

Reducing Sexual Offences Amongst Youth:

A case study of how the Support Programme
for Abuse-Reactive Children (SPARC) changes
participants' lives

Bahle's Story



TEDDY BEAR CLINIC
FOR ABUSED CHILDREN

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Bahle's Story:

From Helpless Isolation to a Positive and Hopeful Future

Bahle* is 19 years old and he lives with his grandmother and two younger brothers in an informal settlement in Johannesburg, South Africa. The area he lives in is a predominantly black township and has one of the highest population densities in South Africa. There are a mix of low cost houses and informal structures/shacks. The area is characterised by overcrowding, high crime rates, and high levels of unemployment.

Bahle's mother passed away when he was 15 years old and his father does not live with him, but sees him on the weekends. His grandmother, a pensioner, is the sole financial provider and she pays for Bahle's food, clothes and school fees. His aunt, Thandi*, lives nearby and Bahle explains that, *"she was trying her best in assisting my grandmother in supporting us. She liked me most and spoils me most of the times. I used to visit her and regarded her as my role model. We were so close."* Thandi also notes that she had a close relationship with Bahle and she says that she *"took him as one of my own children."*

In 2010 Bahle was in Grade 10 at a local high school. During this period of his life, he was undisciplined, and was disrespectful to adults. He found it difficult to concentrate on school and admits, *"I used to be naughty, dodge school classes and not doing my homework."* Bahle reflects that he was influenced by his surrounding environment at the time – he witnessed very little respect for the law around him. As a result, he used to steal, even from his granny, and he abused alcohol and marijuana. *"Most boys in my township drink liquor, smoke dagga and do drugs. I am not an exception and I had to submit to peer pressure."* Bahle's attitude towards females was also influenced by his peers – they regard-

ed girls as the weaker sex, less intelligent and inferior to males in almost everything.

One day in 2010, Bahle skipped school with a group of children and they all went to his aunt Thandi's house. During a wrestling game with his 10 year old female cousin – Thandi's daughter – Bahle suddenly felt *"I couldn't resist the temptation and I ended up dragging her to the other side of the field. I raped her."* The victim reported the rape to her parents a year later. The matter was taken to the police and in 2011 Bahle was diverted from the Criminal Justice System to the SPARC programme, run by the Teddy Bear Clinic.

Bahle's father explains how the incident devastated the family. Although he did his best to apologise to family members for his son's actions, there was great mistrust and relationships became estranged.

Thandi, in particular, was distraught: *"I felt terrible and I didn't know how to handle it. I was so angry that I didn't want to talk to him [Bahle] at that time."* Bahle himself was tremendously affected by his family's reaction. He was upset that he had damaged the trust his aunt had in him, and he felt guilty and helpless: *"To be honest, I thought I should disappear into thin air. I had no guts to face these challenges. I couldn't shoulder what happened."*

In his community, Bahle was rejected; nobody wanted to speak to him or to be seen with him. Bahle explains his isolation: *"I was like a misfit in the community. I was viewed as a criminal and a very irresponsible person."*

I couldn't resist the temptation and I ended up dragging her to the other side of the field. I raped her.

*All names have been changed in the interests of anonymity

How my life changed

Since Bahle was referred to the SPARC programme “my life has changed completely.”

Participation in the SPARC programme helped Bahle to change many of his attitudes and behaviours. He became able to accept that he had committed a crime and to take responsibility for it: “Every one of us

“ I realised that I am not alone and there is hope that I can get out of this mess.

was expected to explain in details what he has done. It was first a difficult process, because we were all ashamed of what we have done and we didn't want to share that with

anyone. Gradually we opened up and explained what we did. I felt relieved after my explanation and ready to ask for forgiveness.”

The programme helped to rebuild his hope and to break down some of his feelings of isolation: “I realised that I am not alone and there is hope that I can get out of this mess.” Bahle feels that, most importantly, the programme helped him to learn to respect other people's feelings and privacy, especially girls: “At the clinic, my attitude has changed completely towards girls. I learnt that they should not be used as sex objects. I now treat them like every living creature on earth. I admit that I was wrong.” Bahle's father has also witnessed these changes in his son, and is “very happy that Bahle went to Teddy Bear Clinic and attended classes. The intervention was great and there are clear [outcomes].”

Bahle feels more able to cope with his problems, and is able to devise constructive solutions for them. He feels that he socialises better and more appropriately with his peers and is able to resist negative peer pressure. Thandi affirms these changes in her nephew: “He has refrained from going out with bad companies. He is now a good boy. He is not smoking cigarette and dagga anymore.”

Since the programme, Bahle's relationships have improved. His father feels that he is now closer to his son and is more involved in his life. The relationship between Bahle and Thandi has also been rebuilt; she explains “I decided to open up and allow him to visit us again. At that time he was still attending courses at Teddy Bear Clinic. I must be honest that I discovered the change in his behaviour.”

Bahle has worked hard to change his behaviour for the better and this has led to him being accepted by his community again: “I proved it through my performance at school, my commitment to my local football club in the township and my positive attitude to the opposite sex.” Bahle also changed his attitude towards school and, as a result, was successful in completing Matric. He is now enrolled at a Further Education and Training College for Motor Mechanics and he is eager to complete his studies. His family are all very proud of his achievements and his commitment.

Bahle is positive about his future. He intends to pursue his soccer career and to complete his studies so that he can support his family: “My grandmother needs assistance and someone to look after her. I want to complete my studies, get experience and then open my own garage for motor mechanics.”



Help is a phone call away!

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