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Asset Based Community-driven Development: Report on Siya Sonke Project - Children Activities

Project: Child Protection Week For children of age between 7 and 18 years

Report Dates: 30th May to 7th June 2018

Composition: 7-10 years (body assertiveness, safe and unsafe places, family tree)/ 11-18 years: persona doll workshop on a) Ukuthwala (forced marriage), b) 'blesser' (transactional relationships)

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Report by Nomaxabiso Fani



Background

In South Africa, despite the most progressive legal framework worldwide, it is estimated that 80% of all crime victims are children. They are at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation. In 2013 in Grahamstown, the Child Protection Action Forum, a body of several stakeholders from the public, governmental and non-governmental sector, was founded. The aim was to promote children's rights and to improve the local coordinated expert response in protecting these.



“The statistics of sexual abuse of children are staggering. Some estimates place the incidence as high as one in three girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthday.” (<http://e2epublishing.info>) Experts say that the most vulnerable ages are between three and eight years of age. They stress the importance of educating children about body safety and assertiveness as one of the tools which can help in to prevent it.



Besides, children and youth are often not adequately informed about their rights and responsibilities. However, doing so could strengthen resilience in dealing with possible unsafe or risky situations. This also applies to the ability of informed response to situations such as early pregnancy or transactional relationships. Recently, there was reported that our Sarah Baartman District has the earliest sexual debut of 12 years in the entire Eastern Cape Province. There have been initiatives trying to educate about teenage pregnancy and entering relationships with 'blessers', but statistics show that they have not impacted on incident rates. ☒

Our child protection project is located within our Asset-based Community-led Development (ABCD) Programme: There are 40 families from the neighbourhoods of Joza in Grahamstown who participate in our Siya Sonke (isiXhosa for: “We are going together”) Project. Our ABCD-team member Sanelisa Mtwalo is the person in charge of our children activities. The Child Protection project is composed of two elements: 1) Active membership by Raphael Centre in our local Child Protection Action Forum - with Sanelisa as our delegate, and 2) Child safety activities for children and youth.

This year, we aligned our child and youth safety activities with the local child protection week by CPAF which started on Wednesday, the 30th of May and lasted until Thursday, the 7th of June.

For this week, we targeted local social issues children and youth are exposed to (see above). The following activities took place:

Safe and Unsafe places:

The CPAF member St Mary's D.C.C. held an open discussion about what are safe and unsafe places for children and youth. After that, the children identified areas that are safe and unsafe in their communities and made physical maps where they highlighted neighbourhoods such as Sunny Side, Vergenoeg and Extension 9. It was attended by children and youth between the ages of 10 to 15 years.



Family Tree

Part of resilience work with children and youth is fostering an awareness of their social assets. Back at the Little Flower Day Care facilities, the children (age group 7-10 years) were asked to develop their family tree which depicts the people they feel safe and happy with so that they would even share their secrets with them. The tool 'family tree' forms a kind of mapping tool whereby individuals take stock of the social assets (people, groups, institutions, organisations) in their daily lives and can show how close or far the connections are with them. ☒



Children's Rights

Reabetswe and Sabi, who are Master students from Rhodes University Psychology Department, volunteered to work with the 11 to 18 years old Siya Sonke children and youth on their rights and responsibilities:

Rights

To be taken seriously

Quality Medical Care

Good Education

To be loved and protected from harm

To make mistakes

To be proud of their heritage and beliefs.☒

Responsibilities

↔ To listen to others

↔ To take care of themselves

↔ To study and respect their teachers

↔ To show love and caring for other

↔ To learn from those mistakes

↔ To respect the origins and beliefs of other



Persona Doll Storytelling

This activity is for adolescents and youth and aims at 1. preventing them from bringing themselves into risky situations, and/ or 2. Fostering resilience and well-being through enhancing informed response to certain (challenging) aspects of their lives. It is an interactive workshop set-up whereby the persona doll takes on a specific character that tells her/ his personal story to the learners. As the story unfolds, the audience is engaged with questions about aspects of the narrative. The learners work on them in groups and report back to the entire class.



Sanelisa, Rea and Sabi engaged the Siya Sonke youth the story of Thandi who is 15 years old and is in a relationship with a 'blesser' (transactional relationship). Here are some examples of questions the youth had to think about: 1. Mandla (blesser character) gave Thandi presents so must she say yes if he wants to have sex with her? Or, 2. Do you think Mandla will be a good boyfriend for Thandi? And, 3. Who else can Thandi talk to and where can she go to get help?

The second narrative is a 14 years old Phumeza who has fears to be forced into marriage as soon as she turns 15. Some of the questions to the youth group were: 1. Are there places in South Africa where ukuthwala still happens? Or, 2. Ukuthwala is now a crime in South Africa. Do you think that is a good law? And, 3. Do you think Phumeza may be in danger of ukuthwala or is the danger only in her mind?

Body Assertiveness

For this activity, we also received kind assistance by Reabetswe and Sabi who facilitated this topic with our seven to ten years old Siya Sonke children.

They opened the day with sharing what was special and important to them. A few of the answers were: 1. 'That I am loved.' Or, 2. 'That my parents take care of me.' And, 3. 'That I am free to play with my friends.'

Then, the entire group discussed situations which are dangerous and the children came up with the following scenarios: 1. 'To be sent to shops at night and then being exposed to strangers'. Or, 2. 'Human trafficking: being kidnapped on the way to or from school'.¹ And, 3. 'To be abandoned and neglected by your parents'.

Subsequently, the facilitators gave an overview about different forms of abuse: emotional abuse (being shouted at or being bullied at school, voiceless children), sexual abuse, and other forms of physical and emotional abuse, such as corporal punishment.



¹¹ There were a few incidences recently which the children remembered.

Once for the children symptoms of abuse were clear, the group continued with thinking about a few ways to prevent with abuse (for example, don't open the door for strangers when are alone at home). Also, they looked at who the people are whom they trust and should seek help in incidences of abuse. ☒

To conclude the day, the children were given some safety rules and tools, such as are slogans: 'My body belongs to me'; 'No to secrets'; 'Abuse is not my fault'; 'Children have their rights'; 'No! Stop! Run away! Tell somebody!'.

Reflection

Participants:

Next year, we would like to foster mutual exchange of expertise among the CPAF members during child protection week: We would like to invite children from other organisations to attend our activities about rights and responsibilities. Also, we intend to rekindle the 'children's parade' which we used to organise until 2015 in the advent of candlelight month and rather should use it as Child Protection event to raise awareness for issues in the community and show presence as 'united' NGO's and institutions for children's rights. For the activities next year, we will ask the Siya Sonke children to bring one friend along.

Workshop tools and facilitation:

We want to use more diverse media in workshops with our learners to keep their concentration during one session (one gathering takes 60 to 90 mins). At the moment we are looking for age-appropriate child safety clips for "My Body". Just like last year, we had one female and one male facilitator which appears to be a better way of facilitating the problematic topic of abuse.☒

Conclusion:

In the recent years, we ran a series of sessions during the second and third term with our Siya Sonke children. However, to facilitate child protection activities during the local CPAF campaigning week, it felt inspiring and by far more effective than in the past. ☒