

Background and History

The Youth is in a crisis!

Â The impact of the socio-economic climate in SA on the youth “irrespective of race, culture, gender and/or religion” resulted in our young people having a need for guidance to ensure that they can enjoy a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle does not only consist of physical health, but also mental, social and spiritual health.

Â The majority of the young people in SA are facing a grim and insecure future: 93 - 97% of school-finishers will not find a work after matriculating! We share the governments’ concern in the rising number of youth involved in substance abuse, sex related problems, depression and suicide. There is hardly any place a young person can go to where they can get free guidance.

Â In August 1995, Dr Willem Semmelink, the then Pretoria Director of Youth for Christ, an international, multi-cultural, interdenominational, youth organisation, was approached by a local medical centre, to assist the medical staff with young people in crisis. Trained and experienced in youth development, training and counselling since 1974, Dr Semmelink recognised that something should be done about this need. From 1995 to 1997 he trained several volunteers from the community to render a free service as counsellors to the youth in crisis at the above mentioned medical centre. He also arranged several seminars to inform the community on relevant youth matters such as teenage pregnancy, teenage depression & suicide and substance abuse.

Â In April 1997, Dr Semmelink presented a seven-year plan for youth development to the board of Youth for Christ (YFC). This seven-year plan included the establishment of a youth crisis centre, seminars on relevant youth issues to inform the society, a youth leaders development course, a five-year youth development programme, and training. YFC did not want to be engaged on such a long term, in what they considered to be an ambitious project. Nevertheless, Dr Semmelink launched the seven-year plan from within his own department.

Â During the following two years a youth crisis centre was established in Pretoria in co-operation with other organisations and local communities. Administrative and other difficulties caused Dr Semmelink to leave YFC in 1998 to found Youth at HEART Development in conjunction with his advisory board.

Â After months of groundwork, Youth at HEART Development was incorporated as a non-profit organisation under Section 21 of the Companies’ Act in May 1999. Soon afterwards it was registered at the Department of Welfare, who issued Youth@HEART with a fund-raising number.