

Hold Me Tight Comes to Vrygrond, South Africa

Vrygrond is a multicultural community situated in Cape Town, South Africa. It is plagued by cycles of abuse, gangsterism, crime and violence. In 2010, South African born husband and wife team, Anton and Elana Cuyler traded in their jobs in England and moved to Cape Town to volunteer as youth workers. Moved by the crushing need of the people in Vrygrond they developed the Sozo Foundation to meet the practical and emotional needs of the people in this community.

When Kathryn de Bruin, my EFT trainer and supervisor from San Diego, California, asked me (Colleen) to find a community that she and her fellow colleagues from the USA could “gift” with a HMT workshop, Vrygrond immediately came to mind. In my professional capacity I had adopted the Vrygrond community as my pro-bono community, because giving back has always been a core value of mine.

On the 6th & 7th August 2016 Kathryn, Alair Olson, Mark Maxwell (all from San Diego) and 14 of Kathryn’s local EFT trainees from the Cape Town EFT community, assisted us at a HMT workshop for 27 Sozo Foundation’s staff members’ couples in Vrygrond.

We seized the opportunity to use this workshop as a cross-cultural research opportunity. Led by Dr Elmien Lesch, EFT therapist, supervisor-in-training and senior lecturer at the University of Stellenbosch, Cape Town, we conducted a piece of relevant research at this HMT workshop.

This is groundbreaking and pioneering research as it will be a first for EFT as well as a first for the African continent. We are all very excited to be able to take part in this community project and bring Susan Johnson’s great EFT contribution to South African couples. The research will enable us to gain an understanding of how South African adult couples from diverse backgrounds experience and conduct their close relationships. The project will also explore how South African couples experience the HMT couple enrichment workshop.

The qualitative research included pre-intervention interviews of 13 of the couples who participated in the HMT workshop. The pre-interviews tapped the couples’ experience of their relationship, their expectations of the workshop, their longings for their relationship, their negative communication patterns, as well as how they repair disconnection. After the retreat, we interviewed 10 of the same couples, to explore their experience of the retreat, and how it impacted their relationship. We asked for feedback on the presentation styles, language used, most and least helpful parts of the workshop, and suggestions for further changes.

We look forward to presenting our research in the near future. Some of the initial comments that stood out from our couples are as follows:

Pre-HMT:

“Silence kills me completely.”

“I would rather keep things to myself, to protect us.”

“Things are better when we don’t talk.”

“Maybe she’s had enough of me.”

“I’m happy to give him space.”

“I am not important, the same feeling as my dad leaving us.”

“I’d like some colour, and everything from him is just black and white.”

Post-HMT:

“I learnt from other’s experience and I can implement it in my relationship.”

“Good to know we all struggle with the same thing.”

“We all carry the same stories, even the experts go through the same things.”

“The facilitators made it easy for us to understand.”

“ We didn’t realise before the workshop that we have the same fears.”

“We could talk about things we don’t normally talk about, like sharing our fears.”

Our preliminary observations about holding a Hold Me Tight workshop in a multi-cultural environment are as follows:

- The presenters sharing their personal vulnerability around their own relationships was a new, comforting and different experience for them.
- These presenters, “met us where we are, on our level and in our worlds” which was “healing and restorative”. They are more familiar with workshop presenters and counsellors teaching and advising as “experts” from the front.
- Our structure consisted of a brief teaching time, couple conversations and large group debriefings. Participants appreciated the group debriefings, reporting that it was most helpful to discover that they were not alone in their struggles and really enjoyed having the opportunity to learn from others.

It was an awesome adventure to work together, the Cape Town EFT community joining with the US team, to partake in such a relevant piece of research. We’ve all grown so much in many ways and are grateful for the opportunity. Thank you to all who gave their time and effort, and a special thank you to our donors, Julie Myers and Jim and Patrice Thomas of the Colorado EFT Center.

To follow our research results and other opportunities please go to:

<http://www.eftsouthafrica.com/fun-news/>. For those who are interested in further supporting our work, please join us on our next South African adventure or consider donating to our outreach fund.

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