

- **Blurb/ Introduction**

Recent times have seen a dramatic increase in government's roll-outs of ARVs to HIV-positive South Africans. Increasingly, however, there is evidence that the system is being abused, and that life-saving medicines are – quite literally – being thrown down the toilet. In this piece, *Raging Ferret Prod.* sets out to investigate the social reasons why HIV-positive people in Grahamstown choose (or are forced by circumstance) to “default” on their ARVs. The piece also looks at the devastating impact this can have on the community. Further, it uncovers the social taboo that surrounds the apparent misuse of ARVs and the disability grant, and follows the team's efforts to find a “defaulter” willing to reveal the truth.

- **Self-Reflective Analysis**

Once again, we did not assign ourselves rigidly specific roles during *Dying to Live's* production. Thus, each of us performed a number of varied and exciting roles throughout both shooting and editing. At different stages of production, I played the role of (amongst others) cameraman, sound man, interviewer, editor, researcher and scriptwriter. This fluidity and interchangeability of roles was a great success, as it allowed us all to attain a number of different skills. It also allowed us to get the piece finished as planned. For instance, when one of us tired of editing, another would step up into in the gap and keep things going. This did not, however, mean that certain members would shirk work, and just let others take over out of lethargy. Our excellent team work ethic meant that each of us felt a very real responsibility to one another to pull our own weight. The proof of this commitment to each other is in the pudding (a successful final product).

I was unsurprised to find myself most interested and involved during post-production. I get a palpable thrill from creating a story out of what sometimes seems like arbitrary footage, and seeing a work come together. Thus, I found myself paying most attention to post-production. However, as we were all present at almost all the shoots, I learnt a lot about camerawork, interviewing technique (somewhere I feel there is room for improvement in our group), and especially sound. During the editing process, I also learnt that there is no room for poor shots, as they can spoil a whole piece. Early in our shooting schedule, we said things like “it looks bad, but let's just shoot it anyway” and this cost us later during editing. Poor shots made us take the

decision to reshoot the poor footage and hand the piece in past its deadline. Thus, I learnt to be meticulous in preparation and not take anything for granted. Thus, the whole group developed highly critical minds, and this was an important outcome of the exercise. We also started to learn what is needed to gain the trust and respect of possible interviewees, and the ethics behind this. We learnt that treating all people with respect and empathy, can get them to open up during interviews (to the journalists' benefit). No doubt this understanding will stand us in good stead for a later, longer documentary.

Personally, I do not feel that I had any major shortcomings on this project's productive process. If I had one regret, it was that I did not intervene during interviews that were not being conducted very well. Sometimes, I felt that our interview technique was lacking and that I (usually sound or camera) should have stood in and taken over. In the future, I hope to take more of a lead on shoots (even if it is not particularly my area of interest).

There were a number of things that I was personally happy with. I felt that I really had a proper voice in the making of this piece. I could argue my case and usually it would be what we went with. I felt like I had more say in the creative process than on previous pieces and greater ownership over the final product. In fact, I took charge of developing the story's plot and major arcs. The story outline that I developed before editing was largely what we stuck with (much to my relief, as I thought it was the right of going about things). I also took charge of writing the narration for the piece (which is crucial for driving the story forward), and I think this was largely successful.

I think the group dynamic of RagingFerrets is largely reflected by our excellent interpersonal mark. Everyone pulled his or her weight in one way or *another. We worked for each other (when someone was struggling with something,* another would be immediately willing to help). During the making of this piece, I also felt that we gained a greater respect for each other's ideas. Where as before, one or two of us may have had a sort of creative tyranny over the others, I felt that we all learnt that every one of us has important ideas and abilities to offer, and listening to these benefits the final product.

This is not to say that the group did not have its fair share of problems. It took days for us to find a solution to an initial lack of defaulters. I think our great strength during this time was our unflinching belief that we would make an excellent piece and it would be the best (despite a slow start). We opened ourselves up to all sorts of possibilities, just so that the story could develop. This willingness to try everything to get a story led us to giving lunch to five people, filming a march that we knew might

be fruitless, and going out of the way to the tiny Jabez Centre. Thus, we found our major source of information for the piece almost by chance, but also by a willingness to keep our options open. We slowly learnt that there were more reasons for defaulting than we initially thought, and pursued these new angles fervently.

The only real disagreement we had came when it was time to hand the piece in. The others felt that they would rather hand the piece in late and redo some of the poor shots. I argued that we had worked through the night to meet a deadline and that we should stick to that deadline. Majority ruled, however, and (in retrospect) I am glad. The poor shots spoilt our piece, but now we have something of which we are very proud. Once again, our good group dynamic shone through, as we debated this with full respect for each other's opinion. I think our spending at least 30 hours in a row together really brought us together as a team, and taught us about each other. We are now a very tight working unit. We debate issues of content and ethics seriously and calmly, and usually we take the right choice. I look forward to the next project.

