

SOUTHSIDE

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THE FUTURE OF THE Community Arts Project, one of Cape Town's oldest cultural service organisations, is in the balance after being hit by a funding crisis. CAP's staff members have been informed that they could face retrenchment by the end of June after the transfer of funds from a key funder failed to materialise.

This led to the board of trustees and staff having to take crisis action, including the curtailment of fulltime art courses.

Some of the students taking these courses have already returned to their homes in Namibia and Natal.

Members of the ANC's youth league from De Aar, Queenstown and Upington also ended their special media course because of the financial insecurity.

A fulltime art student said students had been informed that there were no guarantees that classes would resume as normal. "We were led to believe that there was not enough money to pay staff, rent and electricity."

They were told an emphasis would be placed on the fulltime training course at CAP if further funding was found.

A CAP staff spokesperson, Ms Lorelle Bell, said students and staff jointly decided that the visual arts and media fulltime students should return home a month before the mid-year break.

"This decision was taken because CAP could not guarantee the payment of the July bursaries on the due date.

The students, however, were paid their June bursaries and agreed to continue with fieldwork in their communities, using equipment given to them by CAP.



Reproduction by Billy Mandindi, one of CAP's former students

The part-time art and photography classes would continue until the end of June. The future of these classes would be determined by the availability of funding and the outcome of an evaluation.

The deputy chairperson of CAP's board of trustees, Professor Shirley Walters, said funds had

been received to assist CAP to overcome the immediate crisis.

She said the crisis has forced CAP to re-evaluate its priorities and structures.

A worker who attended the Cosatu Workers Skills Course revealed that Cosatu members who were working on a street theatre

production with CAP also experienced financial difficulties.

The workers, from centres all over the country, were promised that they would receive R650, in lieu of their monthly salaries, for board and living expenses. When they arrived they were told that CAP was experiencing financial difficulties. They first received R100, and later R360.

The CAP spokesperson indicated that CAP had entered an agreement with Cosatu whereby the amount dispursed would be according to the individual circumstances of the participants.

Bell, an administrator at CAP, indicated that CAP's financial difficulties had arisen from the delay in the transfer of funds. As a result financial commitments for May could not be completely covered.

CAP spends up to R100 000 a month on all its projects. About R40 000 is spent on staffing a full-time art course, a full-time media course, the CAP theatre company, the children's art course and the part-time art and drama courses.

While the warning signs about the pending crisis were there, it is felt that insufficient preparation was made to inform staff and students timeously of the problems.

CAP has played a pivotal role in the development of underprivileged artists, not only in the Western Cape but around the country.

While financial commitments for May have been covered, CAP is in the process of reassessing programmes in response to changing conditions.

Despite the funding crisis both CAP staff and trustees have indicated that they are even more convinced of the importance of CAP's work in the field of education and skills training. □

Squeeze on community art as the bucks stop

A shortage of funding at Cape Town's most established cultural education project the Community Arts Project has led to emergency retrenchments of staff and early closure of full time courses. **HEATHER ROBERTSON** reports: