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GRAIL PROGRAMMES NEWSLETTER

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The natural environment at The Grail Centre.
Picture by William Scrooby

Justice for Children: Keeping our children safe

By Brenda Kyomugisha

I am Brenda Patience Kyomugisha, a graduate of Tft 2011. I currently work for The Justice Law and Order Sector in Uganda on the programme Justice for Children. I joined the programme at pilot level and am participating in the mainstreaming into government. I am a Regional Coordinator and my duty station is the High Court at Fort Portal.

The Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) is a sector wide approach that brings together approximately 17 institutions responsible for administering justice, maintaining law and order and promoting human rights. The need to improve services for children was highlighted and led to the Justice for Children programme. The stakeholders I engage with include Magistrates, Judges, Police officers, State Attorneys, Prisons, Remand Homes, Probation and Social Welfare Officers, the Advocates. They also include Non State Actors such as the Chief Administrative Officers, Religious Leaders, Traditional Leaders, Political Leaders, Civic leaders, Civil Society Organizations that are relevant to children, human rights bodies, the community children volunteers (Fit persons) and the Resident District Commissioners.

Bearing in mind that the law was originally made for adults, there was a gap for children who sought justice.

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Stakeholders discovered that the judicial system is not child friendly in terms of distance, structures, language, protection and procedures. As a Regional Coordinator I try to use the platform of Regional Chain linked Committee and District Chain Linked Committee (RCC and DDC respectively) to engage stakeholders to be more responsive to all children, the offenders, witnesses, victims or the vulnerable.

How Tft has helped me in my work

As part of my job I lobby for meetings with relevant stakeholders around issues affecting children and the law. **Tft has improved my approach to engaging stakeholders.** For example, the seemingly simple act of now holding meetings at the premises of relevant institutions has brought on board reluctant members who before would have considered attending such meetings too time consuming.

The process of “digging deeper” and uncovering the root causes of problems (along the lines of Paulo Freire’s approach) has also been a helpful addition to the way we work. For example, one problem has been the number of child cases that have been lost in court due to the poor medical reports as well as the absence of medical personnel in court to testify.

Police had also noted that most health workers shied away from filling the police forms for medical examination for fear of testifying in court. The District Medical Officer and Director of the Regional Referral Hospital were brought on board to be able to jointly identify the root causes of health workers fear of testifying in court, an issue that resulted in children not accessing justice. The root causes were identified as: the long time spent at court before medical witnesses were called up, an issue perceived as a lack of respect for medical personnel and their time; the intimidating language used by advocates during cross examinations and the lack of facilitation to support medical workers coming to court to testify before magistrates, especially in simple cases (simple defilement, grievous harm, arson, etc). The resolutions reached were: courts to always give priority to hearing first those cases that involve medical witnesses, magistrates to protect the personnel from intimidating language of advocates in court.

Another skill that was enhanced by TtT was **the listening survey**. According to Paulo Freire “feelings are facts”. My mind became so aware that what is being heard and felt in an informal meeting, gathering or setting is a true reflection of the feelings in that setting. In this regard, I was very keen to acquire information from stakeholders such as magistrates, prosecutors, the police about the challenges faced in dispensing child justice. This was through the one-on-one engagement with the stakeholders who would express their feelings and point out specific challenges faced. This, in the long run led to a specialized training of selected officers.

Another skill I am sure was enhanced by TtT and has yielded results is the **training and facilitation skill**. In one of the specialized trainings of judicial officers and related stakeholders, the academic approach was changed and the methodology adapted to be more participatory, especially at the point of generating actions.



A court open day on awareness raising about children rights.

Each member was tasked to pronounce their commitments by pinning them on the wall and sharing with the group and to be followed up by the coordinator.

My language to state actors also changed from being confrontational to simple words that are able to bring out the desired results. Yet I keep a relationship in the process. I for instance use words such as: “supposing, in the event...” “In my little understanding...”, “To me, this statement/story or situation suggests...” “I hear what you are saying, I only object...” “For me, I would add...”, “How do you feel that...?” These kinds of phrases indicate that I know what I want, value the contribution being made and help get to the desired outcome. This has increased heads of agency(s) ability to propose their own answers that are action oriented.

The TtT training changed my life in terms of thinking, approach to life and my understanding that small actions can have huge outcomes. I have been able to help my stakeholders to identify root causes and to draw insights from the current situations. This has led to practical solutions that can be felt and touched. The programme that employs 4 social workers and 9 legal officers has appreciated the social work approach compared to a more legalistic approach.

Change Agents celebrate Graduation on June 16

By Lindia Trout

The Mthimkhulu Community Development: Change Agent Programme will celebrate the graduation of 40 Change Agents on Youth Day, 16 June 2016.



This will be the 11th group of Change Agents graduating from the Community Development Programme. Thus far, over 600 Change Agents from across the Overberg Region have been trained and have graduated from this programme.

Change Agents

“A change agent should be like waves on a sea, made of the same water, but which rise up above the water according to the needs of the situation and merge into

the water again when the need is over” (Filipino peasant quoted by Bhasin, 1972).

“A change agent is a person who initiates a process of change. Change in itself can be either good or bad. The direction which this change will take should be decided through interaction with the people with who the change agent is working, rather than unilaterally by the change agent acting alone or on behalf of the outside interests” (Burkey, 1993 p.76). From these two definitions, Change agents could be defined as facilitators or animators of development processes within their communities.

Over the last 16 years, Change agents have been at the forefront of many victories for communities in the Overstrand Region, including the building of 410 houses in the Kleinmond housing project in 2011, starting neighbourhood watches, soup kitchens and even reading programmes for children.

June 16 (Youth Day)

This year Mthimkhulu decided to celebrate its Change Agent Graduation on 16 June to encourage Change Agents to draw courage and inspiration from youth, who on this day stood up against the repressive apartheid regime and said ‘no’. These youth in their unity and solidarity changed the course of history. Our communities today are faced with many social injustices and socio economic challenges – we require committed, courageous agents that will challenge the status quo of apathy and helplessness to engage people in their own personal change as well as in transformation of their community. We salute our youth for their courage on June 16, 1976 and we wish our Change Agents courage and commitment ahead in their leadership roles in their communities.

Grail Centre Winter Warmer Special

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ABOUT US

THE GRAIL CENTRE TRUST

The Grail Centre Trust is based in Kleinmond, Western Cape. This Not-for-Profit Organisation delivers two programmes, namely Training for Transformation and Mthimkhulu Community Development Programme. In addition, the Grail Centre Conference and Retreat Centre can accommodate groups of up to 50 people.



FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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