

FROM VISION TO VOICE

The Story of the
National Shelter Movement
of South Africa



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FOREWORD

When I reflect on the journey of the National Shelter Movement of South Africa, I do so with immense gratitude, deep humility, and unwavering hope. It has been one of the greatest privileges of my professional life to have walked alongside this movement for many years, witnessing its evolution from a bold vision into the nationally recognised voice of shelters in South Africa.

This publication is far more than a historical record. It is a testament to the resilience, courage and collective determination of countless women, shelter practitioners, activists, researchers, volunteers, board members, donors and government partners who refused to accept that women and children fleeing violence should be left without protection, dignity or hope. Together, they built a movement that has consistently placed survivors at the centre of its work while advocating for systemic change.

As I read these pages, I am reminded that the NSMSA was never created simply to establish another organisation. It was founded because shelters across our country shared common struggles, insufficient funding, inconsistent government support, unequal treatment, and the daily challenge of providing life-saving services with limited resources. Rather than facing these challenges in isolation, shelters chose solidarity over silence. They recognised that together their voices would carry further than any one organisation could alone.

Over the past seventeen years, the NSMSA has demonstrated that meaningful change is built through persistence. We have challenged policy where necessary,

partnered with government where possible, invested in research to strengthen advocacy, supported shelters through crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthened provincial movements, and ensured that the lived realities of shelters continue to shape national conversations on gender-based violence.

I have personally witnessed the power of this collective voice. Whether advocating for equitable and standardised funding, building relationships with the Department of Social Development, establishing provincial shelter movements, or sharing South African innovations on international platforms, every milestone reflects years of dedication by individuals who believed that women deserve safety, respect and the opportunity to rebuild their lives free from violence.

This publication also honours the leadership that has carried the movement through changing times. I pay tribute to Dr Zubeda Dangor, whose vision and determination laid the foundations upon which the movement was built; to Dianne Massawe and successive Board members; to the Secretariat; to our Provincial Representatives; and most importantly, to the shelter managers and frontline staff who continue to serve women and children every day, often under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Their commitment reminds us that movements are sustained not by titles, but by people who continue to show up with courage and compassion.

As we celebrate our achievements, we must also acknowledge that our work is far from complete. Gender-based violence continues

to devastate families and communities across South Africa. Many shelters remain under-resourced, women continue to face barriers to economic independence and safe housing, and the sustainability of our sector remains an urgent priority. The next chapter of the NSMSA must therefore be one of strengthening provincial movements, diversifying funding, building organisational sustainability, embracing innovation, and ensuring that every woman, regardless of where she lives, has access to quality shelter services when she needs them most.

Institutional memory matters because it reminds us of where we have come from, preserves the lessons we have learned, and equips future generations to continue the journey with wisdom and purpose. I hope this publication inspires current and future leaders to protect the values upon which this movement was built; solidarity, courage, accountability, dignity, and an unwavering commitment to justice.

To every person who has contributed to this movement over the past seventeen years ... thank you! Your work has saved lives. Your advocacy has influenced policy. Your compassion has restored hope. Together, you have demonstrated what is possible when a movement stands united for the rights, safety and dignity of women and children.

May this publication serve not only as a record of our past, but as a call to continue building a South Africa where every woman and every child can live free from violence, with dignity, safety and hope.

Joy Lange

Board Member, National Shelter Movement of South Africa & Global Network of Women's Shelters

Former Executive Member and Provincial Representative of NSMSA

Former Chairperson, Western Cape Women's Shelter Movement



INTRODUCTION

Since its founding in 2008, the National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA) has grown from strength to strength so that by 2025 the movement is recognised as the voice of shelters in South Africa.

The NSMSA's vision in 2025 is a society where women and their children are free and safe from gender-based violence (GBV). The NSMSA's key strategy over the years has been to build a movement of shelters working together in solidarity to meet the needs of shelter residents with dignity, and to lobby the South African government to meet the true costs of sheltering while ensuring that laws, policy and practice safeguard the rights and interests of GBV survivors.

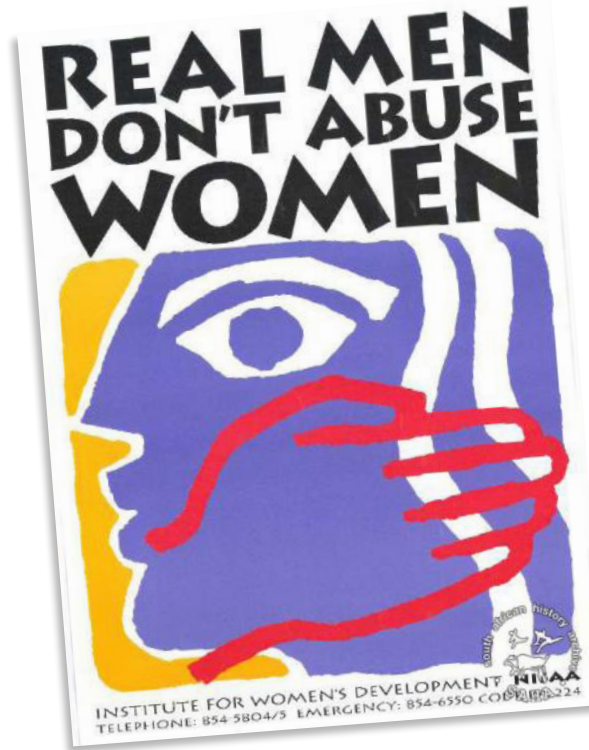
Movements are usually formed to pressure powerholders, such as governments, to improve services, policies, laws and material conditions and to hold them accountable to actioning their paper commitments. The NSMSA founders brought the movement into being in order to address the South African government's failure to meet its own stated commitments to address the needs of women who experience GBV. The government's responses have fallen short of its promises in the early years of the new democracy, and of its more recent declarations that GBV is 'a second pandemic' and 'a national disaster'. Government inaction thus created the impetus for this movement.

As a movement of shelters the NSMSA has centred the needs of women who seek refuge from GBV and who need shelters as spaces for healing and support. Shelters exist to serve these women and the NSMSA exists to support these shelters. The NSMSA's focus is to ensure that women who experience violence from intimate partners or family members may enter shelters where they may heal and strengthen their power to rebuild happy, healthy, violence free lives.

South Africa has extremely high rates of GBV. The NSMSA understands the violence women experience in their intimate relationships as linked to the broader culture of violence that defines women's and men's experiences in

South Africa. Girls, and boys, who grow up within violent family and societal cultures, experience such violence as the norm. This impacts how they see relationships, how they see themselves, and how they see others. The violence against women is additionally shaped by patriarchal beliefs and practices which deem men superior and sanction men's power over women. NSMSA understands the need for healing spaces such as shelters in addition to societal change to shift violent and patriarchal attitudes and practices.

The NSMSA has amplified the voices and role of shelters within GBV activist spaces and within society more generally, highlighting that shelters save women's lives in addition to providing refuge, a place for healing and emotional and psychological support. In interviews¹ former shelter residents spoke of how relationships of care, trust and safety with other shelter residents and with shelter staff formed a foundation for healing, and opened the possibility of supportive future relationships. They spoke of gains from counselling and said that they were able to leave the shelters feeling more confident and able to face life in the world outside. Most women were, however, in precarious financial positions, before and after sheltering. For most, housing and finances were ongoing challenges as they tried to rebuild their lives after sheltering. Had non fee-paying shelters not existed most would have had nowhere to go at a time of crisis. They could not have afforded renting their own space, or the cost of a hotel stay. There was therefore a critical need for the government to fund shelters.



A poster from Nisaa's media campaign.

By 2025 there were 146 shelters in South Africa with 103 of these being NSMSA member shelters. The shelters range from emergency shelters which accommodate women for a few days to longer term shelters which accommodate women for up to a year. On average women stay from 3 to 6 months at a shelter. The numbers of women accommodated at a shelter range from as few as 3 to as many as 40. The smaller shelters tend to be independent shelters run by women who had themselves experienced violence from an intimate partner. The larger shelters tend to be run by well-established Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs) for which shelters are one service among a range of services.

Key factors that have enabled the movement's growth include:

- A dedicated and passionate secretariat, board and executive team who held the organisation together over the years, kept a clear and unfaltering focus on their mission and honed their strategic skills
- Passionate and committed provincial representatives, many of whom work in member shelters and were able to link their experience at shelter level to provincial and national advocacy
- Committed shelter members and staff
- Strategies developed on understanding, analysis and capacity to link research, advocacy and capacity building
- A collaborative approach of working closely with member shelters and with an ear to the ground
- A strategic approach which balances challenging and partnering with government departments.

1. National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA) 2020, Raising women's voices in South African shelters: Composite report, National Shelter Movement of South Africa. <https://www.nsmsa.org.za>.



NSMSA calling for the removal of Police Minister Bheki Cele in 2022

Over the years the NSMSA developed provincial shelter forums as spaces for building solidarity, knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and coordinated responses to GBV. In a context where shelters struggle to survive with extremely little financial support from government departments, NSMSA has provided much needed capacity building to member shelters for organisational strengthening, movement strengthening and professional development. The NSMSA and its member shelters have raised community awareness on GBV and on the services shelters provide, through media campaigns and community engagement.

This publication provides an overview of the NSMSA from its founding in 2008. It highlights

what it means to be a movement organisation, and how movements are shaped by state responses even as they attempt to shape state responses. It shows that movement can include strategies of working from the outside in protests and other direct actions, strategies of working within spaces created by the government, and strategies of creating partnerships with government institutions.

Each chapter highlights key moments in the NSMSA's story and why these were important. Chapter One highlights the context within which the idea of the movement germinated and what it took to build the movement so that it is today recognised as the voice of shelters in South Africa. Chapter Two looks at the movement's key strategy of advocacy based

on research and capacity building. Chapter Three highlights the NSMSA's contribution to capacity building for organisational strengthening, movement strengthening and professional development. Chapter Four focuses on the building and strengthening of provincial shelter movements.

Before proceeding to Chapter One here are the views of key NSMSA personnel interviewed in 2025 on NSMSA's main achievements and on the issues NSMSA should prioritise beyond 2025.

NSMSA'S MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Joy Lange, NSMSA Board Member, who is also a former Provincial Representative and former Chair of the Western Cape Women's Shelter Movement, said that the partnership NSMSA has been able to develop with the National Department of Social Development (DSD) is a major achievement. She and others interviewed mentioned the Annual Shelter Indabas cohosted by NSMSA, The Heinrich Böll Foundation and National DSD since 2022 as a key milestone in developing this partnership.

The relationship with National DSD is something we developed over the years. It took a long time. And with the Indabas the relationship has been strengthened and we can call this a partnership.

Bernadine Bachar, Executive Director of the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children, shared her view on NSMSA's three main achievements:

Firstly the NSMSA has been able to hold the government accountable and make sure the voices of shelters are heard. The Indabas, advocacy, and the media strategy have contributed to this. A second achievement is the support NSMSA gave shelters during the Covid pandemic, most notably through support with PPE and through setting up the 24-hour helpline. A third achievement is the ongoing training the NSMSA provided for shelter staff and from which shelters benefitted greatly.

For Dianne Massawe, the chair of NSMSA's Board, NSMSA's key achievements are its ongoing advocacy on standardisation and adequate resourcing of shelters, its partnership with National DSD on the Annual Shelter Indabas, and its helpline.

We raised a lot of noise around the need for standardized funding. Zubeda as head of Exec did a lot of advocacy. It wasn't the huge win we wanted, but in some provinces funding was increased for shelters. The partnership we've built with National DSD is an achievement. Our indaba in partnership with DSD is going very well and DSD is recognising our work. DSD invited NSMSA to present on how we are doing sheltering when a delegation from Sudan visited South Africa.

Our helpline was launched in 2020, and even with our small helpline, we've been able to direct and to support a lot more women than the National Command Centre's helpline, with all their funding. This gives us a sense of fulfillment, that even in our little corner, we've been able to do this.

Dianne Massawe also noted the gains made through NSMSA work to expand the definition of violence and to contribute to a climate

where women are believed, and feel more able to speak out about abuse:

As women and activists in South Africa, we've made gains around expanding the definitions of what violence is. For a lot of people violence is when somebody physically beats me. Our expanded definition includes economic, emotional, and mental violence. People are now realising that most people are in abusive relationships and a lot more people are speaking out about it. The stigma previously attached to being a survivor of violence is also slowly going away. A child who had been abused in the eighties said she spoke about her abuse in the eighties. Nobody believed her. Her abuser continued abusing her, and she said why would she speak out when nobody believed her? But now she is able to speak about it, because now the environment we live in has changed because of the work we have done.

Melanie Padiachy, Assistant Coordinator of NSMSA, said that NSMSA's achievements lie in its advocacy, giving shelters a voice, raising awareness on GBV in the community and through webinars and the media. She notes:

The National Shelter Movement of South Africa has become a leading voice for shelters nationwide. By engaging Parliamentary Portfolio Committees, it has ensured that the challenges facing shelters are formally recognised in legislative processes. NSMSA also provides mentoring and serves as a trusted support system for shelters in difficulty. Its credibility is reinforced by its ability to mobilise collective action, exemplified by the 62,000-signature petition that contributed to calls for the removal of former Minister of Police, Bheki Cele.

NSMSA PRIORITIES BEYOND 2025

Tamara Braam, who has worked closely with NSMSA in a range of capacities, noted that NSMSA should focus on funding, resourcing, and standardisation; should ensure that shelters are available in all districts in the country; and ensure that second stage housing, skills development and economic opportunities are available for women shelter residents. Beyond this, she proposes that the NSMSA should broaden the role of shelters so that they become "hubs of healing" in the communities and play a role in rebuilding community.

Fisani Mahlangu, former Exec Member and former Provincial Representative, was of the view that NSMSA should continue to support shelters to do their work, with a particular focus on the small under-resourced shelters. Fisani said: "It is the small shelters, the grassroots organisations that need the support of NSMSA".

Joy Lange was of the view that a key challenge is for the NSMSA to set up proper structured offices within all provinces. Like in the Western Cape and Mpumalanga, these should be provincial offices separate from the shelters and should have their own dedicated funding.

Fisani Mahlangu who was employed at a shelter for much of her tenure as the Mpumalanga Provincial Representative noted that movement strengthening at a provincial level would be enhanced if provincial representatives in all provinces were dedicated employees of provincial

shelter movements. She said: "If you are based in a shelter you only see your shelter, and your shelter will suffer if you focus on the province". When the Mpumalanga Shelter Movement set up their own dedicated offices Fisani was one of the Provincial Representatives employed in a full-time position by the provincial shelter movement. This, she says, freed her to think province wide: "With the freedom that comes from not being based at a shelter you can support shelters in the province."

Ms G Itumeleng, of the National DSD VEP Programme, which directly works with shelters, was of the view that NSMSA should work on diversified funding, succession planning, and that shelters should embark on prevention programmes in addition to providing care and support.

Joy Lange, who has always been a strong advocate for sustainable development for NGOs, suggested that NSMSA should support shelters in thinking about sustainability. She gave some examples of how she worked to sustain the organisation while she was Director at St Annes shelter in Cape Town.

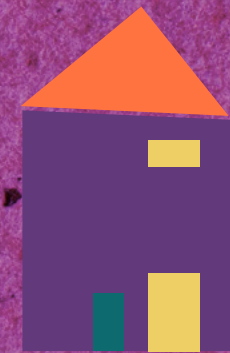
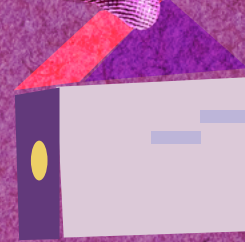
At St Annes I developed a sustainable development model that involved making the stage one shelter solar powered and off the grid. We went from paying R 8,000 for electricity in winter for one house to nothing. The model involved Water harvesting to flush all the bathrooms; getting a rental income from providing accommodation to international students; starting a charity shop which generated R40,000 a month when I left St Annes in April 2023. So, the sustainability element should not be swept under the carpet. There are innovative ways one could do things.

Bernadine Bachar was of the view that NSMSA should look at public private partnerships to address funding shortfalls, that work needs to continue around government accountability, on training staff who do not have formal post graduate training, on women's economic empowerment, continued advocacy for GBV survivors to be recognised as a vulnerable group for housing policy, and advocacy to ensure the NSP is costed and funded.



CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING A MOVEMENT OF SHELTERS



In 2025 the National Shelter Movement of South Africa (NSMSA) celebrated 17 years of existence. The fuel for imagining and bringing into being this organisation in 2008 was the spirit and determination of key activists working to end violence against women.

