

## **TOWARDS A MODEL FOR BUILDING SAFE SCHOOLS: REFLECTING ON SOUTH EXPERIENCES IN SCHOOL SAFETY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The first part of this input will be based on a comparative evaluation of the Crime Reduction in Schools project and the Tiisa Thuto project that was commissioned by the South African Police Service and the UNODCCP. The evaluation was aimed at developing a replicable model for safer schools programme in general, and in particular a proposal for expanding the Tiisa Thuto project to a second area.

The second part of the presentation will focus on the role of the South African Police Service (SAPS) in supporting school safety. The input addresses, in particular, the contribution of the SAPS Adopt-a-Cop programme to safety in schools and building partnerships for safety.

### **BACKGROUND**

United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, the South African Police Service Social Crime Prevention Component and the Gauteng Dept of Safety and Liaison commissioned the CSIR Crime Prevention Centre (CPC) to facilitate the development of an action plan to assist in furthering good practice in Safer Schools Initiatives.

The development and consultation phase aimed to develop a project proposal and implementation plan. This project proposal included a “model” for safer schools based on the experiences, challenges and lessons learnt from projects undertaken across the country. The proposed site for implementation was Alexandra, Gauteng, chosen because President Mbeki identified it as a national priority area for urban renewal.

The Safer Schools programme is part of the Tirisano strategy of the national Ministry for Education. It provides for improved school management and also addresses safety in school. This strategy should be implemented by each of the provincial education departments. The SAPS works closely with the National and Provincial Departments of Education to improve safety at schools and various programmes led or supported by the SAPS are in place. SAPS programmes often provide the catalyst for involvement of other stakeholders in school safety and youth crime prevention. The input will explore the role of the SAPS and pose questions in regard to a sustainable and realistic role for a police service to play.

### **CONTEXTUALISING THE NEED FOR A SAFER SCHOOLS MODEL**

In order to contextualise our safer school model, one needs to understand the challenges faced by South Africa schools. What are the issues that these schools and communities need to deal with on a daily basis?

Girl children at schools are constantly faced with the fear of sexual abuse and harassment by educators and other learners; there is a high incidence of rape, particularly in school toilets, in empty classrooms, hallways and in hostels. Research undertaken by the Human Rights Watch (2001) records that from 1996 to 1998, girls aged 17 and under constituted approximately 40% of reported rape and attempted rape victims nationally, 20% of young women surveyed in southern Johannesburg reported a history of sexual abuse by the age of 18.

Schools have become spaces for violence; crime and violence represent real threats to the achievement of educational goals. Learner and educators take firearms to school, believing that they need them for protection. The SAPS and the Department of Education have a number of Safer Schools initiatives, including the piloting of Firearm Free Zones for Schools, in terms of the Firearms Control Act of

2000. In some areas, educators resist the implementation of Firearm Free Zones, as they believe they should be allowed to carry guns for protection.

Out of this environment comes the need to develop a model, to turn these environments into safe places for teaching and learning to occur and to encourage the recognition of the school environment as a nurturing and community centred space.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was of an explorative nature with the focus on the review of the two safer school models in Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal. A review of international and national research was undertaken, including consultative workshops with the stakeholders and interviews with the relevant role players for example the provincial and district safer schools coordinator were central to the methodology. An environmental scan of the schools involved in the models was completed. There were regular progress and information sessions with the project partners.

## **KEY OBJECTIVES**

Violence and crime is one of the major obstacles and daily challenges for schools in South Africa. Since the SAPS initiated this project it informs the perspective of the police as to how they can contribute and support a safer school environment. The Provincial Department of Safety and Liaison is mandated to coordinate crime prevention programmes in the province, and has a vested interest in understanding good practice.

The key objective of the project is to develop a ‘management’ model for urban previously disadvantaged communities to improve school safety. The model reflects on the experiences, challenges & lessons learnt thru Tiisa Thuto Programme in Gauteng; Crime Reduction in Schools Project (CRISP) in KwaZulu-Natal and current projects in Alexandra schools.

The model aims at providing support, basic skills and training for educators, learners and the wider community within which the schools are located and at helping the schools address their unique safety and crime trends. It is also geared towards providing a framework that government departments would have to consider in order to sustain the management of safer schools.

The model must also identify the required participants and stakeholders and their roles and responsibilities. In this regard the experiences of the SAPS in regard to school safety and in particular the Adopt-a-Cop programme will be highlighted.

## **CONCLUSION**

The need for a safe environment in which children can be encouraged and nurtured through primary and secondary education is undisputed. In South Africa, it is not a given and every effort must be made to ensure that crime and violence are eradicated from schools. It is hoped that the understanding of what works in safer schools models will contribute to a better future for all our children.

“Schooling equips children with the skills and confidence needed to meet life’s challenges and to lead productive lives. In times of crises and emotional trauma, schools may be the only place where children can find safe, supportive spaces to learn and to grow as human beings”  
(UNICEF 2001).