



MY DISTRICT TODAY

Issue no. 19, June 2012

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Protect the vulnerable and innocent...

Writer: Jacob Molete – GCIS Gauteng

The concept of Child Protection Week stems from the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child," which emphasises the role of the wider community in keeping children safe. Child Protection Week has become an annual campaign to educate and mobilise communities to put children first. The green ribbon is symbolic of accepting the obligation that "I will protect a child."

The 2012 Child Protection Week was held from 27 May to 3 June 2012 under the theme *Working Together to Protect Children*. The Government Communication and Information System in Gauteng, in collaboration with the Tsakane South African Police Service (SAPS), loveLife and the Department of Social Development supported 120 children from the Brakpan Crèche Association who marched on the streets of Tsakane in Brakpan, saying "Stop Children Abuse, Save and Protect Children for Life."

The day was set aside by the association to educate children in crèches about their rights and also to make their voices heard in fighting child abuse that seems to grow day-by-day in South African townships.

Speaking on behalf of the Department of Social Development, Ms Kgomotso Mogoerane, mentioned that it is the department's duty to ensure that children are protected at all times. "Even one abused child is one too many. It's a shameful fact: thousands of South Africa's babies, boys and girls are victims of abuse, neglect and exploitation – and offenders often go unpunished," she said.

She called on communities to ensure child safety and for the police to work hard in bringing perpetrators to book. "It begins with you, today – at home, next door, in your social circles and community, because when you start to see every child as your own, the world starts to change for every child," added Ms Mogoerane.

"Child Protection Week is a very significant and important date on our calendar. The police witness the effects of child abuse so, it is incumbent on us to act as swiftly as possible when we come across it," said Captain Petros Mabuza.



"We must remember that children are our future and that we must teach a child from a very early age, what abuse is. This way they can help themselves and other children to come forward and talk about their situation to the right people," added Constable Lebogang Ramaesa of the SAPS Social Crime Prevention Unit.

Furthermore he said, "Children must know that there is a problem if an adult tells them to 'keep this a secret.' You must know that your friend at crèche or school with a sore arm and bruises is being abused at home. Remember that you are special and nobody has the right to touch you if you don't want him or her to," he added.

He distinguished between abuse and discipline, "However a hiding on the backside for being naughty is a far cry from physical abuse," warned Captain Mabuza.

Children were entertained by loveLife with an anti-child abuse educational drama, music and dance.

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Street vendor turned employer



Selling fruit at social grant distribution points and clinics seemed the end of the road for 39-year-old Banne Khoza, from Hazyview in Mpumalanga. With no fixed income, he also relied on occasional odd jobs to make ends meet. Khoza, who is a father of three, provided for his family with his meagre income as a vendor, until he joined an Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) farming project.

Khoza says through hard work and the continuous assistance he received from the EPWP, he has turned his life around. "I'm now employing two people and help feed their families. There's no greater joy than knowing you made a difference in someone's life."

Though his life is better now, things didn't always come easily. "There were times when I could barely make ends meet, times when the project was not sustainable; but those days are gone."

Khoza also stresses that the support he received from the community was immense and touching. "When things went wrong, I knew I could depend on my community for support, be it financial or emotional. I must say that, without the support of the community, we could've been singing a different tune. I'm grateful. The main support came from EPWP. Even though at times the money was not enough, I will forever be grateful to them."

Despite the success he has achieved, Khoza says that he will only claim glory when he has realised his long-term dream. "I've always wanted to own a farm, employ people from the community and eradicate poverty in the neighbourhood. Until that happens, I will continue to work hard and pray that God answers my prayers."

The EPWP is one of government's array of programmes aimed at providing poverty and income relief through temporary work for the unemployed to carry out socially useful activities.