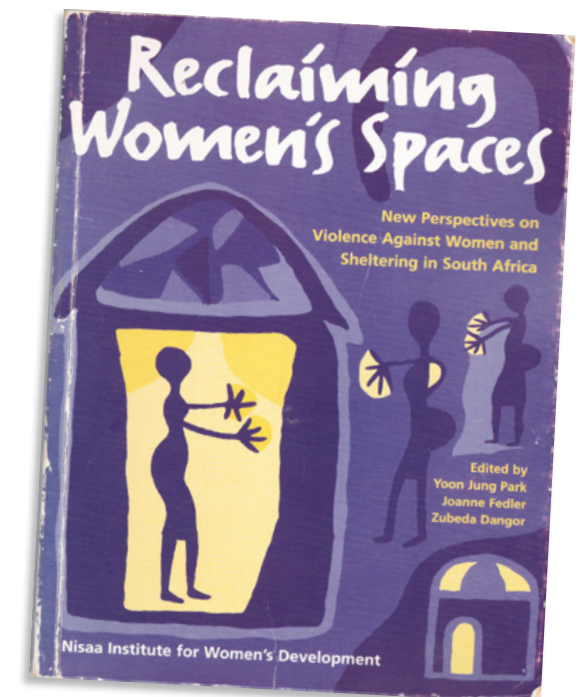
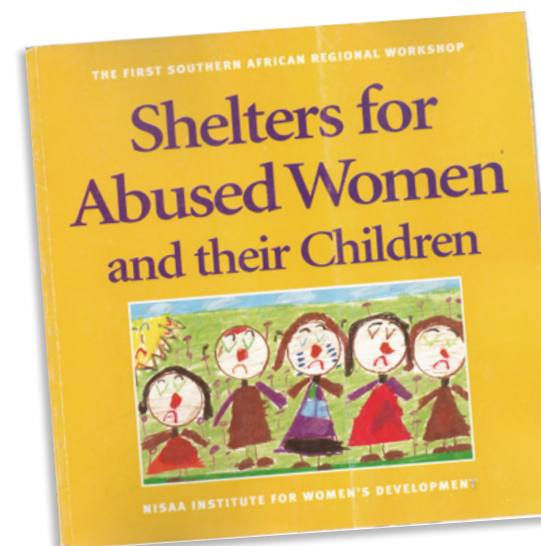
Zubeda Dangor, Director of Nisaa Institute for Women's Development (Nisaa) was a driving force in bringing shelters and activists together in the early days of South Africa's new democracy. By 1997, just 4 years into the new democracy it had become clear that the government was not living up to its promise to address the high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) and the need for sheltering. Zubeda, through Nisaa, drew in GBV activists, shelter workers and residents into a process of discussion, research and writing on the key challenges they faced. The writings from the process started in 1997 were brought together in a book "Reclaiming Women's Spaces: New Perspectives on Violence Against Women and Sheltering in South Africa"¹. The book was published in 2000, and shared at the First Southern Africa Regional Workshop on Shelters organised by Nisaa in 2000. Both the book and the workshop laid the foundation of the movement that was to come.

1. The book was edited by Yoon Jung Park, Joanne Fedler and Zubeda Dangor, and published by Nisaa Institute for Social Development.

The book and workshop captured the growing disillusionment among gender activists in the late 1990s resulting from the failure of the post-apartheid government to address GBV in a significant way. There had been great hopes among activists that the new democratic government would deliver on the needs of the vast majority of South Africans. However, while the new government seemingly had good policies and laws in place, there were serious impediments to implementation of these commitments. Instead of the promise of better lives for all, poverty, inequality, unemployment and violence were on the increase across the country. The majority of the women who experienced violence from intimate partners or family members did not have the resources to pay for alternative accommodation when faced with near death experiences of violence. Shelters which could have provided a lifesaving place of safety were not receiving government support. Government plans, such as one stop centres for victims of GBV, were not broadly available, nor were they sustained. In a context of increasing GBV the government seemed to

be failing poor working class women who had no recourse other than shelters when their lives were in danger. Given these government failures, activists working to address GBV began to feel the need to come together to challenge the government in new ways to make sure that the government acted on its commitments to address women's needs and interests.

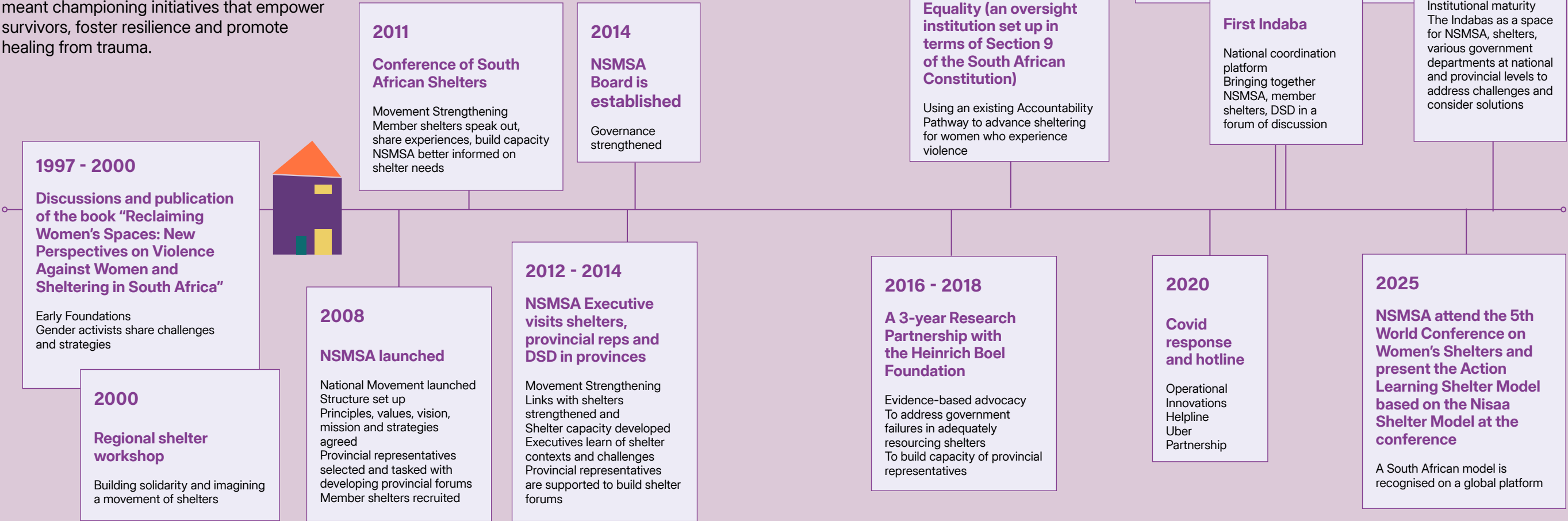
At the workshop, shelter workers and policy makers from across South Africa noted that networking, collaboration, skills development and ongoing training were sorely needed if they were to hold accountable government departments, statutory bodies and national gender machinery. The idea of a national movement that would bring shelters together to lobby for the needs of women who need sheltering from GBV was in their sights. However, it was to take seven years of preparing the ground before this idea was to become a reality.



FROM EARLY FOUNDATIONS TO MATURITY: BUILDING THE ORGANISATION AND MOVEMENT OVER THE YEARS

In February 2008, after years of strategising and fundraising, the NSMSA was launched and the work of building the organisation and the movement started. NSMSA's approach was to centre the needs of women who need sheltering, and to work from a feminist empowerment framework. This meant championing initiatives that empower survivors, foster resilience and promote healing from trauma.

The following are milestones in the NSMSA's history from the idea of a movement in 1997 through its launch as an organisation in 2008 and its development into a mature organisation by 2025.



BUILDING THE ORGANISATION

At the NSMSA launch in 2008 Nisaa was appointed the NSMSA secretariat and began the work of organisation building. Provincial Representatives were selected to begin the work of movement building. A few months after the launch, in May 2008, NSMSA executive members were elected, and together with the secretariat and provincial representatives engaged in strategic thinking to develop the NSMSA's vision, mission, goals and strategies. In the following years the executive and secretariat worked on building the organisational infrastructure in order to carry out their vision and mission of bringing shelters together to lobby and advocate for the needs of women who need sheltering.

In 2009 the secretariat and executive, in consultation with the Provincial Representatives drafted the NSMSA constitution, registered the NSMSA as an NPO, and developed a database of shelters. In the 2014/2015 financial year the NSMSA Board was established. By this time there were Provincial Representatives in 8 provinces, and 77 shelters across the country, 20 of these being NSMSA members. The sustained development of the organisation over the years has been possible through a committed and strategic leadership.

The infographic on the next page sets out the structure as in 2025.

Clear job descriptions, clear roles and collaborative ways of working hold together the people in these positions and contribute to a sense of collective ownership of the organisation.

The Board and executive provide strategic leadership in line with the organisation's vision and mission. The Provincial Representatives liaise with and support shelters and liaise with provincial DSD officials. The board provides oversight and supports the secretariat and executive members.

The Executive members and NSMSA Provincial Representatives have played an important and remarkable role within the NSMSA over the years despite the fact that these officials perform their roles without payment, and are all in full-time employment elsewhere as directors, managers or social workers at shelters. While the embeddedness of executive members and provincial representatives in shelters has the positive aspect that they understand issues on the ground, they often have to prioritise their full-time paid jobs over their voluntary roles as executive members or provincial representatives. This situation continues today with the exception of the Mpumalanga Provincial Representatives who are full-time paid employees of the Mpumalanga Shelter Movement since 2019. Some of the NSMSA personnel interviewed in 2025 were of the view that movement and organisational strengthening would be more adequately served if provincial representatives and executive members were paid positions.

The Secretariat is made up of the Head of the Executive, Coordinator, Assistant Coordinator, Project Officer, Bookkeeper and Administrator. These are all paid staff. The secretariat is responsible for fund raising,

co-ordination, administration, planning and implementation of projects and events such as the Annual Shelter Indabas. The coordinator oversees implementation of programmes and campaigns, supervises staff and works on

public relations while also engaging with the Executive Head, Executive Members, the board and provincial representatives and ensuring that activities are implemented according to the plans and agreements with donors.



BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

Shelters and the women who need shelter are at the heart of NSMSA's vision, which in 2025 is a society where women and their children are free and safe from gender-based violence. The NSMSA's key strategy is to build a movement of shelters working together in solidarity to enhance their effectiveness in running shelters and to advocate and lobby the South African government for increased funding, improved resources, and for legislative reforms and policy changes that safeguard the rights and interests of GBV survivors.

Provincial representatives were selected at the 2008 launch to begin work on recruiting shelters and setting up provincial shelter forums as essential steps in building a movement of shelters. Important to movement building was the need of the executive and provincial representatives to understand the needs of shelters and the needs of women who needed sheltering in both urban and rural settings. The book and the regional workshop in 2000 had helped to understand the challenges of shelters at the time. Aware of the need to understand the changing contexts for shelters and for women who need sheltering, the NSMSA created opportunities over the years for this: through a conference in 2011, through strategic planning and thinking at various intervals, through visits to shelters including in the most rural parts of the country, and through gatherings of provincial representatives and provincial shelter forums. All of these have been important spaces of information sharing on the challenges and needs of shelters and of women needing shelter.

The NSMSA's Conference for South African Shelters in November 2011 brought together 52 participants from 46 NPOs to share challenges relating to the state of sheltering, and to build capacity, motivate and inspire sheltering staff and provincial representatives.

At the conference Zubeda Dangor presented the Nisaa Shelter Model as a framework for improving shelter performance to best serve the needs of women and children. Department of Social Development officials from Provincial and National offices attended this conference on invitation so that they could hear the challenges experienced on the ground.

Between 2012 and 2014, executive members, Zubeda Dangor, Joy Lange and Linda Fugard travelled to the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. The executive rotated the venues of AGMs and national meetings so that they could build relationships with shelters, provincial representatives and provincial DSD officials in different provinces. Executive members introduced NSMSA to shelters in these provinces and invited shelters to join the movement. During these visits Executive members learnt about the capacity building needs of shelters, the social and economic contexts in which they worked, and the needs of the women who seek shelter. In some instances the executive members ran capacity building workshops for shelters during these visits. Founding Executive Member Linda Fugard shared in a 2025 interview:

We were instrumental in assisting with conflict within various shelters between staff and their board. We assisted shelters to set up skills training centres which would assist them financially. We came alongside struggling shelters and worked closely with them, allowing them to send their staff to the more established shelters for hands-on experience.



NSMSA Executive and Secretariat 2012. L to R standing: Executive members Linda Fugard, Lynette Strijbus and Zubeda Dangor. Left to right seated: Fozia Dangor, Administrator and Romila Pillay, National Coordinator.

Meetings of provincial representatives at a national level were spaces where the executive was made aware of the experiences of shelters. It became clear to the Executive that in many instances shelters had been set up by women who had themselves experienced violence, and who were driven by a desire to help other women in need, very often using their own meagre resources to do this. Often these women warriors did not have skills in organisational development, or in advocacy and lobbying. There was thus great need for capacity building with the greatest need in the case of those shelters based in rural areas which were once apartheid demarcated homelands. These shelters had less access to resources, skills and networks than shelters close to large urban centres of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban.

Provincial shelter forums, which brought together shelter managers, were important spaces where shelter leadership within provinces became aware of each other's

realities and funding discrepancies. Joy Lange shared in a 2025 interview that she and other shelter managers in the Western Cape only became aware of the discrepancies in shelter funding between shelters and across provinces when they shared information with each other at a 2010 meeting of the Shelter Forum (currently known as the Western Cape Women's Shelter Movement) affiliated to the NSMSA.

We talked to each other in an open and honest way and we started discovering disparities in funding. We were out of apartheid, yet we found that a shelter like Sisters Incorporated in a white area, run by a white manager was getting R33 per bed and we were getting R28 per bed [in shelters in Coloured areas run by Coloured managers]. There was funding for their social worker, but no funding for our social worker.

Bringing this discovery to the Executive and engaging in discussion with provincial



NSMSA Provincial Representatives 2012. Standing left to right: Rina Van der Berg, Sonia August, Lynette Stribis, Tinkie Slippers, Linda Fugard, Yvonne Perumal, Melonie Gobel. Seated left to right: Sarah Lekale, Nirri Moethilalh, Joy Lange, June Grindley.

representatives from other provinces made clear that this was a national issue. In her address to the 2011 Conference for South African Shelters, Zubeda Dangor noted two major challenges. Firstly, the Department of Correctional Services allocation per prisoner was higher than the Department of Social Development’s allocation per woman in a shelter. Secondly, there was a lack of standardisation in the allocation for shelters across provinces, with allocations ranging from R27 to R35 per woman per day. Zubeda Dangor called for more realistic allocations per woman in shelters and for one standard across the country.

The NSMSA Executive and secretariat began to strategise on how best to take up the struggle for increased and standardised funding nationally. NSMSA attempted to redress this situation over the years, most notably through a research partnership with the Heinrich Boll Foundation (HBF) from 2016 to 2018. This research project incorporated

advocacy, capacity building of provincial representatives, and engagement with DSD at National and Provincial levels. NSMSA built on the outcomes of this project in the following years to advance the struggle for adequate resourcing of shelters.

In a 2018 strategic planning workshop, the NSMSA and partners noted the following ongoing challenges: the need for more shelters, given that there were very few shelters in rural areas; extremely low salaries of shelter staff, in some cases below the minimum wage, making it difficult for shelters to retain staff; and the need for training for shelter staff.

Challenges in meeting Gauteng DSD and municipality compliance and accreditation requirements in 2024 and 2025 resulted in a number of shelters in Gauteng being forced to close their doors. Shelters and other affected NPOs formed the Gauteng Crisis Care Committee to challenge what they saw as a

punitive rather than a supportive approach by the Gauteng DSD relating to compliance.

While there have been some advances resulting from NSMSA advocacy over the years, lack of standardisation, late payments by DSD and hurdles with compliance still continue into 2025. The call made at the shelter conference 14 years ago continues to be a call made continuously into the present.

CENTERING WOMEN WHO NEED SHELTERING

In its work of supporting shelters the NSMSA has centred the needs of women who seek refuge from GBV and who need a space for healing and support. Shelters exist to serve these women and the NSMSA exists to support these shelters.

By 2025 there were 146 shelters in South Africa, 103 of these being NSMSA member shelters. The shelters range from emergency shelters which accommodate women for a few days, to longer term shelters which accommodate women for up to a year. On average women stay at a shelter from between 3 to 6 months. The number of women that a shelter can accommodate ranges from as few as 3 to as many as 40 women. The smaller shelters tend to be independent while the larger tend to be run by well established NPOs who offer a range of services in addition to the shelter.

Women who use the services of shelters typically flee violence in their homes in fear of their lives with nowhere else to go. They lack the resources to rent their own accommodation as they are either unemployed or survive on state grants. The majority have very low levels of education and few marketable skills. Were it not for the existence of shelters which provide refuge without charging a fee, many of these women would not be alive. Non fee-paying shelters are therefore necessary in South Africa, given the high levels of gender based violence and the high levels of poverty and unemployment.

