

Mamelodi for a month

The Mamelodi for a month experiment was conducted by Ena Hewitt, an actuary based in Pretoria in South Africa. The experiment consisted of an affluent, white family of four (two adults and their two daughters, aged 4 and 2) accustomed to living comfortably with all necessities, moving to an informal dwelling in the Mamelodi Township for a month. The objective of the experiment was for the family to experience first-hand the quality of life most South Africans lead, in the hope of igniting a broader conversation on the role of empathy within a healthy democracy.

The key take-outs for the family enabled them to truly understand the lives lead by impoverished South Africans and the challenges they face on a daily basis. This is a critical perspective that adds substantive depth to an implemented course of action to alleviate poverty. It has provided the family with the realisation that poverty, in all its complexity, is crippling the backbone of South Africa and that action needs to be taken. It has also provided an exponential appreciation for the privilege their family experiences on a daily basis within their affluent lives.

Mamelodi for a month key findings

The key findings of the Mamelodi for a month experiment include:

- 47% of the family's monthly budget was spent on transport. As many South Africans spend such a significant proportion of their income on transport, it results in many being particularly susceptible to increases in transport costs which has consistently exceeded salary inflation over the recent past.
- The experiment elicited quite varied reactions from the public. Some considered the experiment to be reckless given the perceived danger the family would be exposed to. Some were angered by the experiment as it was believed to make a mockery of the hardships of many South Africans. This highlights the need for any immersion activities to be well planned and positioned to ensure that there is buy-in from all participants.
- The inequality in South Africa is startling. This is evident from the apparent disparity between transport, housing, electricity and basic amenities between the low income households and middle to upper income households.
- The problems which plague townships such as Mamelodi are too complex for any one individual to overcome. Some of the key problems include poor access and low quality education, lack of electricity, abuse of alcohol and drugs, and a high prevalence of crime and unemployment.
- Charity is not the answer to alleviating poverty. Charity is thought to encourage complacency and dependency as opposed to addressing the underlying problems and drivers of poverty.

More information can be found on www.mamelodiforamonth.co.za.