



MEDIA RELEASE

Circles of protection around vulnerable youth in honour of Madiba's legacy

Mohlakeng, a township on the West of Johannesburg is battling a myriad of challenges that are eroding the promise of a brighter future for its young people. The parents and teachers of learners attending one of the high schools there have shared alarming experiences of raising children in an environment where they are exposed to drug use, sexual abuse, bullying, teenage unplanned pregnancy and high crime and poverty rates.

These insights are not unique to this community.

Last year, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund (NMCF), Deloitte and Girls and Boys Town (GBT) jointly produced The State of the South African Child Report which shows that a majority of the country's children are highly vulnerable to poverty, violent crimes and lack of access to basic services. Their employment prospects are also compromised by having few opportunities compounded by a school system that is rated among the lowest in quality globally with a high dropout rate.

But all hope is not lost.

At the heart of this community is a school that has opened up its classrooms to do more than deliver the curriculum for learners, but to accommodate dialogue with concerned parents and other stakeholders to create healthy and sustainable change. Finding solutions for reducing the impact of poverty on youth is at the core of change efforts because of its link with developmental issues like educational outcomes. Poverty eradication is the focal point for this year's Nelson's Mandela Day under the theme: "Action against poverty".

The robust discussions are part of workshops facilitated by the youth-care organisation GBT in a programme called Circles of Protection and Safety that was designed in partnership with the NMCF.

"Our work with youth over the years has shown us that you cannot simply counsel young people and give them the tools to cope with challenges without looking carefully at how family, school, community and social environments impacts on their healthy development. Poverty features at the top of the list of causes for many of their obstacles," says GBT CEO Lee Loynes.

GBT has done similar work with schools and families for many years in Kagiso and other communities around the country. But for the first time, it is applying a social-ecological strategy that seeks to understand and address the complex and inter-related underlying factors for the prevailing problems that mainly affect the youth.

The evidence-based method places the school at the core of the project which equips community members with tools to become change agents in addressing some of their challenges.

This approach fulfils the vision outlined in NMCF's strategy.

The main priority of NMCF's initiatives is to support and foster partnerships with organisations like GBT that are embedded in communities as they are better positioned to make a meaningful difference to children's lives and ensure that efforts are not abandoned with time.

"It is impossible to change the course for communities with complex problems like Mohlakeng in the blink of an eye. This is why the Circles of Protection initiative is informed by a shared vision with GBT which is to help communities identify their own assets that can be optimised to achieve better and more sustainable results for such interventions. Our hope is to inspire all workshop attendees and stakeholders to become *Madiba change-makers* in their own way and bring new hope into the lives of our youth," says Sibongile Mkhabela, CEO, NMCF.

The implementation and outcomes of the programme will be evaluated using interviews with parents, school teachers and other stakeholders as well as measuring changes in different variables for school performance that can be attributed to it. The results will be used to inform rollout of comparable activities in other communities similar to Mohlakeng around the country.

There is an encouraging willingness and energy among stakeholders for collaborating with one another to come up with solutions for social problems based on past successes. These include a project led by a young resident of the area in which resources were mobilised to establish a library to replace one that was torched during protest action.

"We are very inspired by how different men and women, who in the spirit of the late Madiba, are taking a stand and committing to tear down the barriers that trouble youth at risk and cast a shade over their bright futures – and then help them to Shine™," concludes Ms Loynes.

Ends

Issued by Meropa Communications on behalf of Girls and Boys Town.

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The State of the South African Child Report

In partnership with GBT and NMCF, Deloitte compiled a report on the overall vulnerability of South Africa's children aged 0-18 years. The key findings of the report include:

Social determination: 9% of children live in informal housing & 31% have access to sanitation (2012)

Social welfare: 56% of children living in poverty (2012)

Housing and basic services: 5 million children used pit latrines, buckets or open land (2012)

Education: 15% of children achieved matric or equivalent qualification (2013)

Child abuse: 50 688 children victims of violent crimes (2012)

Children nutrition: 2.5 million children go hungry each year

About GBT

Established in 1958, Girls & Boys Town (GBT) is a national non-profit organisation that runs proven and successful programmes to strengthen youth and their families and communities in difficulty – and help them to Shine™. Through a combination of interventions, on average it assists between 16,000 and 20,000 beneficiaries a year. In addition to the 10 therapeutic residential care environments for youth; GBT offers SACE accredited '*GBT Education Model*' training to Educators and schools; '*Common Sense Parent*' training to parents; community-based early intervention and prevention work, building skills and strengths within families and children in their own homes and communities, a Hotline Service; and has contributed to the professional knowledge and practice base, both locally and internationally, via the *GBT/UJ: Growth 'Beyond the Town'* longitudinal Research Study, since 2009. Visit: www.girlsandboystown.org.za.



Restoring the light.

Abandonment. Abuse.
Violence. Rape. Some of
the reasons that the lights
go out of our children.
Rage. Addiction.
Alienation, Suicide.
A few of the paths that
some youth choose to
cope with overwhelming
challenges. Significance.
Home. Independence.
Nurture. Education. The
things we focus on to
empower the young
entrusted to us to
overcome their difficulties
and **SHINE™** again.