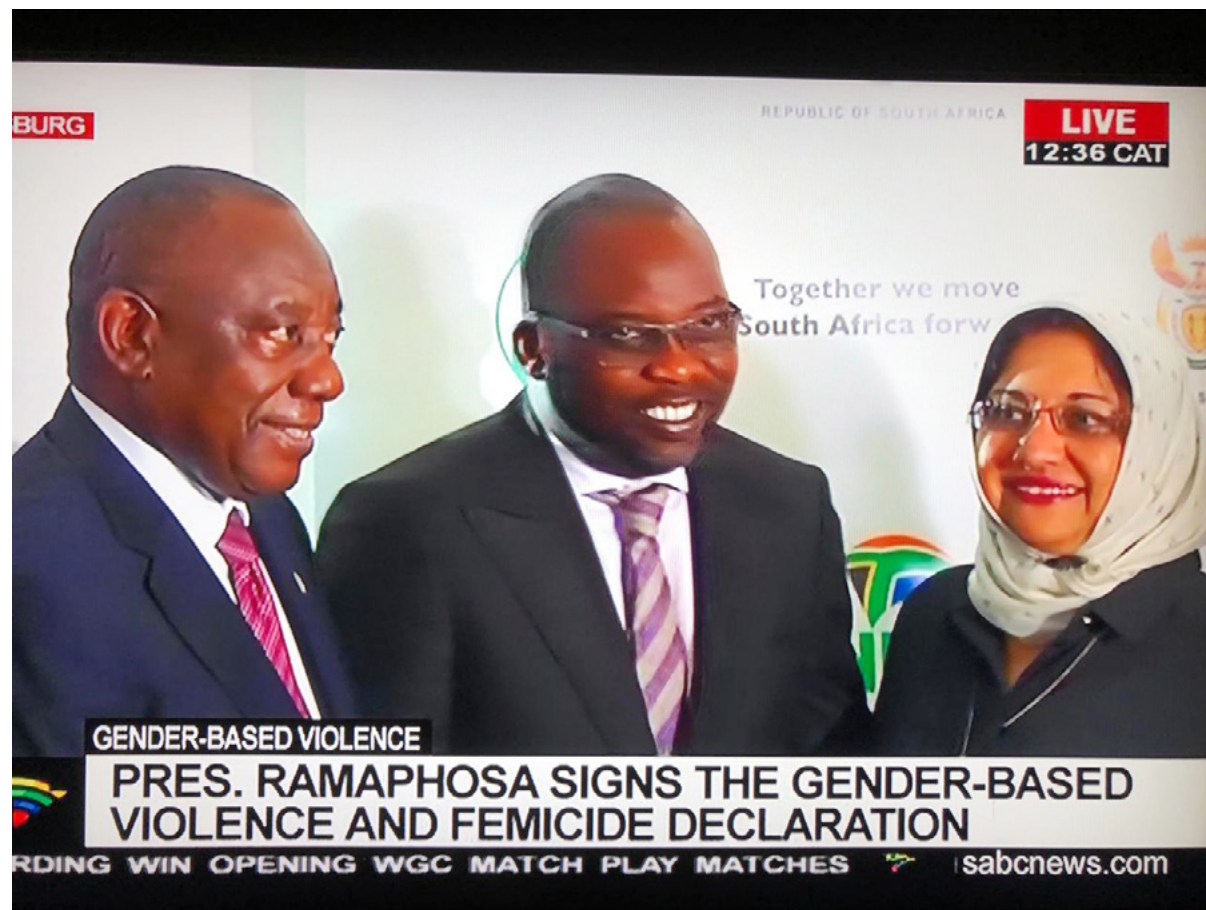
NSMSA advances trauma-informed practices in working with women who seek shelter and in line with this approach supports shelters to work with women residents in ways that enable their voice, their initiative, and the building of their inner strengths.

In order to support shelters to provide for women residents, the NSMSA has engaged shelters in advocacy and capacity building. Advocacy actions have aimed at getting DSD to provide the resources necessary to adequately meet the needs of women residents, and capacity building has focused on professional development, organisational strengthening and movement strengthening.

WORKING WITH AND CHALLENGING DSD

To redress inadequate government funding the NSMSA has honed an approach of working with, while simultaneously challenging government. This has meant engaging in lobbying and advocacy actions while at the same time helping government departments to meet their own stated commitments to support shelters for women who experience violence in their intimate

partner relationships and in their homes. Recognising the need for shelters where women were not expected to pay a fee, government planners and policy makers made provision for funding support to shelters through the Department of Social Development's Victim Empowerment Programme. However, as NSMSA has made clear in their calls to the government



TV news report on the signing of the Gender Based Violence and Femicide Declaration, 2019. L to R: President Cyril Ramaphosa, Minister of Justice and Correctional Services Michael Masutha and Zubeda Dangor Executive Head of NSMSA.

over the years, DSD funding is insufficient, disbursements are often delayed, and the allocations per woman, in addition to being insufficient, are not standardised within and between provinces.

NSMSA has lobbied for more than a decade for funding support to meet the real costs of sheltering, and for a standardised funding formula across provinces and shelters, so that women may be sheltered in dignity. Lack of adequate funding has led to the closure of many shelters over the years.

Since its inception, the NSMSA has worked at relationship building with DSD at national and provincial levels. The Provincial Representatives worked closely with DSD in the provinces where they were based. The NSMSA invited DSD officials to attend and address the Conference for South African Shelters in November 2011. The National Director of DSD's Victim Empowerment Programme addressed this conference as the guest speaker, accompanied by two additional DSD officials in attendance. In 2012 the Executive met with the National DSD's National Director of VEP and gave feedback to DSD on the government's National Strategy Document. Between 2012 and 2014 the NSMSA Executive met with Provincial DSD in four provinces. In 2013 The NSMSA held meetings and roundtables with DSD to strengthen relationships in the interests of the women and children in need of shelter. In 2014 the Executive attended two national VEP meetings, and met with National DSD, DSD in Eastern Cape and Northern Cape.

The NSMSA's research and advocacy in partnership with HBF, beginning in 2016, sought to establish a less adversarial relationship with DSD at national and provincial levels and led to the launching of

the National Shelter Indaba in partnership with HBS and DSD National. Today National DSD views NSMSA as an important partner organisation.

The NSMSA leadership has strategically engaged in spaces available for civil society participation within government in order to ensure that paper commitments are carried out in practice. These have included local and district victim empowerment forums, parliamentary standing committees, hearings on shelters held by the Commission on Gender Equality and participation in processes to set up the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide. These engagements are reported on in greater detail in the following chapters.

INNOVATIONS IN RESPONSE TO CHALLENGES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

During 2020/ 2021 the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown resulted in increased violence in intimate partner relationships and shelters faced the challenge of housing women while preventing the spread of Covid. NSMSA responded to these challenges in innovative ways.

To protect women from the spread of Covid while living in communal conditions in shelters, NSMSA developed intake protocols

to minimise the spread of infections, made available protection equipment, and developed safety plans for women. NSMSA raised and distributed more than 19 million Rand and this enabled the provision of face masks, thermometers, and sanitisers to 76 shelters in 8 provinces as well as covered operational costs to some shelters to enable them to keep their doors open. To accomplish this the NSMSA became a disbursing agent while simultaneously putting in place financial accountability mechanisms.

Research in partnership with the HBF explored the effect of the Covid-19 lockdown on VAW and on shelter staff, programmes, processes, and procedures. The NSMSA undertook a project to understand the impact of Covid on women in mining communities in 5 provinces – holding ongoing meetings with government and other stakeholders regarding the Covid-19 Pandemic and the safety of shelter residents and staff.

As a response to the increased violence during Covid, the NSMSA launched South Africa's first dedicated shelter Helpline for abused women. From its launch on 2 December 2020, up to 30 April 2021, the helpline assisted 2547 callers, averaging 17 calls a day. The success of the NSMSA helpline resulted in the Western Cape DSD Provincial Office providing an additional social worker on the helpline. A strategic partnership with Uber provided free and timely transport to shelters for clients in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Gauteng, and KwaZulu Natal, the four provinces where Uber operates.

In 2022 The NSMSA helpline was relocated from Cape Town to Johannesburg to enable management by the Johannesburg based secretariat. The helpline continues to provide

a 24-hour toll-free service seven days a week and plays a crucial role in making shelter services accessible to women in need.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Learning from and sharing their own experiences with shelter leaders and GBV activists across Africa and across the world has been an important part of NSMSA's growth to maturity.

In December 2017 HBF project manager, Claudia Lopes, and NSMSA Executive member, Joy Lange, presented the joint NSMSA/ HBF research at a conference in Vienna. In 2019 NSMSA Executive members and the HBF project manager attended the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in New York where they presented their research findings.

NSMSA members attended the World Conference on Women's Shelters in 2008, 2015, 2019, and 2025; and NSMSA serves on the steering committee of the Africa Network of Women's Shelters.

In November 2019, NSMSA executive members and Representatives from the Eastern Cape and Free State, attended the 4th World Conference on Sheltering in Taiwan, attended by 1400 people from 120 countries. This was a life changing experience for the NSMSA team who were inspired by the best practices shared and by their visit to the Taiwanese Domestic Violence Courts.

NSMSA presented its work at the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Australia in September 2025 and learnt from and collaborated with others from across the globe. Following this conference the NSMSA, in conjunction with the South African government, will submit an application to host the 2028/2029 global conference of Women's Shelters. Should the application be successful this will be the first conference of its kind to be held in Africa. NSMSA is working with the Kenya Shelter Movement on strengthening the African Network of Shelters.



Zubeda Dangor, Claudia Lopes and Joy Lange at CSW in 2019

CHAPTER TWO

**RESEARCH AND
ADVOCACY TO SECURE
ADEQUATE STATE
SUPPORT FOR SHELTERS**



One of the key challenges that led to the establishment of the NSMSA was the ongoing struggle by shelters to secure sufficient resources from the government’s Department of Social Development (DSD).

Government policy post 1994 had established funding possibilities for shelters through the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP). The programme was administered nationally and provincially by the Department of Social Development (DSD) with provincial DSD departments disbursing subsidies to registered Non-Profit Organisations (NPOs).

However, government funding of shelters has been barely sufficient to meet even the basic needs of food, safe accommodation, and adequate staffing. In addition, with each new funding cycle shelters faced delayed payments from DSD, often waiting up to three months. This placed shelters in the position of having to find ways to feed women at the shelter while they waited for funds and having to rely on the commitment of staff members to continue working for months without pay. The frustration faced by individual shelters over the years led to the strategy of forming the NSMSA as a national umbrella organisation to build the collective power of shelters across the country to redress these challenges.

The NSMSA’s advocacy from their earliest years made clear that the gap between government’s stated commitments and their lack of implementation of these commitments was not simply an information gap. Since more was at stake the NSMSA realised the importance of understanding the underlying reasons for government failures

to support shelters adequately in order to devise strategies to address these failures. Research was important to provide both a deeper understanding of underlying factors and evidence to back advocacy, and it was important to build the capacity of shelter staff and provincial representatives for successful advocacy.

Over the years the NSMSA has honed an approach that links research, advocacy and capacity building, and that allows working with DSD at national and provincial levels, while simultaneously challenging DSD. NSMSA has thus worked with DSD in official spaces that invite civil society participation while also engaging in protest action, including marches, demonstrations, petitions and the use of the courts in the interests of advancing the rights of women who experience violence.

The timeline that follows sets out key moments of research and advocacy over the years and their significance. Each of these moments are discussed in greater detail in this chapter.

YEAR	RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY MOMENTS	SIGNIFICANCE
2010	NSMSA becomes aware of DSD funding disparities within and between provinces	Sparks advocacy for <u>standardisation and increased funding for shelters</u>
2016-2018	Research partnership between the NSMSA and the Heinrich Boel Foundation	Evidence-based advocacy and <u>capacity building to support government’s accountability to shelters through standardised and increased government’s grants</u>
2018 -2023	Engagement with the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE)	<u>Accountability Pathway to advance sheltering for women</u>
2018-2026	Participation in #TotalShutdown, two Presidential Summits and the development of the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide	National policy influence through protest and engagement NSMSA puts forward shelter related demands which are included in the NSP on GBVF
2019	Demonstration outside parliament for standardised and adequate funding	<u>Protest while working from within</u>
2019	Participation on the Interim GBVF Steering Committee	<u>National Policy Influence Contributing to the NSP for GBVF in South Africa_</u>
2021- 2025	The Indabas	<u>Institutional maturity Bringing together NSMSA, member shelters, DSD National and Provincial and other government departments to address challenges</u>
2021	Campaign to remove Minister of Police	<u>Protest while working from within</u>
2023 and Ongoing	The Gauteng Crisis Care Committee	<u>Joining with NPOs to challenge Gauteng DSD’s failure to support NPOs</u>
Ongoing	VEP Forums	<u>Spaces for ongoing engagement with DSD</u>

BECOMING AWARE OF DSD FUNDING DISPARITIES WITHIN AND BETWEEN PROVINCES, 2010

Early on in its formation the NSMSA discovered that in addition to low subsidies and late payments from DSD, there were marked differences between the funds received by shelters within a province as well as between provinces. Joy Lange shared in a 2025 interview an important moment of revelation in 2010 at a meeting of managers of the Western Cape Women's Shelter Forum. As managers shared their experiences they were astounded to learn that shelters managed by white managers in apartheid era white group areas were receiving higher subsidies than shelters managed by Coloured managers in apartheid era Coloured townships.

The coordinator of the Western Cape Shelter Movement shared this revelation at the next meeting of the NSMSA Provincial Representatives and the Executive. This led to more sharing which brought to light discrepancies across provinces and galvanised the NSMSA into lobbying nationally for standardisation and an increase in funding to meet the true costs of sheltering. As they took up this campaign new information came to light. The NSMSA was shocked to learn that the allocation by the Department of Correctional Services for a prisoner in a correctional facility was higher than the allocation made by DSD for a woman in a shelter.

Research published by the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre's (TLAC) in 2013 uncovered more evidence on the inadequacy of DSD funding to shelters. This research found that less than 1% of National DSD's overall budget was set aside for the Victim Empowerment Programme which supported shelters, and that shelters received just over a third of the VEP allocation.

Of the three Western Cape shelters participating in this research, DSD funding covered 48% of one shelter's operational expenses, just over 33% of the second shelter's operational costs, while the third shelter had sufficient funding to keep their doors open for only 3 months and were engaging in retrenchments, restructuring and a massive media appeal to remain open². These findings spurred on advocacy with greater urgency to increase the DSD and VEP budgets as well as the allocations to shelters so that DSD funding met the true costs of sheltering.

Building on this research and to intensify the call for standardisation and increased allocations to shelters, the HBF and NSMSA entered into a three-year partnership between 2016 and 2018.

2. <https://za.boell.org/en/2013/06/26/departement-social-development-funding-shelters-abused-women-inadequate>

RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN NSMSA AND HEINRICH BOELL FOUNDATION

The NSMSA undertook the three-year project in partnership with the Heinrich Böll Foundation between January 2016 and December 2018. The project linked research more closely with advocacy and capacity building³.

Titled "Enhancing State Responsiveness to GBV: Paying the Trust Costs" the project aimed to influence National DSD policy and Provincial DSDs' operational management and funding. Inbuilt into the research design were discussions and public debates to engage DSD and other government department officials on the research findings at various intervals over the 3 years. The NSMSA saw its role as 'supporting state accountability', making a strategic move away from the more adversarial framing of 'holding the state to account'.

Also built into the project design were 6 capacity building workshops for NSMSA Provincial Representatives over the 3 years to strengthen the NSMSA's ability to engage in policy formulation, build alliances, and engage in advocacy and lobbying. Additional design elements included engagements with oversight bodies and the media to strengthen public awareness; initiatives to increase awareness of shelters and referrals to shelters; and initiatives to build the capacity of journalists to increase public awareness of GBV and services of shelters.

Overall contribution of the research "Enhancing State Responsiveness to GBV: Paying the True Costs"

The research findings and engagements with government officials, shelters and the public, placed shelters on the political and public agenda. The project provided evidence on the inadequacy of DSD funding support and strengthened the shelter movement's lobbying abilities.

HBF and NSMSA called for the state to recognise the sheltering of abused women as a contribution to the well-being of society, to appreciate the role of shelters in the prevention of VAW and in providing care to those most needing support, and to treat women who access shelters with greater dignity and equality.

A significant contribution of this research project was that the NSMSA and HBF gained a better understanding of DSD functioning at National and Provincial levels. This understanding has been crucial for NSMSA's ongoing relationship with the DSD and in working with the DSD as partners in addition to undertaking ongoing advocacy.

3. Final Narrative Report Paying the True Costs, 2019 https://static.pmg.org.za/241030HBF-NSM-PayingTrueCosts-finalnarrativereport2019_Final.pdf

It became clear that the National DSD holds limited power to influence and/or hold provincial departments to account. NSMSA learnt that at the provincial level politics and personal agendas play a significant role in where power lies and how things play out. For example in the Western Cape provincial DSD is the power holder that needs to be approached in order to influence programme and/or budget decisions on shelters. However, in the Eastern Cape power rests at the regional and district levels and NSMSA needs to engage at these levels.

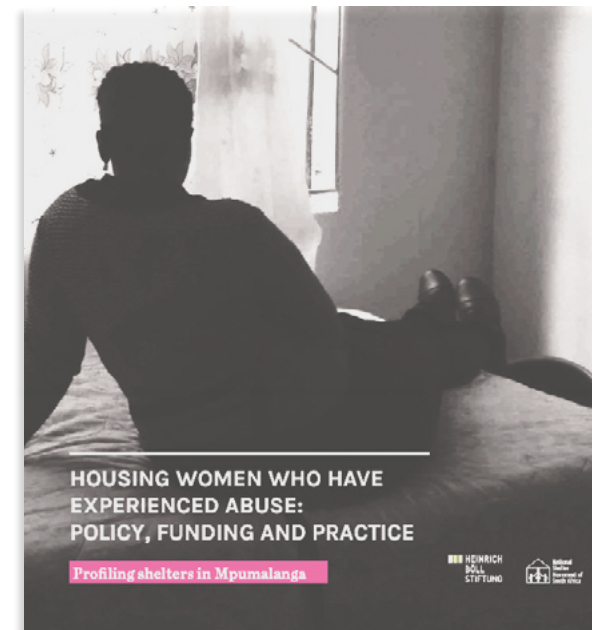
Other outcomes of the research included NSMSA/HBF influencing the Commission on Gender Equality to investigate government's support to shelters, engagements in the #TotalShutdown protests, and in 2 Presidential Summits, and the development of the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide.

