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25 November 2021

Alumni in Action programme strengthens UCT support for GBV survivors

The University of Cape Town (UCT)'s Alumni in Action programme, launched in partnership with alumna Zellah Fuphe and student Sanda Nyoka, has received a boost through funding from various donors which is helping to expand the programme's counselling service.

The programme is aimed at expanding the university's mental health and counselling service for survivors of gender-based violence (GBV).

UCT has not been left unscathed by the increase in GBV in South Africa over the past few years.

In August 2019, UCT student Uyinene Mrwetyana (19) was raped and murdered in the Clareinch Post Office when she went to collect a parcel.

The COVID-19 pandemic – and its accompanying series of national lockdowns – has further exacerbated the country's GBV problem, with support structures and counselling services hampered due to financial strain and restrictions on movement.

In response to this strong need for mental health support and counselling for GBV survivors, UCT alumna Fuphe felt compelled to initiate the Alumni in Action programme.

Fuphe, who also provided initial funding of R120 000 towards the programme, is supported by Nyoka.

Alumni in Action aims to provide up to eight sessions of mental health support services to UCT students who have survived GBV.

"Gender-based violence has many adverse consequences in our society: it can retard personal growth, destroy the dreams of survivors, and have a negative impact on the country's GDP. It can also have an adverse intergenerational impact," said Fuphe.

Private sector pledges support

Corporate South Africa has pledged its support to Alumni in Action through financial donations.

Among donations received are R200 000 from the Citadel Philanthropy Foundation, which will provide 333 counselling sessions for 42 GBV survivors. Further contributions include R10 000 a month from Eversheds Sutherland, which will help provide extended counselling

sessions to at least 180 students who are survivors of GBV; and R100 000 from the Mauerberger Foundation Fund.

Citadel's head of philanthropy, Jean de Villiers, said the foundation is passionate about causes that affect South African communities.

"As a father and husband, this cause is close to my heart, and I believe that by taking a stand against GBV we will be able to break the cycle," he said.

Fuphe is "very grateful for the very generous contribution to Alumni in Action by the Citadel Philanthropy Foundation, in line with its Philanthropy in Action ethos".

Fahim Docrat from the UCT Development and Alumni Department said the university appreciates Citadel Philanthropy Foundation's support.

"It will have a direct impact on so many lives. This support highlights the important role that corporates and other funders play in partnering with UCT to help us implement impactful projects and bring about positive social change."

GBV affects everyone

South Africa is currently commemorating the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children campaign, which is held annually from 25 November to 10 December.

According to United Nations Women, around 736 million women and girls globally were abused by an intimate partner in the past year.

In addition to this, the World Population Review states that the impact of GBV often goes unreported, with less than 40% of women reporting these crimes, leading to emotional and psychological struggle. It also says that 94% of women who are raped experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, while 33% of women who are raped contemplate suicide.

Looking to the future

UCT and Alumni in Action continue to invest in quality support services for students by providing assistance to survivors of GBV through student counselling and other existing services available on campus.

For more information, or to support this programme, contact Fahim Docrat on 081 571 3164 or fahim.docrat@uct.ac.za.

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