

SOUTH AFRICA

Promotion of sexual health and prevention of sexual abuse:
Changing the attitudes and behaviour of Tikwe primary
school community

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1. Frame of Reference

Child protection is a primary responsibility of every parent. However, the socio-economic conditions that most parents and family live under, sometimes prescribes different setup. Vulnerability of some parents is sometimes reflected in the manner in which they respond to behaviour that is unbecoming towards their children by other elders. Hence, the Department of Education decided to identify Tikwe Primary as a pilot project for child and classroom management in Lejweleputswa District.

The project is situated in the Free State Province, Virginia (Lejweleputswa Education District) in Meloding Township. The name of the school is Tikwe Primary school under the principalship of Mrs. N.A Mofokeng, who happens to be a member of the team South Africa Batch 14. On joining the Child Rights, Classroom and School Management Training Programme the total number of learners was 1025 and the teachers was and still remains 33 and the learner's number has increased with 64 which puts the total number of learners at 1089.

Tikwe is situated in an area that has a high rate of unemployment and poverty due to the recent closure of the mines. The social conditions in this area are not healthy and safe for children to survive. The major problems that the children are experiencing are sexual abuse, rape, learner pregnancy, dropout rate, HIV/ Aids and negative attitude of stakeholder (teachers, parents and community) towards the learners.

The above mentioned problems amongst Tikwe Primary community are detrimental to the future of the learners of the school. As already indicated in the statistics, the environment is of high risk considering the age of learners in the school. The children of Tikwe Primary are exposed to abuse by elders ranging from biological parents, uncles, and neighbours who are expected to protect them. During the period between January and October 2011, the school had registered 14 cases of sexual abuse of children by grown up and the community expected intervention from the school to protect and prevent this situation from going out of order. Then, workshop on Child Rights and Classroom Management was identified as a tool that should be used to address the threat of abuse in the school.

The project targeted learners themselves, with the intention of empowering the learners on issues of sexuality education. The aim is to provide information about sexual health in order to enable learners to know more about themselves and how to take care of their bodies. The expectation is that with more information they will develop consciousness and love for their bodies. Furthermore, the project intends to develop and provide educators with the necessary skills on how to manage and handle child abuse cases in their school in a professional manner. The purpose of this is to ensure that educators are the support structure for the school and parents. They are empowered in order to secure the trust of these children to enable them to open up rather than keeping all the horror that happens to them a secret. Therefore, educators must possess necessary skills to deal with these cases in order to assist the victims. Parents on the other hand, are drawn to child right project in order to enable them to identify signs and indicators of abuse at an early stage. The project will raise consciousness of parents so that they stop abusing and develop resilience.

One aspect that needs to be highlighted is that abuse is as a result of mindset and attitude that the abusers have towards their victims, therefore the involvement of parents will benefit the process because they will also learn a lot about themselves. The project will help them to change their attitude and behaviour about life. Cooperation of parents is essential in the development of the project thus covering more learners and community.

Although it might sound like the project will be based on Swedish theories, it must be noted that Child Rights is a priority in South Africa and protection, provision and participation are embraced in the policies of government. The Bill of Rights which is covered in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, clause 28 (1) provides for the protection of children's rights. The South African Schools Act of 1998 also binds schools to ensure that children participate in their education and how through children's involvement in school governance. The Maintenance Act of 1998 binds parents to provide for their children even if they are no longer staying together. Learners Attendance policy binds parent and children to ensure that their children are at school and learning so as to ensure that they are provided with their basic rights

which is education. The government's commitment to provision and protection can also be found in the commitment by government to provide free education to all school that fall into a category of quintile 1-3. Feeding schemes are implemented in these schools in order to enable poor learners to eat at school. All these provisions are provided at Tikwe Primary; therefore the government is directly involved in the education of Tikwe Primary learners. It is thus imperative; to ensure that the learners at Tikwe are protected and if Child Right and Classroom Management strategy could help then it will be implemented with the support of the Department of Education.