The Four Research studies that made up the 3-year research project

Over a period of three years four studies were conducted in 6 provinces – Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, Gauteng, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Northern Cape. These included Provincial Shelter Assessments and an assessment of the South African Police Services (SAPS) referrals of abused women to shelters in these provinces⁴;



4. Lopes, C. and Mpani, P. (2017) Shelters housing women who have experienced abuse: policy, funding and practice. Profiling shelters in Mpumalanga. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation
- Lopes, C. and Mpani, P. (2017) Shelters housing women who have experienced abuse: policy, funding and practice. Profiling shelters in KwaZulu-Natal. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Vetten, L and Lopes, C. (2018). Out of Harm's Way: Women's Shelters in the Eastern and Northern Cape. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation.
- Kelly Stone and Claudia Lopes (2018) Policing Responses to Domestic Violence: Exploring Reactions by the Police to Women in Need of Shelter. Research Paper. National Shelter Movement of South Africa and Heinrich Böll Foundation
5. Lopes, C, Matebeni, Z, Ngcobo, S and Mangwiro, M. (2018). "If it wasn't for them, I could have been dead!" The long-term impact of shelters on the lives of abused women. (Editor, Kailash Bhana) Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Foundation.
6. Lisa Vetten (2018) What is Rightfully Due? Costing the Operations of domestic violence shelters. Johannesburg: HiDSA



Three of the reports published as part of this research project

Provincial Profiles; a Long-Term Impact Study⁵; and research in partnership with Hlanganisa Institute for Development in South Africa (HiDSA) to cost the operations of domestic violence shelters⁶. The studies highlighted the importance of shelters as places of care, support, empowerment, and healing in a country with extremely high rates of gender-based violence, and that at times shelters made the difference between life and death.

The Provincial shelter studies found that DSD subsidies under the Victim Empowerment Programme were insufficient, failed to cover the operational costs of running a shelter, and payments were frequently late. While the government states that shelters are a 'national priority', this was not reflected in DSD funding mechanisms.

During 2015/2016, funding ranged from R50 to R63 per woman per day to cover food, schooling, transport, and healthcare, with minimal increases in the following years. This meant shelter staff often had to use their own resources or secure loans to feed residents. The research recommendations to DSD focused on increasing subsidies, strengthening mental health care services, a call for reviewing and rethinking policy and practice, and a reduction of red tape.

The costing study published in October 2018 under the title "What is Rightfully Due? Costing the Operations of Domestic Violence Shelters" highlighted that domestic violence shelters are essential but underfunded, inconsistently supported, with subsidies not meeting real needs. DSD funding covered around 41% of shelter costs and shelters had to rely on precarious fundraising to cover the shortfall. DSD subsidies were insufficient and inconsistent across provinces and not distributed equitably. Shelter employees often earned below the national minimum wage, and this led to high staff turnover and compromised service quality. Documentation of each task shelter staff undertook and the support they provided from the time a woman entered a shelter revealed an extremely large range of tasks and made clear how undervalued and invisible many of these supports are. Shelter staff themselves were amazed at how much of what they actually did was invisible even to themselves. The study found that funding was not based on a reliable costing framework and to remedy this proposed a framework for more adequate costing of shelter facilities and programmes based on women's actual use of shelters. The proposed framework

8. Joy Watson and Claudia Lopes (2017) Shelter Services to Domestic Violence Victims – Policy Approaches to Strengthening State Responses. Policy Brief No.1, September 2017. National Shelter Movement of South Africa and Heinrich Böll Foundation
9. Final Narrative Report Paying the True Costs, 2019 https://static.png.org.za/241030HBF-NSM-PayingTrueCosts-finalnarrativereport2019_Final.pdf

factored in adequate client to staff ratios; more appropriate subsidies for social workers and support staff, and more adequate funding to cover costs directly related to the sheltering of women and their children and the general running of the shelter.

The long-term impact study “If it wasn’t for them, I could have been dead!” noted that shelters provide invaluable services and can make the difference between life and death in the South African context of extremely high levels of violence. The study recommended that government should i) standardise shelter services and regulations, increase funding for shelters, and develop a more equitable costing framework; ii) provide safe, affordable housing to survivors of Intimate Partner Violence and their children and finalise the Special Needs Housing Policy; iii) audit shelter skills training programmes including linkages to employment; iv) ensure coordination between relevant government departments and shelters in service provision. A recommendation directed at the Department of Health called for the prioritisation of IPV as a public health concern.

Presentations and discussions of the research findings with government officials and parliament

Preliminary research findings⁷ were presented to government representatives and shelters in Johannesburg and Cape Town in September and October 2017. NSMSA provincial representatives elaborated on the challenges in running shelter services. In October 2017

the NSMSA and HBF participated in a joint written and oral submission, together with other NGOs, to a parliamentary Standing Committee on Appropriations on the 2017 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement⁸. Two Provincial Shelter Assessments were launched at a public debate at the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children in Cape Town in February 2018, where shelters elaborated on their challenges.

Preliminary findings of the Provincial Profile studies on Eastern Cape and Northern Cape were presented in East London at a gathering hosted with Masimanyane Women’s Rights International in September 2018 and in Kimberly in October 2018, supported by local shelter Women2Women.

Between February and December 2018 NSMSA and HBF presented the research findings to government representatives and shelters at six gatherings of around 35 participants each. The presentations and engagements between the researchers, NSMSA provincial reps and executive members and DSD officials stressed the necessity of shelters, raised government failures in meeting their mandate to support shelters and the women who needed sheltering, and highlighted the challenges faced by shelters. Government officials and shelter staff were urged to take action to redress current failures, through improved delivery of adequate subsidies and shelter staff through capacity building for lobbying and advocacy.

Towards the end of 2018 two face-to-face meetings with the National DSD and National Treasury were held to discuss the costing of shelter operations.

Final findings and recommendations of the research project “What is Rightfully Due? Costing the Operations of Domestic Violence Shelters” were discussed with the DDG from National DSD and at a public debate which served as the project close-out in December 2018. Drawing on the research findings ongoing advocacy continued into the early 2020’s on standardisation of DSD funding to shelters across provinces; on increased funding for women in shelters and for increased salaries for shelter staff; and for an end to late payments which left shelter staff working with no salaries for months on end while shelters waited for DSD payments.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUALITY (CGE) 2018 TO 2023

In 2018, following complaints of unfair eviction by former shelter residents of the government-run shelter, Ikhaya Lethemba, in Johannesburg, NSMSA, HBF and Lawyers for Human Rights(LHR) met with the CGE to lobby that the CGE undertake an investigation into all shelters. The CGE, set up by the government in terms of Chapter 9 of the country’s constitution, has powers to investigate complaints of gender-related inequality, and make recommendations to Parliament and other authorities. The NSMSA, HBF and LHR saw a CGE investigation as an additional means to hold the government accountable for the real conditions facing shelters and survivors. The NSMSA and HBF provided support to the CGE investigation in

the form of reports from their recent research, through identification of NPO and DSD shelters across South Africa, and the NSMSA provided assistance with finding alternative placement of the 3 evicted families. The CGE held a series of public hearings and monitoring visits to assess the state of shelters for abused women and children across South Africa. DSD national and provincial officials made presentations at the hearings in December 2019 and the NSMSA presented their findings on the costs of sheltering.

The CGE’s 2018/19 report noted systemic challenges and recommended that the government takes action to address inadequate and inconsistent funding, the lack of standardised policies, and failures to accommodate male children, people with disabilities, and the LGBTIQ+ community. However, as the government failed to take action, the NSMSA went back to the CGE two years later, and the CGE instituted new hearings, calling on government departments to explain their failure to act. The CGE 2022/2023 report noted the slow progress of government departments’ implementation of CGE’s recommendations.

Bernadine Bachar shared in a 2025 interview that this is an example of NSMSA’s effective use of strategy as well as the organisation’s tenacity to follow through an issue. In Bernadine Bachar’s words:

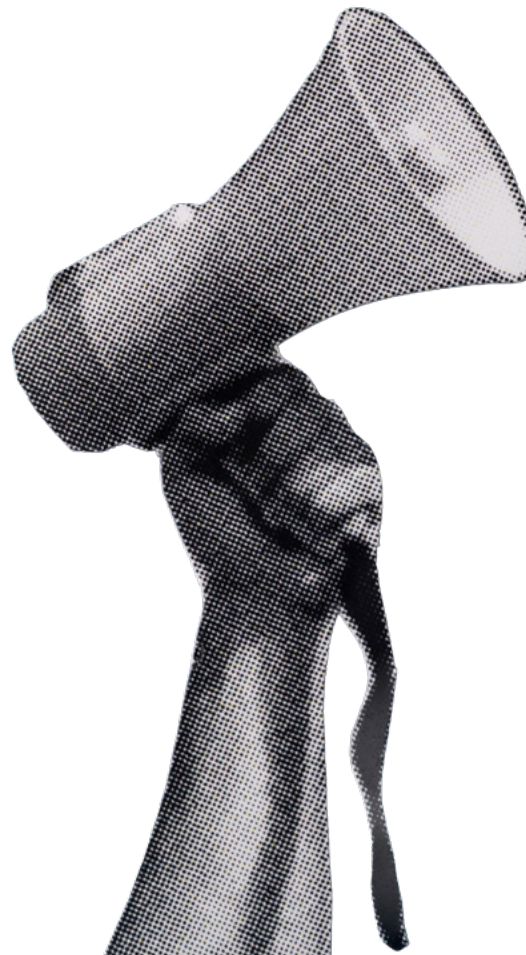
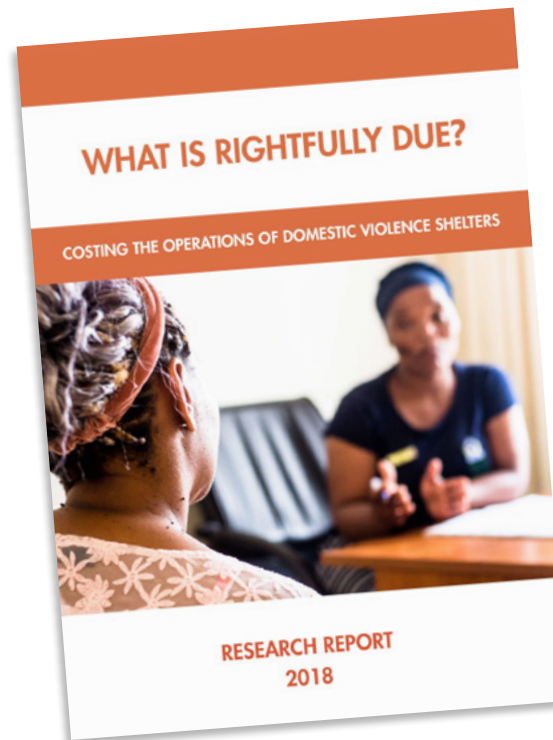
The CGE 2018/2019 report recommended uniform and adequate funding stating that DSD had a constitutional obligation to fund shelters. The report also recommended time frames by when recommendations should be addressed. Two years later we went back to CGE and said the time period had lapsed. More hearings were held and government

departments were called in on their failure to act. A new report was produced. NSMSA is an organisation not only championing and in the forefront of advocacy, but also with an incredibly effective strategy.

Joy Lange, NSMSA current board member, noted in a 2025 interview that NSMSA lobbying of the CGE is an example of the strategic use of existing institutions to strengthen the call for standardised and increased funding for shelters. Joy recalled how the issue of discrepancies in shelter funding first raised at the Western Cape Women's Shelter Forum, was taken to the NSMSA nationally, and then to the CGE:

We had a meeting with the director of the CGE saying we would like for them to do an investigation on shelters, and they actually did it. That gave rise to the CGE's investigative report. in 2019. They then had public hearings which we were invited to. And that for me was a full circle of the power a movement can have - raising these issues in and through the proper channels.

From talking on the ground, we took the issue to the national shelter movement, and then to a chapter 9 institution which is there to hold the government to account.



#TOTAL SHUTDOWN, PRESIDENTIAL SUMMITS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NSP ON GBVF 2018 TO 2025



#TotalShutdown march, 2018

In response to increased violence against women in South Africa, and the increased killings of women at the hands of intimate partners, local actions grew into provincial and nationwide #TotalShutdown marches in 2018, and the presentation of a memorandum of 24 demands to the President. NSMSA executive members, provincial representatives and shelter members joined with civil society organisations in these protests to demand that the country's president calls a summit to begin a process of developing a National Strategic Plan (NSP) on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The NSMSA ensured that the needs of shelters were included in the list of 24 demands.

The President responded by bringing together CSOs and key government departments to organise the Presidential Summits and contribute to the drafting of the NSP on GBVF. The First Presidential Summit on GBVF was held in November 2018. Two NSMSA representatives attended preparatory meetings and the First Summit. Two NSMSA representatives were members of the Interim Gender Based Violence Steering Committee set-up by the President. Zubeda Dangor, Executive Head of the NSMSA led the CSO caucus at the Second Presidential Summit on GBVF held in 2022.

In March 2019 the President signed the GBVF declaration in which he committed to the 24 demands resulting from the Summit. Among these were the following shelter-related demands:

Shelter related demands in the NSP on GBVF

- Consistent and adequate funding for shelters, safe houses, and transitional facilities for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).
- Shelters and service providers must be equipped to offer holistic support — including counselling, medical care, legal aid, childcare, and skills development.
- A formalized, efficient referral system between police, hospitals, courts, and shelters to ensure survivors get timely and coordinated help.
- Government officials who fail to assist GBV survivors or mismanage shelter funding must be held accountable.
- Survivors of GBV should be included in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies affecting them, including shelter management.

The shelter-related demands fed directly into the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF) signed by the President in April 2020. The NSMSA was one of the ten NGOs present at the signing. The NSP-GBVF provided for a National Council on Gender Based Violence and Femicide which was to be set up in terms of the National Council on Gender Based Violence and Femicide Act. Two NSMSA representatives, one in the North

West Province and one in the Free State, had facilitated provincial level consultations that fed into the NSP.

The NSMSA contributed to the plan, particularly to Pillar 4 on ‘Response, Care, Support, and Healing’ which commits to:

- Ensure the availability and sustainability of shelters and safe spaces for all survivors of GBV and femicide.
- Develop a national funding model for shelters with standardized norms and minimum service levels.
- Secure long-term, ring-fenced funding across all provinces.

However, despite the elation in 2018 that the President had listened and that by 2020 the fought-for NSP was in place, the NSMSA Executive noted in their 2023/2024 Annual report that the promised resources were not forthcoming and the GBVF sector and NPOs had not been consulted on the National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Bill. A five-year NSP and pillars review in 2025 showed there were still huge gaps relating to shelters. These included underfunding, lack of standardisation, a regulatory vacuum and still no GBVF Council. The challenge of securing adequate resourcing for shelters makes clear the need for strategies that include protest and challenge alongside work on policy, law and structures within government to secure the needs and interests of women who need sheltering. Hence, even while working on the NSP the NSMSA had continued protests to secure their demands.



Shelter Representatives, WCWSM members and NSMSA leadership outside parliament

2019 DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE PARLIAMENT FOR STANDARDISED AND ADEQUATE FUNDING

In 2019 the Western Cape Women’s Shelter Movement (WCWSM) and the NSMSA held a demonstration outside parliament, calling on the Minister of DSD for standardised and more realistic funding to enable shelters to meet the needs of women residents and to pay staff decent salaries. The Minister received the memorandum of demands, but neither the WCWSM nor the NSMSA received a response from the minister following the protest. Delene Roberts, Western Cape Provincial Representative recalls:

We stood in front of Parliament under umbrellas, soaking wet, waiting for the minister to come out and sign the document. The decision on this silent protest was taken by the Provincial Representatives at a meeting in Joburg and we didn’t realise that on the day there would be torrential rains. All the NSMSA representatives came to Cape Town, and staff of the Western Cape shelters joined the protest. We stood in silence in the rain, under umbrellas, with our banners. It showed that NSMSA, the reps, and shelters wanted to make a difference. The Minister came out in the rain and signed our document.

ANNUAL SHELTER INDABAS 2021 TO 2025



Participants at the 2025 National Shelter Indaba

The Annual Indabas bring together shelters, the NSMSA executive, provincial representatives, secretariat, CSOs and government departments working on GBV. It is a forum where shelters bring concerns, engage with government officials, build their capacity, and network with the broader NPO community working on GBV in a search for solutions to improve the quality of shelter services, and ensure adequate resourcing. The idea of an Indaba was proposed by the National DSD Head of Department at the end of 2018 in a discussion on the findings

of the NSMSA/HBF 3-year research project. He suggested the NSMSA hold an Indaba to discuss the research findings and other challenges and to find ways to resolve challenges. NSMSA developed this idea further to provide for reflection, learning and collective engagement in strengthening sheltering and held the first Indaba in 2021 in partnership with HBF.

Resolutions from the First National Shelter Indaba focused on advocacy for second stage housing; developing a strategy to work with

the South African Police Services to address challenges; raising public awareness on the strategic importance of shelters; improving services to LGBTI+ persons; establishing provincial bodies; and forming strategic partnerships to leverage funding.

Impressed with the 2021 Indaba, DSD officials suggested partnering with NSMSA and HBF in a second Indaba in 2022. Since then the Annual Shelter Indabas have become regular events convened jointly by NSMSA, HBF and DSD National. The Annual Shelter Indabas between 2023 and 2025 have emphasised the urgent need for more shelters and for increased funding for GBVF programs, the important role of shelters as key to attaining outcomes of NSP Pillar 2: 'Prevention and Social Cohesion' and NSP Pillar 4: 'Response, Care, Support and Healing'.

2023 CAMPAIGN TO REMOVE THE MINISTER OF POLICE

In 2023 the NSMSA initiated a campaign for the removal of Police Minister Cele, given the government's failure to curb the escalating Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) pandemic. This call was substantiated by a petition and letter to the President, supported by over 80,000 signatories. The NSMSA leadership and member shelters protested outside the Union Buildings, the seat of government in Pretoria.

