

WORKING FOR A JUST PEACE SUCCESS

The South African End Conscription Campaign recently came to the end of its highly successful national "Working for a Just Peace" campaign. The month long project was conducted in six centres around South Africa.

More than 600 volunteers came forward to participate in a variety of work projects, which were not only constructive in themselves, but also served as a symbolic protest against the system of conscription into the South African Defence Force. Under the slogan "Construction not Conscription" the volunteers set out to show positive ways of serving South Africa's people as opposed to the destructive system of compulsory military service. Many symbolic work projects were conducted.

In Cape Town a total of 17 projects were completed. Among them volunteers did alterations to two township children's homes, painted a pre-school children's centre and built a tricycle track. In another project renovations were done to Cowley House, a place where families stay when visiting Robben Island political prisoners.

Durban's projects included decorating the children's wards of a hospital, clearing a sight for a playground and organising a non-racial picnic. Much work also went into building a creche in a township.

In Johannesburg there were also a number of children related projects. As well as running a picnic which brought black and white youth together, volunteers helped with a children's holiday programme and the planting of a garden in the grounds of a home for mentally handicapped children.

In Pietermaritzburg energy went into assisting in the projects of the residents of a resettlement area forcibly moved there by the government some years ago. The work involved building a bridge over a river and planting of sage bushes. Renovation work was also done at a children's home.

The work in Port Elizabeth was concentrated in Walmer township where a creche was built for local children. A "peace workshop" was also run at which benches and toys were made for the creche.

Grahamstown, a new ECC region ran a project in co-operation with a township woodworking co-operative.

Projects were embarked on only once thorough discussion had taken place with



the communities concerned. Said Johannesburg ECC chair Clare Verbeeck, "We were very thorough in our consultations. This was important for two reasons: firstly we did not want to impose ourselves on the communities in which we worked. This is of course a vital aspect of a genuine national service. Secondly, we wanted to create a healthy spirit of non-racialism in the black communities in which we worked. All too often in the past community projects have simply been imposed on communities with no respect for the views of the local community."

"It was particularly symbolic that so many of our projects were run for children," said ECC National Organiser Laurie Nathan. "It has been children especially who have suffered the brunt of repression. Thousands have been detained, many injured and hundreds killed in township security force operations. We hope we have helped to expose this situation as well as pose a long term alternative to sending troops into the townships. This has of course to come with justice and democracy in South Africa."

The ECC has experienced much growth through the campaign. Says National Secretary David Shandler, "More than 600 people who were never previously involved in anything like it became involved in our campaign through the work projects. There are thousands more who gave their support at various public events. In Cape Town our campaign concluded with a public rally attended by over 3000 people. At a similar meeting in Johannesburg 1000 attended. We also ran film festivals and a major photo exhibition as part of the campaign. ECC has grown in public esteem. On the basis built by the campaign we will definitely succeed in further growth this year."

Finally, ECC organisers say a new dimension has been added to their work. Nic Borain of Cape Town commented that ECC had "shown a realistic alternative to military service in the SADF. Through the work we have shown our commitment to our people."

Building on the successes of the campaign ECC is now working towards major protests at the time of the July intake of new conscripts. These protests will be conducted throughout South Africa.



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