On the basis of information provided above, it is evident that the government of South Africa and the Department of Education in particular have a high regard for safety and protection of its learners. The commitment that is shown can be derived from amount of support received from the stakeholder in and around Tikwe Primary school. The need to remedy the situation is the primary aim of the team in support of the children and the school.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to coordinate resources within different Departments in order to promote rights of the child, educating the school community about sexual health to prevent sexual abuse and change the attitudes and behavior of Tikwe Primary school community. The objective is to ensure that the school community is educated in sexual health and the importance of this venture is to prevent recurrence of abuse. The project will work on the attitudes of the school community so as to see the situation in accordance with child rights and the need to protect and provide safety of the children. There is a need to work on the attitudes of the educators who have a tendency of thinking that the children ask for abuse to happen through their behaviour. On observation, it has become clear that stakeholder empowerment and development is an essential element in resolving the problems that Tikwe is experiencing. The school community together with the Department of Education must formulate partnerships that would embrace and promote sexuality education in the school because the team believes that prevention is better than cure.

3. Activities

3.1. Meetings with Departmental officials

Four meetings were held with officials with the purpose of reporting back after the visit to Sweden and also to outline the plan of action to the officials and get permission and support to continue with the project. As Lilly is based at the provincial office, she reported to the Director : Values in Education and the CES : Values in Education. Amelia and Mathibe reported to the District Director and the school SMGD. All the meetings were a great success as the team got the permission and support from all the officials.

3.2. Meetings with stakeholders

Meetings with the following stakeholders were held to outline the project to them and encourage all members to play an active role to ensure that the project achieves its intended purpose :

- > School Management team
 - Teaching staff
 - Support staff
 - School Based Support Team
 - School Governing Body
 - Parents

3.3. Learner Dialogue

This activity was conducted on August 19, 2011 and the target was the Representative Council of Learners (RCL's) for all Secondary Schools in Meloding. RCL is a legislated body in South Africa and it is elected on annual basis as a result the same activity need to be done annually. This is observed as an added advantage, for the challenge we are faced as our topic indicate can't be resolved in one year. The District is responsible to conduct workshops to newly elected RCL members (Mathibe and Kholomu) on behalf of the District.

3.4. Establishing networks

The project is broad and involves different aspects, it was imperative for the team to find people and departments that they need to work with to share the project and also share resources. New networks were formed and existing ones were strengthened.

3.4.1. Department of Health

On the 29th July 2011, the Department of Health held a campaign at the school with the intention of educating the learners, teachers and parents about Tuberculosis. It was during the preparatory stages of the campaign that the project was introduced to the Health officials and a working relationship was established.



Preparatory meeting with the Health Department officials



Turbo boots on the day of the campaign

3.4.2. Department of Correctional Services

We believe that children need to be provided for in order to prevent them from looking at resources in the wrong places. A partnership with the Department of Correctional Services was formed and they donated school uniform to the needy learners. This Department also conducts information sessions to learners, teachers and parents about the effects of abuse and crime in general. In assisting with rehabilitation, one offender was responsible for sewing the school uniform.



Correctional Services donating uniform to the school

3.4.3. Bophelong Youth Club

This is a non – governmental organisation funded by Mandela Children’s Fund. They come to the school once a month to do awareness campaigns on sexuality issues, sports activities, crime prevention.



Bophelong Youth Club performing drama at the school

3.4.4. Virginia Anti- AIDS Youth Club

A group of young people with the aim of involving the youth in activities that will keep them busy and away from the streets. Youth have a lot of energy that can be channelled in the right direction. This group come to the school after teaching hours and during weekends to play and educate the youth and children about the causes of AIDS and how to prevent it, the right time to start involving themselves in sexual relationships.

3.4.5. South African Police Service

The partnership with the police service led to the school being allocated a school cop. The school cop attends to all the cases of the school that need police intervention. The police perform campaigns at the school to raise awareness on crime in general and the Child Protection unit sensitise children on their rights and have a special week during May called Child Protection Week. The police come to school once a month to address learners or anytime they have a special campaign.