GAUTENG CRISIS CARE COMMITTEE 2023 AND ONGOING

In 2023 NPOs in Gauteng Province came together in the Gauteng Crisis Care Committee (GCCC) to challenge the Gauteng Department of Social Development (GDSD) over funding delays and municipal compliance issues which threatened the closure of NPOs. The NSMSA joined the GCCC to represent shelters affected by these funding delays and provided data to support actions which included demonstrations and a court action.

The main issue that delayed NPO funding was municipal compliance requirements. Municipal compliance involves meeting the varied, pre-existing local by-laws of individual municipalities (e.g., environmental health, zoning, and fire safety). GDSD began enforcing these municipal regulations more strictly in 2023. To meet these regulations was often a costly exercise and in the case of rezoning involved bureaucratic hurdles. Instead of partnering with and helping NPOs to meet compliance requirements, GDSD took a punitive approach. They refused to sign Service Level Agreements, withheld subsidies, did not allow the use of GDSD funding to meet the costs of compliance, and withdrew funds from 5 shelters in the Johannesburg Region in the middle of the year. These punitive actions forced many shelters to close their doors, resulting in a reduction of operational shelters in Gauteng from 22 to 12, between 2023 and 2025. Other non-profit organisations in Gauteng, working in areas other than sheltering, faced similar difficulties.

In the 2025-2026 financial year, the non-profit sector in Gauteng faced similar challenges. DSD refused to provide funds to a number of shelters on the grounds that they were not compliant and in once case for handing in their proposal 3 minutes late.

The GCCC made representation at Portfolio Committee hearings and to the DSD, calling for equal assessment and funding, arguing that the different requirements by different municipal regions in Gauteng was unfair and haphazard. Nisaa and NSMSA participated in a GCCC march and demonstration in 2025 where a memorandum was handed to GDSD explaining the difficulties faced by NPOs. NSMSA and member shelters also participated in a protest outside parliament in Cape Town.

DSD VICTIM EMPOWERMENT (VEP) FORUMS

The DSD Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP) Forums have also served as spaces for engaging with government departments. VEP forums in South Africa are local and provincial coordinating bodies that work to support victims of crime and violence. These forums bring together government departments, NGOs, and community groups to provide a coordinated response to services for victims, with a particular focus on gender-based violence and human trafficking. Shelters for victims of crime and violence, particularly gender-based violence (GBV), receive funding primarily through the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), which is managed

and implemented by the Department of Social Development (DSD). The funding is distributed to non-profit organisations (NPOs) that operate these shelters. However, the VEP gets a miniscule portion of the department's budget as NSMSA has made clear in its calls for more adequate funding from DSD.

In the meanwhile, as Joy Lange, NSMSA board member in 2025 notes, VEP forums provide opportunities for shelters to bring to the attention of government officials the actual challenges of women in shelters – for example challenges in placing their children in schools – thus correcting government officials views that the realities of women's experiences are not as policy suggests and that actions are needed to redress these challenges.

If you get funded from the VEP program you have to report at VEP forum meetings. Other relevant government departments are also expected to attend. Shelters send a representative, usually the chair. The idea is for the different stakeholders to speak with each other and align things. We once had this beautiful presentation by someone in the Provincial Education Department from safer schools. We put on the table the real challenges we faced as shelters in placing children in schools. Within this ecosystem of service providers, different stakeholders, and DSD we can raise issues and get them to take these forward.



CHAPTER THREE

CAPACITY BUILDING



From the early years of dreaming the movement into being the NSMSA founders identified the need for capacity building to support shelter leadership and staff to run effective shelters, and to lobby DSD to provide adequate resources.

NSMSA efforts have focused on building capacity for organisational building and strengthening; movement building and strengthening; and continuous professional development of shelter staff and provincial representatives.

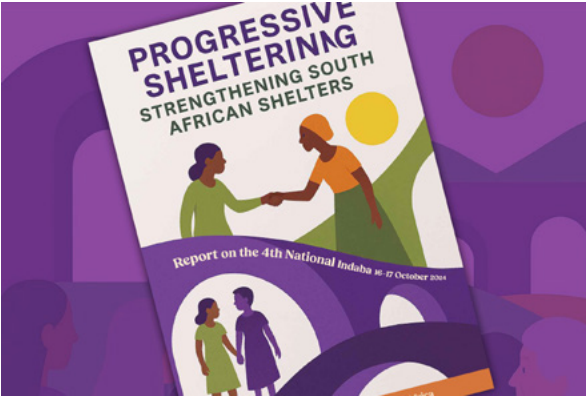
Organisational development and strengthening activities have included support to develop shelter policies, programmes and job descriptions; to undertake strategic planning processes and fundraising; to ensure adequate governance structures and policies; and to meet the requirements for the registration of shelters.

Movement building and strengthening activities have included support to provincial representatives to form women’s shelter movements in each province to build solidarity and strengthen the collective voice of shelters; to hone skills in lobbying and advocacy for adequate resources, and for laws and policies that meet the needs of survivors of GBV while treating them with dignity.

Professional skills development activities have included training in trauma informed practice, empowerment approaches, understanding GBV and its causes, understanding the reasons women seek shelter and the importance of sheltering in moments of crisis, understanding the needs of women in shelters, and understanding burnout and compassion fatigue.

The infographic on the following page captures capacity building processes and their purpose over the years.

National DSD has provided funding support for much of the NSMSA’s capacity building work, and two National DSD officials interviewed in 2025, Mr Sbusiso Malope, Director of the Victim Empowerment Programme and Ms G Itumeleng responsible for VEP funding, noted that NSMSA’s capacity building efforts have contributed to NSMSA’s current position as a coordinated voice of South African shelters.



YEAR	CAPACITY BUILDING PROCESSES	PURPOSE
2008	Capacity building workshops for Provincial Representatives following their appointments	Organisational and Movement Strengthening
2011	Capacity building of member shelters and Provincial Representatives at 1st Conference of S.A. Shelters	Organisational and Movement Strengthening
2012-2014	Executive members led capacity building workshops in provinces for shelter staff and provincial representatives	Organisational and Movement Strengthening
2012 ongoing	Capacity building at regular meetings between the NSMSA Executive and Provincial Representatives	Organisational and Movement Strengthening
2016-2018	6 capacity building sessions for Provincial Reps inbuilt into the 3-year NSMSA/ HBF project included	Movement Strengthening
2018	Publication: ‘Letting Our Power Glow: Activities to build women’s power’	Professional Development and empowering shelter residents
2019-2021	3-year research project to understand the experiences of women in shelters	Professional Development and Organisational Strengthening
2021 ongoing	Capacity Building workshops at Annual Indabas	Movement Strengthening and Professional Development
2022-2023	8 NSMSA member shelters participated in the Action Learning and Mentoring Project led by Nisaa	Organisational Strengthening and Professional Development
2022-2025	41 workshops for member shelters	Organisational and Movement Strengthening, Professional Development
2024 ongoing	Monthly webinars	Professional Development
2024	Publication: Turning The Tide: Guidelines For Caring And Effective Shelters For Survivors of GBV	Organisational Strengthening and Professional Development

Shelter capacity building has included the engagement of 8 NSMSA member shelters in an 8-to-12-month Action Learning Mentoring Programme led by Nisaa, 4 shelters attending the programme in 2022 and 4 attending in 2023. Online workshops for shelters since 2024 and monthly online webinars aimed at organisational strengthening and professional skills development of shelter staff. The NSMSA and Nisaa have developed and published resource books for professional skills development, which can be accessed by member shelters and the general public from the NSMSA website.

Capacity building for Provincial Representatives has included workshops led by executive members in various provinces between 2012 and 2014; capacity building workshops built into the 3-year research project in partnership with HBF between 2016 and 2018; and through regular meetings with the Executive since 2011.

During the years of the Covid pandemic online platforms such as Zoom and Teams made it possible for the NSMSA to provide capacity building workshops virtually. Post Covid, the NSMSA continued to offer virtual workshops and webinars as these enable participation by shelter staff and provincial representatives across the country while avoiding the prohibitive costs of transport, meals and venues.

The Annual Shelter Indabas are spaces for capacity building as well as advocacy. They draw on a hybrid approach of online and in person attendance and this has made it possible for all shelters to participate in a context where funding allows in person attendance for only two shelter representatives per province. In addition, NSMSA has made available recordings of

some capacity building sessions held at the Indabas on the NSMSA's Facebook page so that these may be used as a training resource by shelters as and when needed. Among these popular resources are two workshops for house mothers and one workshop on fundraising.

Key NSMSA personnel interviewed in 2025 noted that NSMSA capacity building activities have had an enormous positive impact on shelter staff and Provincial Representatives.

Dianne Massawe, NSMSA chairperson noted:

At last year's (2024) Indaba shelter representatives spoke about the support they are getting. They shared the peer learning taking place through the Nisaa Action Learning and Mentoring Programme, how they are learning from each other, and how they can take back these ideas to their shelter and province. Hearing this made me think that we are able to create space where people are growing and learning. A participant, who 2 years ago was very shy to speak, took the space at the Indaba and spoke about her growth through peer learning.

Delene Roberts, Western Cape NSMSA Representative shared:

The one thing I like about the NSMSA is the mentoring based on the Nisaa model. NSMSA actually assists the shelters where they need help and last year a lady from a shelter in the Philippi area in Cape Town gave feedback at the Indaba and she was very, very much impressed. She shared how supportive NSMSA was, and how much her shelter valued that support.

Nobesuthu Javu, Limpopo NSMSA Representative said:

We are being empowered at the Indabas through training of house mothers, training on latest amendments to laws, on shelter security. We hear stories from different shelters, we share best practices and we learn to look out for possible pitfalls.

Fisani Mahlangu previous Provincial Representative for Mpumalanga and former shelter social worker noted that shelters gained the following from being members of NSMSA:

Information and knowledge on hands on running of shelters; what needs to be in place; the standards and model to aspire to; ongoing information sharing, exposure to new ideas; an understanding that research also helps to get new information; increased bargaining power from speaking with one voice in advocating for our needs as shelters.

Gary Koekemoer, Director of Bet Sheekoom Shelter and Eastern Cape Provincial Representative shared that Bet Sheekoom gained a wealth of knowledge since joining NSMSA:

We stood alone and it felt like we were in isolation. Now we are a part of the bigger picture. Training and collaboration have been very informative and needed. NSMSA has enabled Bet Sheekoom to grow and become more impactful in the field of GBV prevention.

ORGANISATIONAL STRENGTHENING THROUGH DRAWING ON THE NISAA SHELTER MODEL

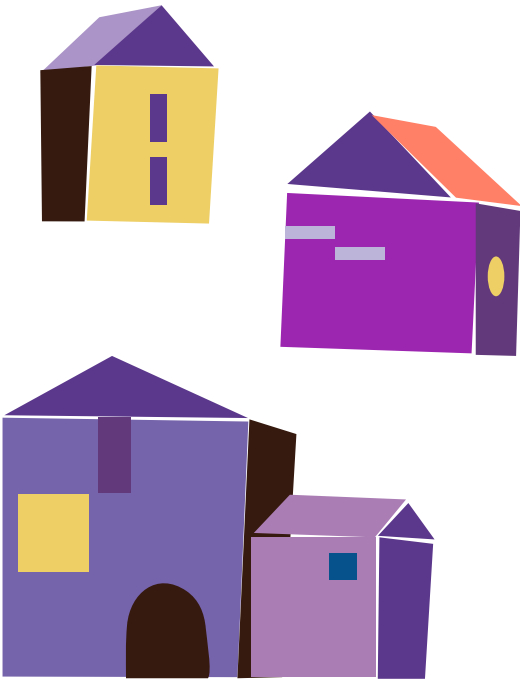
Zubeda Dangor, Nisaa Director and NSMSA Executive Head, developed the Nisaa Shelter Model based on the experience of the Nisaa Shelter. She shared this model with shelters at the First NSMSA conference in 2011, and in 2022 and 2023 the Nisaa Shelter Model served as the centrepiece for the Nisaa Action Learning Mentoring Project through which 8 NSMSA shelters received mentoring support. In 2025 the Nisaa Shelter Model formed the basis of a Resource book *Turning The Tide: Guidelines For Caring and Effective Shelters for Survivors Of GBV*; a workshop session at the 5th Shelter Indaba; and of a presentation by NSMSA at the 5th World Conference of Women's Shelters in Australia.

The Nisaa Shelter Model emphasises that in addition to adequate financial resources and a caring staff with expertise, to run effective shelters requires that the following elements in place: a clear mission, a clear philosophy, clear objectives, specific programmes and services, policies, management and governance rules, space for sharing of solutions.

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE NISAA SHELTER MODEL

A MISSION

sets out what a shelter wants to achieve, for who, and why. A clear mission guides the work of a shelter. The Nisaa Shelter mission statement for example says: ‘To provide safe and secure accommodation and counselling to women from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds whose lives are endangered by domestic violence, so that they may heal and be empowered to make choices which enable them to live their lives free of violence.’



THE PHILOSOPHY

or approach that guides a shelter could be a feminist approach, a therapeutic approach, or a welfare approach. A shelter may have a mix of these approaches.

A Feminist approach sees women as agents capable of making decisions and controlling their lives. It understands violence against women as resulting from unequal and unfair gender relations which gives men power over women. It does not blame women or ask a woman ‘what did you do that he beat you?’ or ‘what were you wearing when he raped you?’ or ‘why did you not leave him?’ A feminist approach focuses on supporting women who experience violence to build their power to act so that they are no longer dependent on others, and it recognises the need to change gender power relations in society so that men no longer have power over women.

A therapeutic approach focuses on the individual and does not consider the need to change gender power relations in society.

A welfare approach sees women who need help as dependents to be saved and decided for. It does little to empower women, and does not see the need to change gender power relations.

MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES AND RULES

ensure that the organisation runs efficiently and meets its objectives. It includes clear roles and responsibilities for the board, management, staff and shelter residents. Since residents may see shelter rules as similar to the control their abusers had over them, shelter staff should discuss the importance of rules in the context of care, support, healing and empowerment. Explaining for example that the rule not to divulge the shelter address is important to ensure the safety of women at the shelter; that rules on sharing of chores, on times of meals and times of leaving and returning to the shelter are important for the smooth running of the shelter.

POLICIES

set out in writing the guiding principles on how to work, what to offer, how to offer it and what to do if staff or clients go against these guiding principles. Examples are: Financial & Administration policies; Governance policies; Management policies; Grievance procedures; Human Resource Management policies; Shelter Admission policies; Intake procedures; Safety and Security policies; Staff development and support policies; Documentation and recording policies.

SOLUTION SHARING

enables staff, management and board to discuss problems and share possible solutions. It enables ongoing support and learning. For shelter residents house-meetings can be a place to discuss problems and share solutions.

OBJECTIVES

set out how a shelter will carry out its mission in line with the shelter’s philosophy.

Examples of Objectives could be

To provide physical and emotional safety and confidential shelter accommodation

To provide psychosocial support programmes as well as information to women residents

To build networks & partnerships and increase community awareness of and response to the problem of domestic violence.

To advocate for legislative and criminal justice processes as they pertain to violence against women.

PROGRAMMES & SERVICES

are the means by which objectives are carried out. Internal programmes and services may include counselling; personal empowerment; socioeconomic support; legal support; exit strategy and safety plan; staff debriefing, training, and care. External Programmes may include community awareness raising; partnerships with stakeholders.

Action Learning Mentoring Programme

In 2022 staff and board members from four member shelters from three provinces participated in the Nisaa Action Learning Mentoring project over a period of eight months; and in 2023 staff and board members from four member shelters from three different provinces were mentored over a period of twelve months.

The aim was to engage shelters in an ongoing process of action-reflection-action to improve the functioning of their shelters. An element of peer learning was included in two 3-day workshops where shelter teams from all four shelters came together. The first workshop was held at the start of the process, the second at the end of the process.

Each shelter team was made up of one senior staff member and one board member. At the first 3-day workshop shelter teams were introduced to the Nisaa Shelter Model and reflected on which elements of the model were in place in their shelter and which were missing. The shelter teams then prioritised which of the missing elements they would like to work on over an 8 to 12 month period. Each shelter team left the first 3-day workshop with a draft action plan and a commitment to engage their organisation's board and staff in a collaborative process to finalise the plan. Over the following months they began to act on their plan, each shelter team meeting monthly with an assigned mentor to share progress, receive feedback and plan next steps. In addition to providing mentoring support these meetings served as an accountability mechanism. Mentoring

meetings were held online, with the exception of one meeting where the mentors visited the shelter and met with all staff face-to-face.

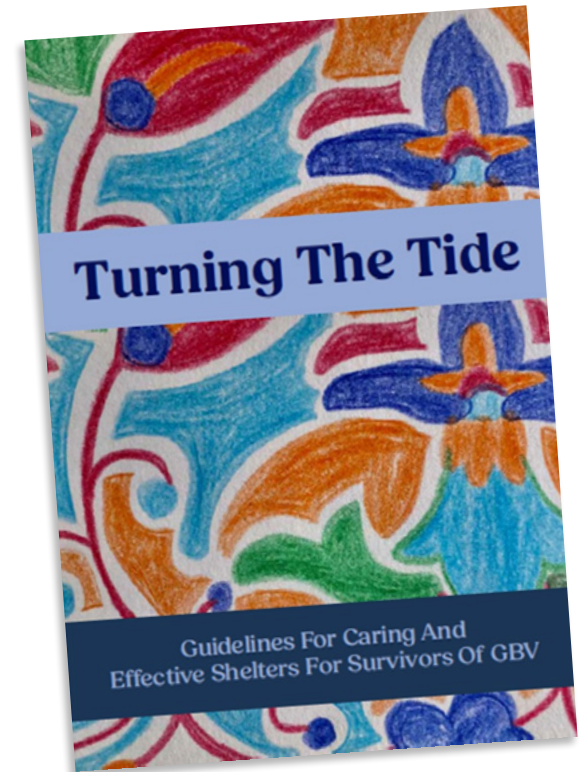
The second 3-day workshop was held at the end of the process where all four shelters teams met with their mentors and shared what they had learnt, what they had implemented and how they would build on what they had achieved. It was clear from all eight shelters engaged in the process over the two years that all had gained enormously from the mentoring process.

