

Precare – Combatting GBV

“Gender-based violence (GBV), a widespread and common occurrence in SA, is deeply ingrained in homes, workplaces, cultures, and traditions. This pandemic, because of unequal power between genders, has far-reaching effects that go on beyond the violence itself.” Indiran Govender MD March 2023.

Children and youth in communities around Kids Haven in Benoni are exposed to high numbers of adversities, including violence, sexual abuse, and parental neglect.

The primary objective of the Kids Haven project to combat GBV is to change behaviour and attitudes in targeted communities to improve child and youth safety through education, support, and training. Our goal is to break the GBV cycle that we see displayed in children at risk, and those already affected by GBV in their homes and communities. Certain risk factors underlie the violence and include a history of social isolation, violence, lack of knowledge and unequal opportunities among others. The presence of such risk factors in a community perpetuates the cycle of violence. The Kids Haven project builds protective factors for children, such as social support, training, and improved awareness.

How we implement the programme to combat GBV

Kids Haven uses participatory methods to engage with children and their parents or caregivers to deepen their understanding of what child abuse and neglect (CAN) is, and to generate personal and community level responses to prevent and reduce CAN and GBV.

Our specific objectives:

1. To raise awareness and impart knowledge on children’s rights and responsibilities, and sexual rights and reproductive health, peer pressure and risky behaviour as a teenager, and intimate partner violence. This includes understanding gender and power.
2. To implement regular dialogues and workshops incorporating child participation so that children’s understanding and fears can surface, and an action plan can be developed with the children to address their knowledge and fears.
3. To encourage agency in children through their participation in dialogues. The weekly group sessions build relationship and trust, allowing the children to talk through scenarios that they have directly experienced or witnessed. The children are supported to critically consider and problem-solve for solutions. This is all done in a safe space of mutual respect and understanding.
4. To connect the parents and caregivers to the programme content so that they understand and appreciate what their children are learning about. There are opportunities for the parents and caregivers to reflect on their own experiences of CAN and GBV and identify ways to improve safety outcomes for their children and all children in their community.

Methodology:

1. Weekly meetings of teenage girls and Kids Haven facilitators in their own communities. We want to hear from the children and increase open discussions on this subject. The weekly meetings take place across four to five months.
2. Facilitating discussions and knowledge-sharing across these four broad topics:
 - a. Childhood abuse and neglect
 - b. Childrens rights and responsibilities, including peer pressure and risky behaviour, and gender and power.
 - c. Sexual rights and responsibilities.
 - d. Intimate partner violence.
3. Incorporating awareness and support for mental health needs of the children, including anxiety and depression, into the weekly workshops. Children may be referred for specialist therapeutic support from Kids Haven where necessary.
4. Incorporating practical support for the girls through provision of hygiene products – toiletries and sanitary products, promoting personal dignity. This includes an age-appropriate and comprehensive presentation on menstrual health and well-being.
5. Incorporating parents and caregivers in parallel discussions to open lines of communication across these ‘unspoken’ topics and facilitate awareness of how to support their children and their community to combat CAN and GBV.

Expected Outcomes:

1. Children included in the weekly group meetings receive knowledge about their rights and responsibilities, sexual and reproductive rights, developmental stages of children and teenagers, and the positive role that adults should play to protect children.
2. Children recognise CAN and GBV and know how to get help to improve and change the situation for the victim – whether the child is the victim, or witness to another victim of CAN or GBV.
3. Children and youth are empowered through knowledge and understanding to be safe, and to break the cycle of violence.
4. Parents and caregivers are knowledgeable and alert to the signs of CAN and GBV and clearly know how to give the correct, sensitive, and well-timed support necessary.

Resources to implement this project:

1. Facilitators who are equipped to meet the children regularly every week for at least four months, building trust and relationship.
2. Meeting space in the community – usually a community hall.
3. Refreshments for the weekly meetings.
4. Entry fees, travel costs, and refreshments for the group to participate in a hike as part of the relationship building of the group.
5. Specialist discussion on menstrual health and dignity packs for all participants.
6. Toiletries and hygiene products for the participants – monthly if possible.
7. Stationery and journals for the design and printing of information booklets at the end of the group meetings. Printing of these booklets for each participant and a friend.
8. Travel costs for Kids Haven to enable the weekly meetings.
9. Monitoring and evaluation contribution for data management and reports.