

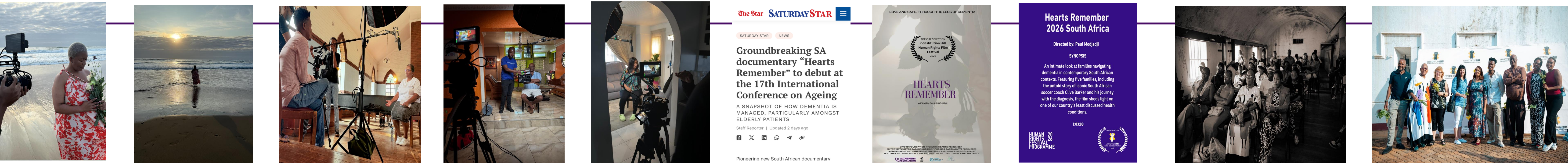
HEARTS REMEMBER

South African Stories of People Living with Dementia

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Filmed between 2024 and 2025, the documentary features diverse narratives from South Africans, including the untold story of renowned soccer coach Clive Barker’s journey with dementia.

INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that film can reduce the stigma of mental health conditions¹. Sharing multiple personal narratives in film has been identified as an important factor in reducing stigma¹. As populations in Sub-Saharan Africa get older it is important to improve understanding of critical issues such as healthy ageing and dementia².



METHODS

Hearts Remember was filmed between 2024 and 2025 in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (South Africa). Interviewees were selected through targeted outreach to include:

- Persons living with dementia
- Dementia advocates, families and caregivers of persons living with dementia
- Octogenarians without dementia.
- Medical doctors (a neurologist and general practitioner) and lindigenous health practitioners
- Social workers and faith leaders

This approach ensured diversity. These contributions blended personal lived experience with biomedical, indigenous and spiritual perspectives.

Interviews were conducted in participants' homes, professional workplaces or a studio setting. Home-based settings were specifically chosen to ensure that participants were comfortable. Interviews were conducted in the participants' preferred language and translated into English.

RESULTS

The reflective and emotive personal stories shared are complemented by the professional opinions from healthcare and spiritual practitioners. The perspectives shared:

- Highlight day-to-day realities of those living with dementia and their carers, including the lack of adequate support services and associated stigma
- Provide understandable information on healthy ageing and dementia
- Address myths on ageing and dementia
- Emphasise the relational impact of care
- Centre the role of love in supporting dignity and quality of life among older people and people living with dementia

The completed film has been screened at the International Federation of Ageing conference in Cape Town (2025) and the Human Rights Film Festival in Johannesburg (2026).

A six-episode series has been developed. Distribution on local television channels is being planned. Global distribution is also being considered.

CONCLUSIONS

Film can be an important educational tool. The personal narratives and professional opinions shared have the potential to:

- Inform policy
- Reduce stigma and improve empathy
- Encourage the inclusion of diverse narratives
- Increase investment in health-related documentaries

The human capacity to care and love is the highlight of the documentary. This informs its title '*Hearts Remember*'. Phase 2 of the project focuses on securing funding to study the documentary's impact on altering perceptions of dementia in South Africa. The team will host community screenings, alongside workshops and research studies, to evaluate how visual storytelling improves dementia awareness and supports communities.

REFERENCES

1. The power of film film to reduce stigma of mental health condition, cogent social sciences. (2022)
2. World health organisation, Dementia: a public health priority. 2012, World Health Organisation: Geneva.



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