Andisiwe Magingxa, Siyakuyenza Safe Home Manager, Philippi, Cape Town, shared in an interview in 2025 how valuable it was for Siyakuyenza Safe Home to be part of the Nisaa Action Learning and Mentoring Programme.

The Action Learning Mentoring Process injected life into our organisation. It gave us a chance to list areas we want to work on and encouraged us to work on these areas. We identified gaps in staff development, safety and security policies, and HR policies. At the time we had no director, and no money. The Board was not working with staff. Zubeda was our mentor. We worked on improving communication between the board and staff, we brought the board into the picture. Zubeda came and we sat down with the board and staff and discussed how we could work together on the gaps and on resolving misunderstandings. The environment changed. There was a willingness to work together. Staff understood that it is our organisation to carry, not just that of the manager. That it is a shared responsibility. Zubeda helped find someone to do a strategic planning and helped us get funding.

Turning The Tide: Guidelines For Caring And Effective Shelters For Survivors of GBV

In 2025 Nisaa produced a resource book which offers six two-hour workshop sessions for organisational strengthening based on Nisaa's Action Learning Mentoring Programme. Titled 'Turning The Tide: Guidelines For Caring And Effective Shelters For Survivors of GBV', Section One of this resource book provides steps in a 12-month action learning process to strengthen a shelter's organisational functioning; as well as facilitator guidelines, readings and handouts for once off workshop sessions for organisations not in a position to embark on a 12-month action learning process. Topics include: The Story of Our Shelter; Identifying Gaps and Strategies; Vision, Mission and Values; Governance; Reflective Practice; Wellness. Each workshop session is designed to engage participants in thinking through how to improve their shelter's performance in specific areas of organisational functioning, while simultaneously strengthening teamwork and contributing to a collaborative, supportive, caring organisational culture.



MOVEMENT STRENGTHENING

Bringing Provincial Representatives together in regular meetings with the executive provided space for sharing, learning and capacity building. These meetings took place twice a year from the time provincial representatives were appointed. Their capacities were built to engage with shelters, form provincial shelter forums, and engage with provincial DSD and other government departments.

In addition to these regular meetings, the 3-year NSMSA/HBF research project, 'Enhancing State Responsiveness to GBV: Paying the True Costs', had an inbuilt capacity

building element for movement strengthening. Six dedicated capacity building workshops were held with provincial representatives. In addition round tables with government officials and public debates to share research findings served as capacity building spaces for both provincial representatives and participating shelter representatives.

The HBF Final Narrative report¹ notes that shelter representatives and the provincial representatives gained new skills and knowledge, strengthened their collective strategic thinking, their capacity to engage with policymakers, funders and other critical stakeholders and strengthened their capacity for advocacy. The process amplified the voice and influence of local shelters and increased DSD responsiveness to and recognition of shelters.

A provincial representative noted that the process empowered her and built her confidence:

[I now have] more confidence in engaging with decision makers...I would not pick up the phone and speak to the Director of the DSD, but now I just do it directly (rather than go via local district processes to try and reach the Director) – so my confidence and knowing best ways to access decision makers has grown.

A provincial representative noted that the process enabled coordination and improved networking:

Attending research launches helped us get to know each other, to bond and build relations to coordinate better with other actors in the sector. We went to

launches at the national level and in other provinces, and those were very informative and gave us networking opportunities.

Two provincial representatives commented that the costing study provided important information:

It helped us realise how much we are doing that is taken for granted. We did not appreciate how much work we were doing because we don't document it.

We really learned a lot about costing issues and how other shelters operate and get subsidised. The opportunities for engagement with decision makers and other departments were excellent and none of this would have been possible without this project.

Annual Shelter Indabas play an ongoing role in movement strengthening. The Indabas bring together shelters, the NSMSA executive, board, provincial representatives, secretariat, CSOs and government departments working on GBV. Shelters bring their concerns to the Indabas, engage with government officials in order to advance the needs of women who need shelter, and build connections with CSOs working on GBV. The first Indaba was organised by the NSMSA in partnership with HBF in 2021. The second and subsequent Indabas have been organised by NSMSA in partnership with national DSD and HBF.

The Indabas are an important space for reflection on important areas for strengthening sheltering in the country, for engaging with DSD on the need for increased funding to sustain and expand services, for assessing progress in government implementation of the National Strategic Plan on GBVF, and for highlighting the contributions of the NSMSA and its member shelters.

1. Final Narrative Report Paying the True Costs, 2019
https://static.pmg.org.za/241030HBF-NSM-PayingTrueCosts-finalnarrativereport2019_Final.pdf

PROFESSIONALISATION

NSMSA capacity building has supported the professional development of provincial representatives, social workers, auxiliary social workers, house mothers and board members through online workshops and webinars, hybrid breakaway sessions at Annual Indabas and through publications that can be accessed online.

Discussions at each of the National Shelter Indabas have stressed the importance of continuous professional development for shelter staff, noting that specialised skills are needed to effectively support survivors of GBV. Indaba sessions have focused on providing information on laws and amendments to laws, on the NSP on GBVF, on the prevalence of GBVF, the role of shelters, trauma-informed counselling, and the needs of women clients of shelters.

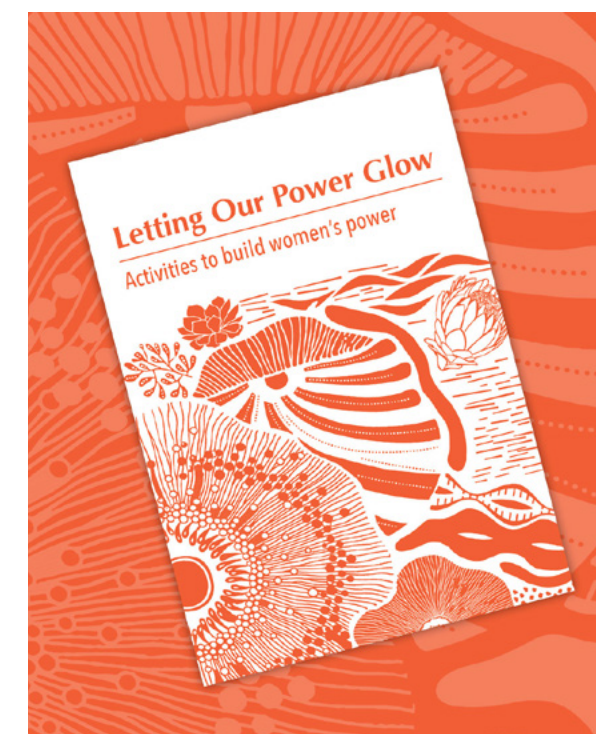
Between 2022 and 2025 the NSMSA organised 41 customised capacity building workshops for member shelters. Content covered included: fundraising & proposal writing; report writing; governance; self-care for shelter staff; helping clients deal with crisis fatigue and burnout; solution focused therapy; religious leaders' roles in relation to GBVF; engaging men and boys in the prevention of GBVF.

Between April 2024 and March 2025 NSMSA held 15 online webinars, attended by between 40 and 50 participants. The webinars aim to build the capacity of shelter staff, organisations working on GBV and community members in general, and to increase opportunities for networking. Content covered included: highlighting the work of NSMSA;

dynamics of GBVF; community based responses to GBVF; the National Council for GBVF (NCGBVF) Act; the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); women's economic empowerment; teen and youth empowerment.

NSMSA publications to build capacity of shelter staff

'Letting Our Power Glow: Activities to build women's power' is a NSMSA resource book that shelter staff may draw on in their work with women in shelters. Workshops were held with Provincial Representatives and



staff from member shelters in KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga and Eastern Cape to introduce the book, and discuss ways in which the book may be used.

The book provides reflective activities for shelter residents focusing on building inner strength, self-confidence, self-esteem, clear and assertive communication, and reflection on what one wants in relationships with romantic partners and family. The book includes readings on violence, highlighting that violence against women results from a system which sees women as inferior, subordinate and powerless in relation to men who are deemed superior. It highlights that women can come into their own power and claim their place in the world and in their relationships as full human beings and equals. The book can be downloaded from the NSMSA website.

The NSMSA research project, 'Raising Women's Voices in South African Shelters' aimed to highlight the needs of women who seek shelter and the challenges faced by shelter staff. The project involved interviews with 101 former shelter residents from 31 shelters across South Africa's 9 provinces between 2019 and 2021. Four publications, one for each of the three years and the fourth, a composite report of the findings from across the three years, record the women's reasons for taking shelter, their experiences while at the shelter, and their lives after shelter. The four reports may be downloaded from the NSMSA website. They enable shelter staff to understand more fully the needs of shelter residents and to reflect on the challenges they themselves face in providing for these needs.

The reports highlight that the violence women experienced before arriving at shelters was in many cases akin to torture or war. The

vast majority of the women interviewed had sought shelter from intimate partner violence – violence at the hands of men they once loved and who were themselves once loving. A smaller proportion had fled violence from families who are expected to love and nurture. Among the women who took shelter from intimate partner violence and family violence were women who were raped by intimate partners or family members. In many cases the violence had continued over many years before the women had fled their homes, fearing for their lives.

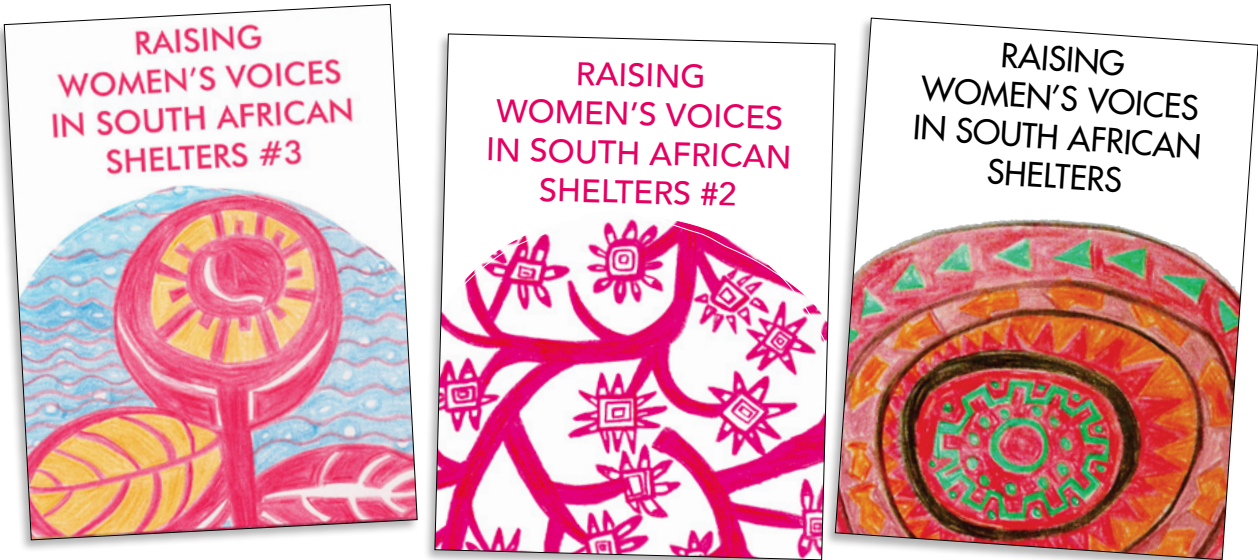
On average the women had spent between 2 to 7 months at the shelters, and they were interviewed at least a year after leaving a shelter. The shelters had played a role in saving their lives in a time of crisis. They had provided a refuge, enabled reflection and healing. Most women left the shelters feeling confident and able to face life in the world outside. Most were however in precarious financial positions, before and after sheltering. Housing and finances were ongoing challenges as they tried to rebuild their lives after sheltering. Fisani Mahlangu, former NSMSA Provincial Rep and Executive Member shared how her engagement in this research as an interviewer brought home the experiences of women who take shelter in new and profound ways, even though she had decades of experience as a shelter social worker. Fisani said:

The research on the life experiences of women is engraved in my brain. I had worked at a shelter for decades but it was a different experience doing these interviews. It really hit home as women shared their experiences of abuse, the kind of help that came their way when they really needed it. And that after all these experiences they are still standing.

One shelter staff member was interviewed from each of the 31 shelters in this study. Shelter staff were challenged to maintain a balance between (i) the need to ensure that shelter rules and schedules are observed and followed, and (ii) the need to demonstrate care and empathy, especially since shelter rules were a reminder for the women of the controls imposed by their abusive partners and families. When achieved, this balance helped create an atmosphere for healing. Shelter staff highlighted challenges of insufficient training to attend to the many needs of women in shelters and that staff were often overstretched and in danger of burn out.

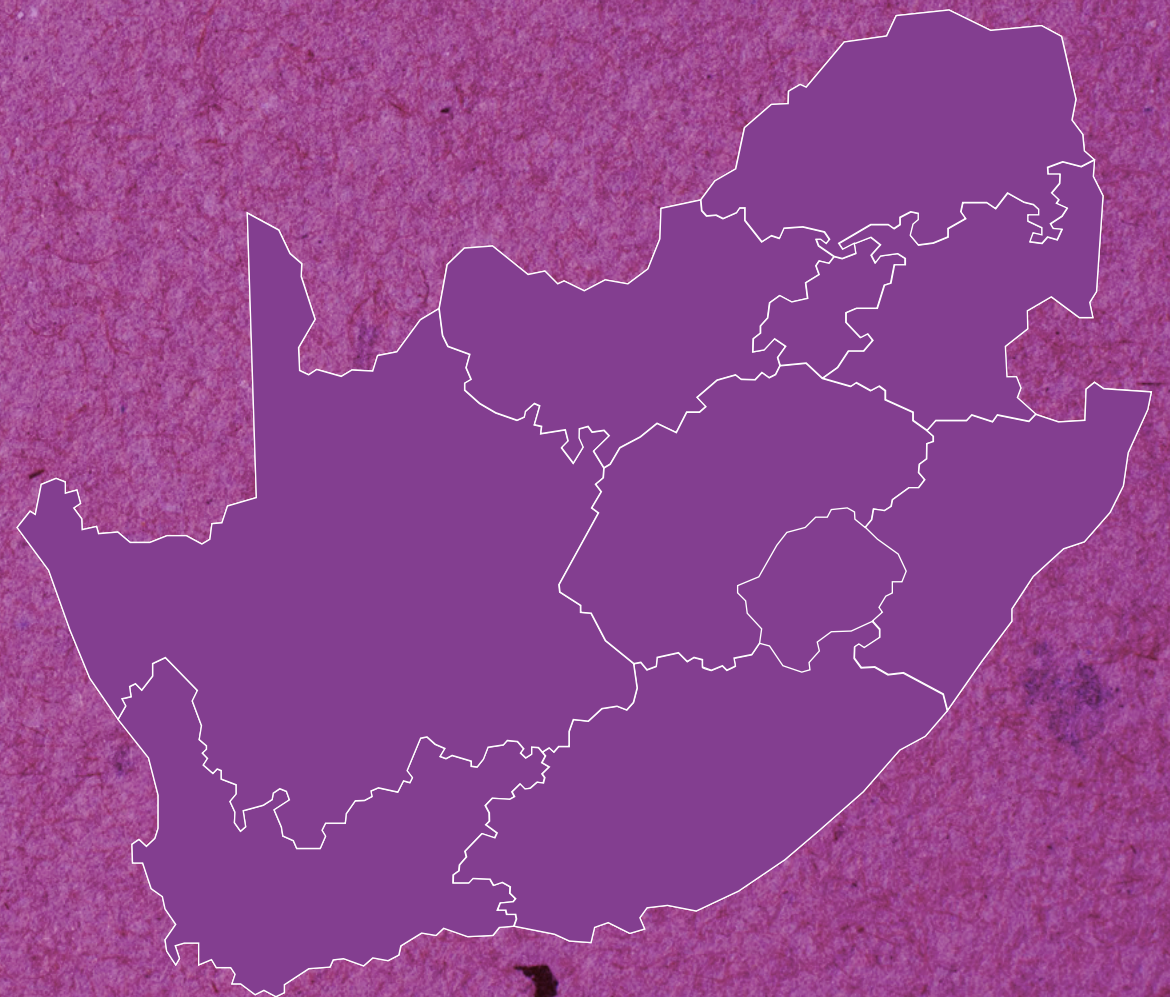
Recommendations based on the NSMSA research project, 'Raising Women's Voices in South African Shelters'

- increased public awareness on shelters and their services;
- secure housing, skills, jobs and incomes for women who leave shelters
- second stage shelter housing
- improved police services to women who experience violence
- Training and ongoing support for shelter staff, including measures to prevent burnout
- improved working conditions and salary increases for shelter staff
- actions to address the causes of the violence against women including social and economic causes, violent family and societal cultures, and ingrained ideas of male superiority



CHAPTER FOUR

PROVINCIAL SHELTER MOVEMENTS



Provincial representatives are the NSMSA movement building life force at provincial level, in much the same way that the secretariat, executive and board are the life force for organisational strengthening and movement building at a national level.

