rapid rehousing will benefit a great number of those living on the streets. It will also help people falling into homelessness due to job losses and eviction from the home they can no longer afford. It will help them to get into accommodation, sooner rather than later, preventing the potential exposure to substance use and behavioural changes that are synonymous with long-term homelessness.

*Mesquita is an activist for the homeless and a researcher working in the W Cape Legislature for the GOOD Party*