• Critical Analysis

Dying to Live ended up being a great success, as far as we were concerned. We wanted to make a documentary that would be investigative, while also evoking the viewer's empathy and sympathy. At an early stage in the editing process, we realised that there was a real danger of the piece becoming a boring episode of "talking heads". We quickly saw the need to come up with a means of making the piece more exciting than a simple collection of interviews. Thus, we chose to go on our colourful journey with Sandile and to include this footage in the final product. We chose not to omit some footage that might not have overtly related to our topic at hand, but added colour and a touch of tangibility to the viewer (the sequence where he shows the camera his toilets and mud house, for instance). We also ended up using a lot of handheld, spontaneous footage (not just the interviews that had been carefully prepared for). While this footage may have been technically deficient, it gives a sense of this being a real story with real people and problems (for instance, the clip where Bryce talks to the woman outside the Jabez Centre). The inclusion of this uncut footage feels genuine and adds character to the piece, thus avoiding a "talking heads" issue. Another great success was the use of voiceover to drive the narrative. We realised that a lot of explanation of CD4 counts and government grants would be required for the average viewer to be sufficiently informed to understand

the issue, and we managed this with scripting that was clear and succinct. The narration linked the disparate strands together with great clarity. Thus, a story that might have become extremely confusing for the viewer (the problem is extremely complex), was made easy. Further, choosing Palesa to do voiceovers proved highly successful, as her tone combined professionalism with empathy perfectly. Another success, I thought, was our willingness to include ourselves in the piece (Palesa is visible and Bryce's voice is prominent). This did a lot to eradicate our distancing ourselves from the subjects, and the inclusion of questions added to the investigative edge. A further success was our using an angle on AIDS that was new and fresh, and able to keep the viewer interested for the full ten minutes. Our use of colour correction throughout the piece also gave it a sense of consistency and made the colour richer. All in all, our piece had a good investigative edge to it, as it showed the viewer that people have something to hide and interrogated those people about what they are hiding.

We employed several visual cues and symbols to drive the story forward in the viewer's eye. We included the slow-motion shot of the child at the piece's end not only to evoke emotion, but also to hint at a future being lost. The image of such a young child represents a future that may well be falling apart. The desolate donkey shots are also rich in connotative value. The rubbish blowing past points towards the poverty that is a major reason for defaulting. In the background, a rainbow beams, suggesting that there is some hope in this story (an alteration in ARV rollout policy) but this hope is fragile. We also make consistent use of a particular woman as the face of the piece (she goes with the title shot and also sings the piece to an end). This suggests that the piece has gone full circle, without any difference being achieved in these people's lives.

One of the major difficulties we encountered was filming HIV-positive in an ethically-acceptable way (especially those aware of their wrongdoing). We needed to portray them in a way that was empathetic and human (and be certain of their willingness to be on camera). Similar ethical concerns surrounded the idea of who warranted a title in the piece. We decided that the short clips of people denying knowledge of defaulting did not need titles, while the longer comments did.

Having said all this, we did make several mistakes and there is much room for improvement. Some of the shots we were forced to use were technically poor. For example, the interviewees sitting in front of a tree trunk constituted a poor shot, that seemed to connote some significance to the tree (during the editing process, these people gradually became known as the "tree folk"). The "tree folk" shots also had too much looking space and headspace, so clearly we can improve the framing of our

shots. During shooting, we should also have tried harder to get more cutaways, as during last-minute editing we were sometimes forced to use cutaways that were rather poor (e.g. Annelie at her computer, Nombulelo's shaky hand shot). Our implementation of these cutaways could also be improved, as a lot of them lacked background noise, giving the piece a jarring effect. However, we have learnt from this and will strive to improve in the next piece. Our piece could also, perhaps, have been strengthened with the inclusion of an official view to contrast with the rather militant views of Sandile. Had we found a Health official willing to comment on the complaints around ARV rollout or piece would have been more balanced and more combative in style (like many investigative documentaries). We needed this perspective about what government is actually doing (service delivery and the like) to complete the story. Another technical problem with the piece is the inclusion of shots that are very poor, and sometimes the subject is only half-visible (the first woman talking about being too well to receive ARVs, for instance, and the silhouetted shot of Sandile in the car when he is badly underexposed). We chose to include these shots both because of their important content, and because they add to the naturalness, realness and spontaneity of the piece. However, in the future we can strive to make these unplanned, unprepared shots better. Another minor problem was our having shots with raindrops on the lens or a dirty lens. Shooting in the rain is a problem with few solutions, but we shall have to find one to improve our future pieces. In editing, we made a mistake by cutting two very similar shots of Sandile in a row (both on the same side of the screen, looking in the same direction). This was messy, and it would improve the piece to interchange between shots (even flipping them over to create a sense of debate and opposition in the piece). A technical sound issue was our audio being on stereo, which made the sound unbalanced at times. In the future we should "breakaway to mono" to balance and equalise the sound. Finally, I personally think that we should – in future – always get our interviewees to talk in their first language. We struggled with language barriers at times, and I think our content could have had more clarity if we had let the "tree folk" speak in Xhosa.

All in all, *Dying to Live* was a great success, and while there is room for improvement (especially in technical areas) we are proud of what we achieved.

- **ARV Defaulting Arcs**

1. Reasons for defaulting:
 - a. Disability grant