Provincial representatives were identified and appointed at the NSMSA founding workshop, and were tasked with:

- recruiting shelters in the province to join the provincial and national shelter movements
- building the provincial shelter movement
- liaising with and lobbying DSD at the provincial level around funding for shelters
- coordinating meetings of provincial shelter members to discuss challenges and share solutions
- coordinating lobbying, advocacy and awareness by shelters within the province and nationally
- attending capacity building and discussion sessions with the NSMSA executive, secretariat and all provincial representatives, to build a better understanding of national challenges and strategies.
- to share knowledge and information from national meetings with shelters in their provinces

The provincial representatives took on these responsibilities over and above their full-time jobs in management positions at shelters. Except for a 2-year period, from October 2020 to October 2022 when funding was available, provincial representatives have performed the tasks expected of them without payment.

Being embedded in shelters gives provincial representatives the advantage of understanding shelter operations and challenges. However, a huge challenge they face is how to balance their paid jobs at a local shelter while at the same time building a provincial movement. Mpumalanga is the only province where provincial representatives are not shelter based and are therefore able to dedicate their time and energy to their provincial tasks. It is also the only province where the provincial shelter movement is registered as an independent NPO. Fisani Mahlangu, former Mpumalanga Provincial Representative who set up the present Mpumalanga Shelter Forum structure is convinced that provincial representatives should be freed from shelter level responsibilities so that they may dedicate themselves to building the provincial movements as independent NPOs. A number of other interviewees were also of the view that this is a necessary change in order to strengthen movement building. According to Fisani: “If you are based in a shelter you only see your shelter, and your shelter will suffer



Meeting of NSMSA Executive and Provincial Representatives

if you focus on the province”. Fisani added that it was only once she was released from shelter employment and took up full-time paid work as a dedicated provincial representative employed by the Mpumalanga Shelter Movement that she was free to think province wide. She said: “With the freedom that comes from not being based at a shelter you can support shelters in the province”.

Despite the challenges of building a provincial movement while in full-time employment elsewhere, provincial representatives have performed their roles with passion and dedication. They have recruited member shelters, created spaces for sharing,

learning and joint advocacy, and brought provincial experiences and challenges to national advocacy through the National movement. In the Western Cape the Provincial Representative has the support of an established provincial shelter movement structure which employs a coordinator.

Provincial shelter movements were up and running in 2025 in 8 of the 9 provinces. The NSMSA had no Provincial Representative or provincial movement in the North West Province since the 2024 closure of its one shelter member in this province.

Numbers of NPO shelters per province and Number of NSMSA shelters in 2024

PROVINCE	GBV Shelters run by NPO's per Province*	NSMSA Member Shelters
Gauteng	22	23
KwaZulu Natal	22	16
Western Cape	25	21
Eastern Cape	17	9
Limpopo	2	1
Mpumalanga	25	25
North West	14	0
Free State	7	6
Northern Cape	9	3
Total	143	104

*DSD Progress Report 2024

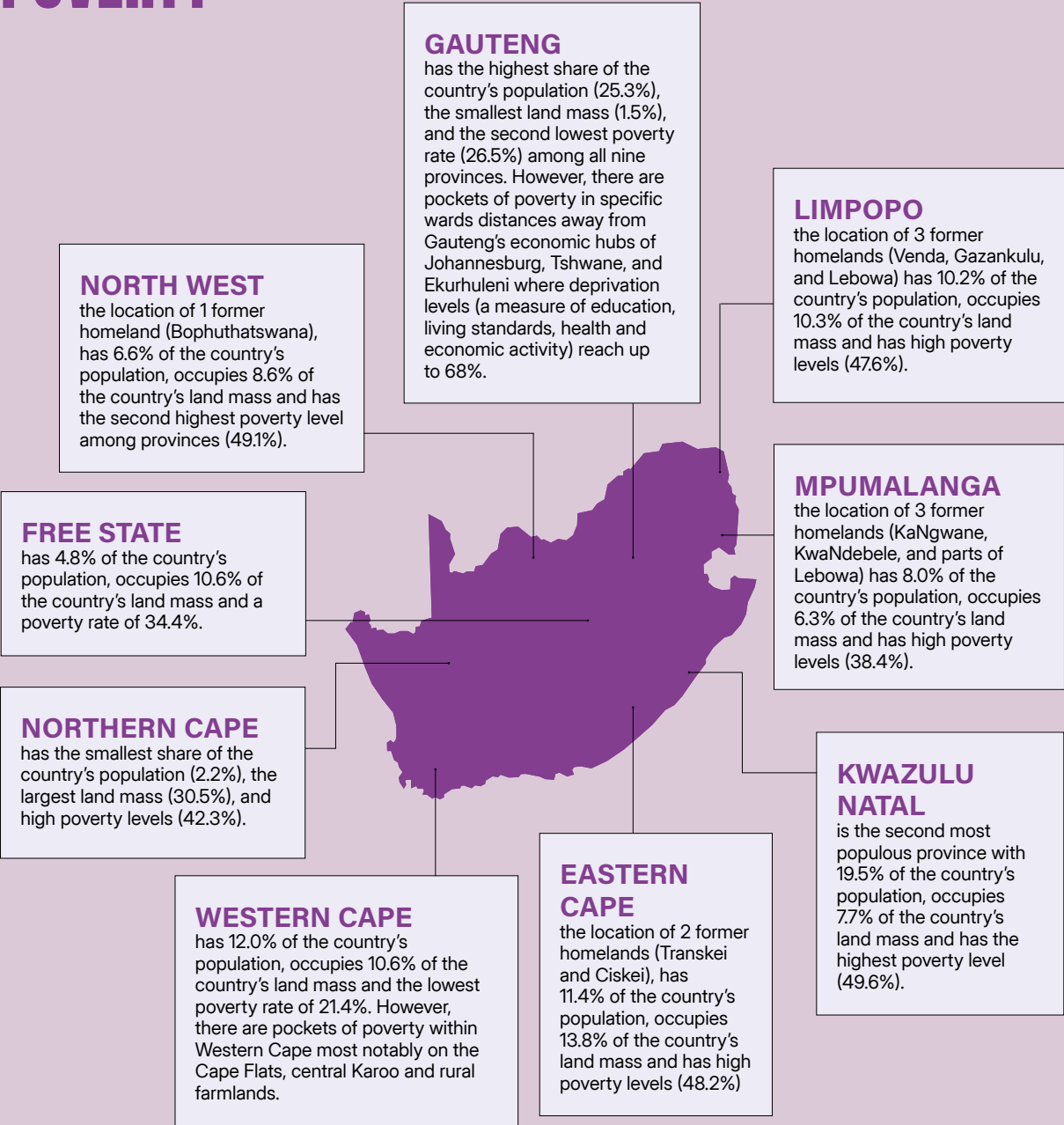
South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world, with huge disparities between and within provinces. Socio economic conditions, distances to be travelled between districts and towns, availability of shelters, and access to activist networks and professional support all shape the movement building possibilities within each province.

Those provinces which include South Africa's former homelands continue to be the most underdeveloped and least resourced parts of the country with the highest levels of poverty and deprivation, and the least access to activist networks and professional support.

At the same time there are pockets of extreme poverty even in the wealthiest provinces. From its earliest years the NSMSA executive visited the more rural provinces to get a clearer picture of their contexts and challenges, and to build the capacity of provincial representatives for movement building, organisational strengthening and professional development.

The following graphic provides an overview of population size, land mass size and poverty and is followed by an overview of the Provincial Shelter Movements.

POPULATION¹, LAND MASS², POVERTY



1 Statistics South Africa Mid-Year Population Estimates 2024 <https://southafrica-info.com/infographics/infographic-population-south-africas-nine-provinces/>
2 Based on Statistics South Africa Census 2022. <https://southafrica-info.com/infographics/infographic-land-area-south-africas-nine-provinces/>

WESTERN CAPE WOMEN’S SHELTER MOVEMENT (WCWSM)



Managers of member shelters at a team building exercise on the West Coast 2021 from left to right

Delene Roberts was the WCWSM Chair and Western Cape Provincial Representative of NSMSA in 2025. This was the second time she had served in these positions while simultaneously holding a full-time job as manager of the shelter Sisters Incorporated.

In 2025 the WCWSM had 18 member shelters. Shelter managers of member shelters met every second month, and social workers met every second month to share

information, discuss challenges, and share solutions and plans.

Western Cape shelters pay a subscription of R6000 a year to WCWSM and from this fee the provincial movement pays the coordinator and meets printing and other costs. The fee for membership of the NSMSA is R450 a year.

WCWSM Objectives are to:

- advocate and lobby for the rights of abused women and their children in shelters
- provide monthly networking meetings for shelters
- ensure effective and efficient service delivery to women and their children in shelters
- develop the capacity of WCWSM shelter personnel
- engage in legislation relating to gender-based violence and sheltering in South Africa
- offer space for mutual support, shared experiences and common challenges

The WCWSM grew out of the Shelter Focus Group formed in the 1990s as a subgroup of the Western Cape Network on Violence Against Women. In 2008 the Shelter Focus Group changed its name to the Western Cape Women’s Shelter Movement (WCWSM) and became affiliated to the NSMSA. The WCWSM thus had the advantage at its formation of being a continuation of at least 10 years of activism in lobbying the needs of shelters and advancing activism against GBV. By comparison, provincial shelter movements in other provinces started as new formations in 2008, their founding members not steeped in activism or with connections to broader networks or movements.

Added to this the WCWSM had the advantage that their provincial chairs Linda Fugard and Joy Lange served consecutively as NSMSA

Executive members working alongside Zubeda Dangor in building the NSMSA in its early years.

Joy Lange, a member of the NSMSA Board in 2025 was in the early years of NSMSA the shelter Manager at St Annes Shelter in Cape Town, and also WCWSM Chair, NSMSA Provincial Representative and Executive member. Joy shared in a 2025 interview the important space created for shelters in the early years to share, learn and provide support to each other:

We started with 5 or 6 shelters in the Western Cape, today we have 18 members. We would meet on a monthly basis, each month at a different shelter, even meeting at the shelter in Atlantis, almost 2 hours away from Cape Town. We would bring and share and it would be a three-hour meeting. We had a clear agenda: finances, sheltering issues, fundraising. Then we had a part that was not minuted, where I would say take out your heart and put it on the table, and we will listen to you, massage your heart, and put it back in. And then you can go out and fight the world again. So that was the support we could give with any issue that a shelter faced. That is where we got support, and the know-how.

Joy shared how the provincial movement shared in kind donations across shelters:

The principle was to keep costs down and help one another. I got a phone call once, when I was the chair, that a company had 327 kg of frozen McCain potato chips at the harbour. St Annes was closest to the harbor, so we made about 3 trips to bring the chips to St Annes, at the same time phoning all the shelters to ask them to bring their vans and collect their share of the frozen chips, because

we cannot store 327 kg of frozen chips. We also received 200 smartphones from Vodacom when smartphones just came out. We issued phones to 2 shelters for the house mothers for after hour work, and we gave the other phones to the NSMSA.

Keeping shelters engaged and involved was and is an important part of the provincial representative's work. Joy Lange shared that building a strong provincial moment has a lot to do with leadership, passion, commitment and the willingness to address uncomfortable issues. She acknowledged the role of Linda Fugard noting that "what Linda created was a sisterhood".

At one of their regular meetings, shelter managers were shocked to learn that shelters were receiving differing subsidy amounts from DSD to cover the costs of sheltering a woman and her children, as well as differing amounts to cover staff salaries. Taking this evidence to NSMSA nationally uncovered disparities in DSD funding between provinces and sparked the campaign, still ongoing, for standardisation and increased subsidies to meet the actual costs of sheltering.

In her role as Chair of the WCWSM Joy Lange raised with the Western Cape DSD Chief Director that DSD was in violation of the law as shelter staff subsidies were less than the stipulated minimum wage.

I saw on the news that the government brought in a minimum wage and that I could use this to argue that DSD is in gross violation of the new law when it came to stipends for shelter staff. I wrote a letter, with the backing of the members, to Charles Jordan, the DSD chief director. In the next financial year house mothers' stipends were increased to the minimum wage.

Bernadine Bachar, NSMSA Executive Member and Director of the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children in Cape Town, shared in a 2025 interview the WCWSM's innovative, flexible and collaborative response during the Covid pandemic. These innovations enabled shelters to survive through challenges of keeping women safe in communal accommodation during the worst days of the pandemic. Shelter Directors worked together and with Western Cape DSD to face the challenges. This strengthened relationships between shelters and transformed the relationship of shelters with provincial DSD. Bernadine Bachar shares:

In November 2019 I started watching how the spread of the virus was developing. At our strategic planning in 2020 I said the virus is coming to South Africa and this is how the rest of the world is dealing with it. A couple of weeks later we shut down as a country. There was a lot of fear and anxiety and people pulled together. We liaised with the government and the Western Cape DSD. We had a lot of engagement with virologists, epidemiologists to make sure we could keep people safe. To prevent the spread of Covid we set up a 2-tier admission structure which allowed for the proper isolation of clients in first stage shelters before they were moved into second stage shelters. We pioneered this structure in collaboration with Western Cape DSD. Shelter staff worked in teams so that if someone was infected the team would have to be isolated and another team could take on the work. The system we put in place worked. There were very few fatalities and very few infections. Most Directors came together, relationships were strong and we had a clear structure. In trying to roll out a whole new way of sheltering our relationships were strengthened. The experience also cemented relationships

between the Western Cape government and the WCWSM. We invited officials from WC DSD to our strategic planning to speak about challenges. We said we pulled you into the room because at any mention of DSD people get anxious. Can we instead work as partners? DSD officials said we also get anxious when shelters contact us. So, we talked and began to work more as partners. It was during Covid that the WCWSM founded and launched the helpline. It was started at SBWCC, headed by myself and came out of our strategic planning on how we can help women with placements.

Joy shared that from the early years, the Western Cape Provincial Representatives shared their experiences with Shelter Representatives from other provinces both at regular meetings and capacity building workshops and on a one-on-one basis.

We helped Sarah, the Free State Provincial Representative, with her policies and documentation and with setting up the Free State Shelter Movement. We also assisted Mpumalanga when Fisani was the Provincial Representative. Mpumalanga has actually gone beyond us now, because the provincial DSD funds them and this hasn't happened as yet in the Western Cape.

MPUMALANGA SHELTER MOVEMENT

The Mpumalanga Shelter Movement (MSM) was registered as a NPO in April 2019. DSD funds the salaries of the four social worker supervisors whose role is to supervise social workers in the three districts of the province, and DSD pays the costs of running the 4 offices.

Fisani Mahlangu was one of two Provincial Representatives tasked in 2013 with setting up the Mpumalanga Provincial Shelter Movement. She served as provincial representative until October 2022 when she left for the UK. Fisani recalls: "NSMSA approached me and the Tirisano social worker to be representatives for Mpumalanga. We attended our first NSMSA meeting in Eastern Cape in 2013. Zubeda, Joy and Linda Fugard were on the executive at the time".

Mpumalanga is a largely rural province which includes apartheid era homelands KaNgwane and KwaNdebele, parts of Lebowa and Gazankulu; where activism had been repressed during apartheid; and where government support was the only viable route for fundraising. With help from Zubeda, NSMSA Executive Head, and Zodwa from Mpumalanga DSD, the two provincial representatives, both full-time staff members at two different shelters, mapped out the GBV NGOs in Mpumalanga. Some were very small shelters with capacity for 3 clients, while some were large shelters with capacity for 40 clients. There were crisis centres accommodating women for one night, and there were walk-in counselling centres. Ninety percent of the funding for these organisations came from Mpumalanga DSD.



Financial literacy at Emthunzini VEP

To get to know these organisations the Provincial Representatives held meetings in the 3 districts of the province. DSD District Representatives dealing with VEP attended these meetings on NSMSA's invitation.

The NGOs working on GBV welcomed the idea of a Mpumalanga Shelter Movement and supported both NSMSA's campaign to standardise funding across the country and their aim to build capacity and share knowledge.

They found the regular meetings important spaces where they were able to share and learn from each other. A key issue for all was inadequate DSD funding and the continued delay of promised payments. Fisani noted that the lack of funding demotivated people and continued for all the years she was

in Mpumalanga: "As long as I was there in Mpumalanga the problem of delayed payments continued. Organisations were not getting their funding and were waiting 2 to 3 months". A shelter manager interviewed for the HBF costing survey had said that while waiting for DSD funding, the only food available for clients at her shelter was the bread they received from a local business.

The two Mpumalanga provincial representatives attended national meetings where they shared information on the province with provincial representatives, the executive and secretariat, and where they learnt from other provincial representatives. When they returned to the province they shared what they had learnt at the national meetings.

It was at national NSMSA meetings that the Mpumalanga Provincial Representatives became aware of disparities and inequalities in DSD support. They found that Western Cape DSD provided funding for shelter social workers and provided supervisory services. However, such support was not provided by DSD in Mpumalanga. Lay people with no counselling training were doing the work of social workers and the few social workers in shelters received no supervision. The MSM started a campaign for the Mpumalanga DSD to fund social workers in all Mpumalanga Shelters and provide funds for MSM to provide supervisory services to shelters in the province. The MSM won these demands and by 2019 DSD funded the appointment of three social worker managers, one in each of the three districts of the province. By 2025 DSD was meeting the salaries of 4 MSM supervisors, the costs of running 4 offices, and petrol costs.