Nelson Mandela Day activity Police addressing learners during Child Protection Week

3.4.6. Love Life

Love Life is a non-governmental organisation run by the youth. It is a form of employment as the youth who are facilitators, receive a monthly stipend. It consists of four programmes namely, Love Train, Body Ys, Make your move and Love Life Games. The Body Ys programme is the one relevant to the project. The facilitators teach the grade 6 and 7 about how their body functions and sexuality in general. They teach them four days a week for 35 minutes



Love Life Activities during the Love Train Week

3.4.7. Local Churches

Priests from local churches come to the school and preach to the learners and teachers. The partnership goes further, they donate school uniform to the needy learners and also provide counselling services to the learners identified by the teachers.



Reverend of the Methodist Church with learners who received school uniform and bags

3.4.8. Virginia Muslim Community

This is a group of local Muslim Business People who assist the school with moral regeneration talks and also donate blankets to the needy school learners identified by teachers.



Members of the MBP and the Executive Mayor donating blankets to needy learners

3.4.9. Established Standing District Committee comprising of the following:

- Lejweleputswa Education District (Mr Kholumo who is one of the change agents from batch 15 also serves in the Committee).
- South African Police Services (Headed by Captain Kgopane from Thabong Police Station).
- Department of Social Development (officials rendering services from Meloding).
- Adopt a Cop attached to Tikwe Primary School.
- Department of Health (representative from clinics in Meloding).
- Department of Labour (Me. Mamburu).
- Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (represented by Me. Khalata).

This Committee has a standing agreement to constantly meet with the general Meloding community to discuss amongst others how to prevent and scale done the following social ills under the slogan "*Child Protection Week*":

- Rape issues ravaging Meloding community.
- Rate of murder cases at Meloding.
- Rate of learner and youth pregnancy.
- Creating awareness on sexuality education.
- Opening dialogue starting from home on sexuality education.
- Parenting.
- Child headed families.

The first community interaction took place on 28 and 29 May 2012 (invitation letters to all schools in Meloding including Tikwe Primary were signed by the District Director: Mr MS Mkgobo). One important committee resolution is to consult and interact with Meloding community on annual basis, however, sporadic meetings will still be conducted with communities for different structures and organisations.

3.4.10. Soul Buddyz Club

The school strengthened the functionality of the Soul Buddyz Club at school. At peer level, they identify learners who are in need of any kind of help. They guard against abuse and bullying in and outside the school and report such cases to the teachers. They recently had a project of collecting food stuffs that they donated to needy learners.



Soul Buddyz Club and teachers with the food parcels they prepared for needy learners

3.4.11. Sexual Talk Fridays

The female teachers at school gather with grade 6 and 7 girl learners every Friday and talk to them on sexual health and how to care for their bodies. The rights of the children and what to do in the case of abuse.



Female teachers addressing girl learners

3.4.12. Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs

A partnership with this department resulted in the school receiving 10 bicycles and opening a cycling club. This is one activity that channels the energy of the children in the right direction and ensure that they are kept busy, healthy and happy at all times.



The learners during the handover ceremony at Tikwe Lodge

3.4.13. Children's Rights Talks by Learners

Learners are now in a position to participate. One Friday in a month, some children address the learners during assembly about their rights and their responsibilities. This is one of the greatest achievements of the project. When they know and understand their rights, they are in a position to act responsibly.



Learners addressing their peers about their rights and responsibilities

4. Mentor's visit

We had an opportunity of hosting our mentor for a week (31 July to 04 August 2012) at the school. On the 05th August, the mentor had a network meetings with all batches in the Free State to share the progress of their different projects and to also prepare and

welcome the new batch that will be leaving for Sweden during September 2012. The mentor had the opportunity to meet with 90% of the networks involved in the project at Tikwe Primary School . the interactions of the different networks with the mentor encourage people involved to want to do more in ensuring that the project achieves its intended objectives. The mentor was also invited to motivate Grade 12 learners at one of the High schools around.