Sindisiwe Msimango, Social Work Supervisor and Manager in 2025 and who was appointed NSMSA Provincial Representative and Executive Member in 2022, said:

We supervise all shelters in Mpumalanga funded by DSD, and all of these shelters are members of the MSM. We supervise social workers and auxiliary social workers. We provide support, making sure clients are referred to the correct stakeholders. We meet once a month virtually. We are self-managing and we have a good relationship with DSD. The main office is in Middelburg. The board meets there. We have an intern who does admin.

Sindisiwe and one of the other Supervisors cover the Gert Sibande District where they supervise 8 MSM member organisations. Five of these are women's GBV shelters, one is a men's shelter (for men who experience GBV) and 2 are VEP Centres. The other two supervisors are each responsible for the two other districts, one supervising 4 member organisations, the other supervising 5 member organisations. Not all MSM members are members of NSMSA. Sindisiwe notes that late funding continues to be a huge challenge, with salary delays every year, for months.

Fisani sees the MSM structure as a model for other provinces, but only if provincial representatives are not based at a shelter. She says:

The structure enables day to day support to run a shelter, supervision and handholding on how to deal with challenges such as court and police support. It could be a model if provincial representatives are removed from a shelter.



FREE STATE SHELTER MOVEMENT



Shelter staff and DSD officials at a meeting in 2025. The blankets they are displaying were made by residents of the Tshepo Ya Rona Shelter, with funding support from DSD.

Sarah Lekale, Provincial Representative for the Free State Province since 2008, holds the full-time position of Managing Director at the Goldfields Family Advice Organisation in Welkom in the Free State. Sarah has been part of the NSMSA since its founding. She established the Free State Shelter Movement (FSSM) working with the Provincial DSD Coordinator. Starting with four shelters, the FSSM had 6 member shelters in 2025.

Member shelters meet face to face, and on virtual platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp to discuss issues affecting shelters, their challenges, achievements, activities and funding. Sarah sends information from these provincial discussions to National NSMSA. All shelters in the province participate in the Provincial VEP Forum, and in the district and local VEP forums. Shelters also network on the NSP pillars.

EASTERN CAPE SHELTER MOVEMENT

Goldfields serves as the secretariat for the provincial movement and has done so since its inception. The FSSM are in discussion with DSD on the possibility of funding the movement so that it may set up their own office with dedicated staff. Sarah says: "If the provincial shelter movement has our own structure this will allow us to develop the movement in the province."

Free State shelters face ongoing challenges with meeting DSD and municipal compliance requirements to qualify for DSD funding. By mid 2025 none of the 6 member shelters had been approved for DSD subsidies for that financial year. This continues to be an annual challenge, with some shelters having to close in previous years.

Sarah Lekale has been involved in the NSMSA campaign for standardisation of funding of shelters and for increased DSD funding to meet the actual costs of sheltering. She has also been involved in the #TotalShutdown protests and in the Presidential Summits, working both on protests on the outside and engagements within provincial government spaces. Sarah Lekale as chair of the Free State GBV Forum attended the G20 Social Summit, held ahead of the G20 meeting in Johannesburg in 2025, where she called for more urgent government action on GBV.

In the province, Sarah Lekale has presented at a district multi stakeholder forum on how referrals between stakeholders could be improved and has served on the Department of Justice's Rapid Response Task Team.

Gary Koekemoer, Provincial Representative for the Eastern Cape Province since 2024, is the chairperson at Bet Sheekoom, a shelter he founded with his wife Shelly, who holds the position of Shelter Manager. Gary Koekemoer coordinates the 9 Eastern Cape shelters affiliated to NSMSA.

Eastern Cape is South Africa's second largest province by land mass with the former homelands Transkei and Ciskei making up more than a third of its land mass. These rural areas have an unemployment rate of around 40%, and high rates of outmigration to the Western Cape.

Gary noted that shelters and provincial representatives get vital support from the NSMSA in the form of training, contacts, information, help with meeting DSD compliance requirements, and help with connecting shelters with possible donors. He said:

Member shelters gain training from NSMSA for example on legal issues, we get contacts and information for funding, help with signing Service Level Agreements with DSD. Shelters get expert advice whenever they need this. The NSMSA national office kept us going during Covid. If not for their support I don't know how we would have managed. A few weeks ago I put a legal challenge on our chat group, and I got a lot of responses and suggestions.



Heritage Day September 2023

Gary noted that provincial representatives support each other and share information with each other in annual meetings, online meetings once a quarter, and via WhatsApp.

Furthermore, Gary picked up on a recurring issue across provinces, that late payments and low subsidies from DSD are a continued challenge.

We need improved government financial support in all provinces, and we need money on time. We need increased salaries for shelter staff. Our shelter manager gets R4,000 a month from DSD, House Mothers get R3,500; and we need money for infrastructure. NSMSA is pushing for standardisation in the stipend structure. Provinces receive different amounts and as far as I know, the Eastern Cape Province gets the lowest.

GAUTENG SHELTER MOVEMENT



Heritage Day

In 2025 Gauteng Provincial Representative Lisha Stevens held a full-time position as social worker at the Nisaa Shelter. In 2025 the Gauteng Shelter Movement had 23 member shelters. However, many of these shelters were facing funding challenges and possible closure because the Gauteng DSD has refused to sign Service Level Agreements with these shelters, on the grounds that they were not compliant with DSD and municipal requirements. Shelters and other NPOs in Gauteng facing this challenge had come together in the Gauteng Crisis Care Committee to take up this challenge. Lisha said in a 2025 interview:

Currently many shelters are facing closure due to lack of funding. Nisaa Shelter currently does not have a Service Level Agreement, and we do not have a subsidy. We are forced to transition the eight current clients at the Nisaa shelter into society, even though these clients need to be in the shelter. The past weeks I have been in touch with all Gauteng shelters to ask who received their Service Level Agreements, and who has received funding. The Gauteng Crisis Care Committee is taking up the current crisis regarding funding and NSMSA is involved in that organisation. The NSMSA has good communication and mutual respect with the National DSD but we have a difficult relationship at provincial level where there is no transparency.

Lisha noted that shelters worked well together during the Covid pandemic when there was an influx of cases and some shelters were overcrowded. NSMSA had acted as a link between shelters, had facilitated the movement of clients to shelters with available accommodation, and had provided PPE support which enabled shelters to operate at a time when communal living held the danger of spreading the virus. Lisha said: NSMSA accessed and delivered PPE, uniforms, masks, respiratory machines, and medical equipment. Shelters could order what they needed and they were protected and able to keep open.

Lisha meets with provincial representatives from other provinces at quarterly meetings, at NSMSA Annual Indabas, and at trainings and has led housemother training workshops at 3 of the 4 National Shelter Indabas.

KWAZULU NATAL SHELTER MOVEMENT

Nadia Munsamy, Provincial Representative for KwaZulu Natal holds the full-time position of Shelter Manager at the Sahara Shelter run by Phoenix Child Welfare (PCW). There are 16 NSMSA member shelters in KZN. Nadia said that the support, training, knowledge on GBV from NSMSA are very beneficial to shelter staff.

Nadia shared that funding is a huge challenge. Some shelters have had their funding reduced, while others have had no increase for the past 6 years. Shelter staff receive minimal stipends with the cleaners,

handymen, housemothers all paid stipends below minimum wage. Nadia notes that KZN shelters were receiving among the lowest DSD subsidies in the country and along with other NPOs in the province, shelters struggled to raise funds. Nadia said:

We have a KZN NPO group chat and all NPOs say they are facing challenges with funding. We share fundraising strategies and help with writing motivational letters. Sahara shelter where I am based was initially approved for a capacity of 22 beds. However, due to budget cuts, the capacity was reduced to 20 bed spaces and we were paid R70,000 less in our last tranche payment period. We were advised that DSD does not have money and that we should fundraise toward Sahara’s operational costs. Phoenix Child Welfare hosts the Phoenix Fair annually, we will host a music concert soon, we also participate in talk shows and interviews alongside these fundraising initiatives.

The NSMSA’s ongoing struggle for standardisation of subsidies, for subsidies that meet the true costs of sheltering and for a fair wage for shelter staff is important in order to address these challenges. In her role as Provincial Representative Nadia has restarted quarterly meetings of the KZN Shelter Forum in order to support shelter staff and build their capacity. These meetings, previously hosted by DSD, had been discontinued and Nadia decided to restart forum meetings virtually so that shelters could discuss achievements and challenges and ways forward.



16 Days Activism Demonstration 2021 with Sahara Shelter, SAPS, DSD, Phoenix Child Welfare and others

NORTHERN CAPE PROVINCIAL SHELTER MOVEMENT

In 2025 Rose Bailey was the Provincial Representative for the Northern Cape and served on the NSMSA Executive, while in full-time employment as Manager of the Ethembeni Centre which runs the Ethembeni Shelter in De Aar. Clients stay at the shelter based on their needs, which could be up to 6 months or beyond 6 months.

The Northern Cape is the largest province by land mass and has the smallest population – just 2.2% of the country’s population. It is largely rural, experiences socioeconomic challenges and has an official unemployment rate of 41%.

In her role as Provincial Representative, Rose Bailey coordinates the three NPO shelters in the province and gives feedback to them from national level NSMSA meetings. The three NPO shelters are Ethembeni in De Aar, Ratanang in Ritchie, and Women to Women in Kimberley. In 2025 Women to Women was struggling to survive as DSD was refusing to fund the shelter on the grounds that there is a DSD run shelter in Kimberley and therefore there is no need for another shelter. Rose says that there is a need for more shelters in the Northern Cape:

The nearest shelter to us, Women to Women, is 300 kms away in Kimberley. In between there are 14 towns with

no shelters. There are no shelters in Namaqualand. DSD has one shelter in Kimberley, one in Uppington, and one in Colesburg with one bed. After a community dialogue Ethembeni opened a second shelter in Victoria West where we bought a house which we furnished through donations.

Rose pointed to ongoing challenges with DSD funding, the lack of psychological services, a lack of skills training and housing. An additional challenge is that it is difficult to establish the actual extent of GBV, since police statistics classify GBV as assault. Rose said:

We face regular challenges with DSD funding. We often don't get funding for 4 months. We have only one psychologist for 14 towns. We lack resources and skills training to assist women to become financially dependent.

As a member of the NSMSA Executive, Rose contributes to the national movement and attends meetings with Provincial Representatives as both a Provincial Representative and an Executive member. Rose stresses the important role NSMSA plays in advocacy and as a voice of shelters in a context where government actions fall short in relation to shelter support.

The Government is saying on paper that GBV is a pandemic but nothing in their actions prove they are regarding this as a pandemic. NSMSA is now a force to be reckoned with nationally.



Advocacy Workshop

LIMPOPO SHELTER MOVEMENT



Thyrest beneficiaries engaged in a garden project

Nobesuthu Javu, Shelter Manager of Thyrest, a shelter which she founded in 2014, was the Limpopo Provincial Representative in 2025. Thyrest was the only shelter in Limpopo in 2025 and therefore the only NSMSA affiliated shelter in the province.

Around 89% of Limpopo's population resides in rural areas. Limpopo also has the highest percentage of people living in former homeland areas and a high dependency on agricultural activities and social grants.

Nobesuthu noted the vital support provided to Thyrest Shelter by NSMSA through the Nisaa mentorship programme; NSMSA Indabas; contact with other NSMSA provincial representatives, and other member shelters. These engagements provided information, advice, and skills required to run a shelter, to meet DSD compliance requirements, and avenues for possible funding. Nobesuthu emphasised the value of NSMSA support, particularly in a rural context where there are few other organisations to share experiences

with and learn from, and where there are limited funding sources.

I joined NSMSA after I started the Thyrest shelter. I had no idea how to go about this. What I had was passion, my house, and that I was a survivor of violence. I learnt about compliance requirements from NSMSA and from the Nisaa mentorship programme. I learnt from other shelters, from the Indabas. When alone in Limpopo there is nowhere to go for best practices. In 2021 we brought in the Provincial Representative for Mpumalanga to check on our admin and advise us on what to do to make sure we have admin and structures in place. We learnt more on budgeting and activity-based costing. We received funding from NSMSA during Covid for a 6-month project. Through NSMSA we have exposure to funding possibilities. Provinces like Limpopo should be the priority with distribution of resources. Organisations in Cape Town and Johannesburg have advantages in mobilising resources.

Nobesuthu noted that it is important for NSMSA leadership to be in touch with what is going on in provinces such as Limpopo, where most people live in rural areas of former homelands where patriarchal relations govern women's lives in specific ways.

It is important for NSMSA leadership to visit the provinces so as to have an idea of what is going on. People are stuck in abusive relationships because culture says it is normal, not a big deal. The patriarchal system in the former homelands continues, there are no females in community courts. That element of masculinity continues.

Nobesuthu sees the need for more shelters. For years DSD and Public Works have been talking about converting five houses in the province into shelters run by VEP centres and NPOS. However Nobesuthi notes:

Progress is at snail's pace. As Provincial Representative I engage DSD on the progress of these 5 shelters. I help NPO shelters look for funding so that they can operate.

Nobesuthu led the #TotalShutdown protests on GBVF in Limpopo and organised around the provincial and national summits on GBVF. She notes:

I was one of the coordinators organising people to attend the Second Presidential Summit and I worked with the Premier's office on the Provincial Summit.

As Manager of Thyrest Shelter, Nobesuthu faces funding challenges which affect the running of the shelter, so that at the time of the interview in 2025 the shelter was not functional.

Thyrest Shelter is waiting for funds from DSD. At present we are doing awareness and counselling and we are not running the shelter. We don't know why there is a delay. We are in the second year of what was to be a 3-year cycle of funding. There were a lot of delays last year. All organisations in the province are waiting to sign DSD Service Level Agreements. We don't know how much they will give us. Thyrest has 3 staff members who started as volunteers. They now receive stipends and when the funds come in they will get back pay. The manager gets R3000 a month; the carer gets R2400 a month; the admin person gets R2000 a month.



APPENDIX 1: NSMSA INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY PROJECT INTERVIEWS BETWEEN MAY AND NOVEMBER 2025

NSMSA Secretariat:

Zubeda Dangor, *NSMSA Head of Executive (3 interviews)*
Anisa Moosa, *NSMSA National Coordinator*
Melanie Padiachy, *NSMSA Assistant Coordinator*
Sima Diar, *Project Coordinator*
Lungile Sithole, *Project Officer*
Tina Magidela, *Helpline Agent*

NSMSA Former Coordinators

Romila Pillay
Chiedza Chagutah
Rebotile Matoane

Current and Former NSMSA Executive Members

Bernadine Bachar (current)
Fisani Mahlangu (former)
Linda Fugard (former)

NSMSA Board

Dianne Massawe, *Chair of NSMSA Board*
Joy Lange, *Board Member, former Executive member, former Western Cape Provincial Representative*
Greer Schoeman, *Board Member*

Provincial Representatives

Nadia Moonsamy, *KwaZulu Natal*
Sarah Lekale, *Free State*
Delene Roberts, *Western Cape*
Nobesuthu Javu, *Limpopo*
Rose Bailey, *Northern Cape*
Sindisiwe Sandra Msimango, *Mpumalanga*
Lisha Stevens, *Gauteng*
Gary Koekemoer, *Eastern Cape*

Shelter Staff and Board

Gary Koekemoer, *Bet Sheekoom, Eastern Cape*
Shirley Hughes, *Lifeline Vaal Manager, Gauteng*
Andiswa Magingxa, *Siyakuyenza Social Worker, Western Cape*
Kathleen Dey, *Siyakuyenza Board Member, Western Cape*

Stakeholders

Nicky Le Roux, *Ford Foundation*
Tamara Braam, *worked with NSMSA on Strategic Planning, Annual Indabas, GBVF Committee*
Claudia Lopez HBF, *partnered with NSMSA on Research and Annual Indabas*
Gogie Itumeleng, *National DSD*
Sibusiso Malope, *Director of Victim Empowerment and Prevention of GBV, National DSD*

APPENDIX 2: NSMSA INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY PROJECT DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

Nisaa Publications

Yoon Jung Park, Joanne Fedler and Zubeda Dangor (Eds) 2000, *Reclaiming Women's Spaces: New Perspectives on Violence Against Women and Sheltering in South*. Nisaa Institute for Social Development, Johannesburg.

The First Southern African Regional Workshop Shelters for Abused Women and their Children. Nisaa Institute for Women's Development, Johannesburg 2000.

Nisaa's Tenth Anniversary Annual Report 2002 -2003

Sheltering Together: Report of the Second Women's Sheltering Workshop. February 2008

NSMSA Reports

NSMSA Annual Reports 2008 to 2025

Sheltering Together for Excellence: Report of the First Conference of the National Shelter Movement of South Africa. November 2011

National Shelter Indaba Reports 2021 to 2024

NSMSA Publications

Letting Our Power Glow

Raising Women's Voices in South African Shelters Composite Report

Turning the Tide

HBF Newsbrief

HBF, 2013, Department of Social Development Funding to Shelters for Abused Women is Inadequate. Heinrich Boll Foundation, Cape Town 25 June 2013 <https://za.boell.org/en/2013/06/26/departement-social-development-funding-shelters-abused-women-inadequate>

HBF and NSMSA Policy Brief and Report

Joy Watson and Claudia Lopes, 2017, *Shelter Services to Domestic Violence Victims – Policy Approaches to Strengthening State Responses*. Policy Brief No.1, September 2017. National Shelter Movement of South Africa and Heinrich Böll Foundation

HBF Final Narrative Report Paying the True Costs, 2019 https://static.pmg.org.za/241030HBF-NSM-PayingTrueCosts-finalnarrativereport2019_Final.pdf



National
Shelter
Movement of
South Africa