Mentor interacting with learners



Mentor addressing Grade 12 learners at Meloding Secondary School

5. Results

The project is very successful as it was able to achieve its initial objectives of making all stakeholders aware of the rights of a child to be protected, provided for and for the children to be given a conducive platform to participate. We now have sustainable partnerships and new ones keep flowing every time they hear of the project. The project

provided emotional, social and financial support to the needy learners. The school now has informed and knowledgeable learners who are in a position to address other learners on issues that affect them and influence them in a positive and responsible way. Because of the interventions of the project, the school has zero cases of abuse reported this year as compared to 14 reported before the start of the project. The attitude of teachers and parents has now changed for the better as they are now very supportive to learners and are able to see the children with a different and caring eye. The partnership with the Department of Health enabled the school to be allocated a School Nurse and during June, a health week was held at the school where grade 1 learners were assessed physically and in cases that needed treatment, referrals were made. Two cases need mention as the biggest achievements of the partnerships.

1. A physically disabled girl child is due for surgical reconstruction in October, thanks to the department of Health. This child has been at the school since 2010, it was only after joining the project that the eyes of the members were opened. We then realised that the child need to be assisted. The project made us to see clearly and to put the best interest of the children first. She will be able to walk properly like other girl children her age.



The disabled foot of the girl

2. A six year old boy had plastic surgery for cleft palate repair operation on the 06th September 2012, thanks to the referral by the Speech Therapist and the Department of Health. The boy will now be able to talk and be heard.



Before the surgery



After the surgery

6. Discussions and reflections

As team South Africa, the project served as an eye opener and gave us as individuals a wake up call. We are now in a position to see things differently and understand them better. All the achievements of the project, could not have been possible if stakeholders did not support the project. It also enhanced our people management skills as we had to deal with different people at different levels with different attitudes and beliefs. We have grown professionally and as individuals were able to recognise and use our strong points and improve on our weak points. What came as an unexpected result is the community organisations that even volunteer their services to the school in order to assist in the project. We expected that it will always be members of the team or the school that will always go out there and ask for help but it turned out differently because some organisations came to the school to offer their services to the school

7. Way forward

The team is going to continue with the workshops and campaigns for stakeholders to intensify their knowledge and understanding of CRC. It came to the realisation of the team that the project will never end and will be part of the operations of the school. We will further strengthen the partnerships and continue empowering learners and teachers to be better and responsible people. The sexual talks with girls on Fridays will be extended to boys by male teachers. Now that the project has been such a success at the pilot school, we are now going to introduce the project at other five primary schools in the location and also at the four high schools. This will be easy and possible because we now have a frame of reference as Tikwe Primary School and also we will be able to

use the different networks that we have already established to carry out the project in the other schools.

Values in Education Sub-Directorate of which Mathibe and Kholumo are driving from Lejweleputswa Education District will be rolling out the following to all Meloding Schools and Tikwe in particular:

- Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM). Aiming to restore morals and values in the community.
- Establishment of Girl Education Movement (GEM) and Boy Empowerment Movement (BEM). This will seek to open debate on issues affecting both boy and girl child. This will be done to ensure that we expand our space of action because they will be given activities to perform on their own and report back.
- RCL trainings mainly to breath the Triple Ps (Provision, Participation and Protection).
- Learner Dialogue will be directed to schools in Meloding and Tikwe Primary to protect the rights of the child as per article 34 of the CRC.

From the District Office we will ensure that the above mentioned committee will be sustained.

All targeted learners we are engaging with boys and girls will be parents in the near future, so the ultimate endeavor is to educate communities about patriarchy. We believe justice will be done if after some years to come patriarchy in Africa and South Africa in particular will suffer some of the defeats it has in places like Scandinavian Europe, where women and men enjoy the same state protection.