



**GIRLS  
& BOYS  
TOWN**

Helping youth S.H.I.N.E.® since 1958

# Youth TODAY

NOVEMBER 2021

A NEWSLETTER FOR SUPPORTERS OF GIRLS & BOYS TOWN



## How much is your hug worth?

*When left alone and lonely, the hug of a soft-toy teddy can help to ease negative emotions – but a hug from a caring and trusted human being is beyond any measurable monetary value. It can literally change feelings, experiences and lives.*

A hug is much bigger than just a fleeting, physical contact. Hugs improve trust, reduce fear, and strengthen relationships. That is why our Hug Worth campaign aims to remind us that not everyone gets a hug, so spare a thought for children who long for one.

- Physical and emotional abuse affects many children. For thousands of them, it is hidden away for days, weeks, or months. And without protection and support, many youths end up making survival choices no child should ever have to – choices that bury too many young lives prematurely.
- According to scientists, the benefits of hugging go beyond that warm feeling you get when you hold someone in your arms. A hug has amazing powers: it is celebratory, reassuring, comforting and calming.

*When you wrap your arms around a child, you are doing so much more than you realise.*

- Outcomes from ‘Lack of Touch’ studies at and from infancy show adverse effects on behaviour and emotion including eating difficulties, excessive crying, hostile aggression, withdrawal and/or shyness or stubbornness. These outcomes have also indicated that lack of touch can lead to significant physical development issues and growth delays.

Thus, a caring, loving hug can serve to enhance the child or person’s sense of well-being, comfort and safety. A hug can calm the nervous system by reducing heart rate and blood pressure, strengthen immunity, alleviate anxiety and stress and assist with stabilising mental health anxieties, wellbeing and trust.

We at Girls & Boys Town SA are encouraging you to share the value of your hug with us so that we can keep hugging the thousands of heartbroken children that we need to help heal.

*We are beyond grateful for all the support we received to bring our Hug Worth campaign to life, from professional expertise of Film, Production and Media houses; bringing passion and selflessness to the project all at pro bono.*

Please throw your arms around our ‘Hug Worth’ campaign!

*What is your hug worth?*

[Watch the video](#)



### Our Vision

Youth, families and communities; South Africa’s strength and future.

### Our Mission

Creating opportunities for youth to grow and develop into responsible citizens, able to contribute to family and community life in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, equality and solidarity with others.

### Benefits of a bequest to Girls & Boys Town

A bequest in a Will to Girls & Boys Town, a registered ‘Public Benefit Organisation’ in terms of Section 18A of the Income Tax Act (Act 58 of 1962), is deducted from the value of your estate, which may be subject to estate duty. Your bequest to Girls & Boys Town will consequently be entirely free from estate duty and will reduce the portion of your estate which is subject to estate duty.



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Registered as a Welfare Organisation (Act 100 of 1978)



## A challenging two years, but here we are still!

First up, I would like to thank our entire national staff team for their flexibility, responsiveness, generosity of time, and effort over the past two years as we have adjusted our practices daily to respond to the changing landscape of Covid-19.

As all of our ten national residential therapeutic campuses were identified to be 'Essential Services', we have had our full teams working 24/7 during lockdowns, with remote support services on full-time stand-by. The GBTSA National Hotline Service has remained functional to the public, managed, and operated remotely.

Naturally, funding all the added operational necessities over the past few months and during the lockdowns has been excessively challenging - health, safety, overtime carers, locums, PPEs and medicinal supplements. *But, more important than just complying with government legislation, the safekeeping of our youth, their families and our staff has preoccupied our planning and operations.* The resilience built over more than 63 years of the existence of our organisation has helped immensely.

Some of the campuses recently faced many safety and food security challenges as a result of the riots and looting in those regions during July. Very worrying, unsettling and often frightening events.

Our hearts go out to everyone who has been affected by the riots and the pandemic and we are immensely appreciative of those who are working to help wherever they can. We know in the coming months there will be many more challenges. Through unity, compassion and innovation, our communities can not only overcome, but thrive.

On that note, and despite our challenges, you'll see that this issue of Youth Today is bursting with stories of real positivity too: we've launched a campaign to promote that very important little gesture called a hug, taking part in Child Protection Week and Youth Month was inspiring earlier this year, thanks to incredible donor response we're well on our way and focused on repairing our fire-damaged family home, and our national vegetable garden project is bringing wonders from the soil...

Challenges there may be, but we're proudly and adamantly still here, and brightly positive! We would like to sincerely thank everyone that has supported us and continues to support us through it all.

*Lee Loynes*  
LEE LOYNES  
Chief Executive Officer



During Youth Month in June earlier this year, Girls & Boys Town SA had the opportunity to discuss mental wellbeing and the different issues that surround it on TV music channel ONE Gospel. The wonderful guest panel included our very own alumna, Matladi Twala, who is passionate about sharing her story to help others overcome their challenges.

Matladi has had her share of childhood traumas, abuse, neglect and loss. She, like most youth in our care, came from an abusive family background. Matladi lost her mother at a tender age and then faced physical and emotional abuse, rejection, rape and trauma. When her uncle and aunt took her in, it brought relief from a traumatic family lifestyle.

She was deeply

*I have learnt to believe in myself and to take each day as it comes and I want to help others get past their negative images and to help them see themselves.*



wounded though, and struggled to trust anyone. It was at this time that she presented with behaviour challenges and was admitted to Girls & Boys Town SA. With the team's guidance and careful work, she slowly learnt to overcome these challenges and grow into a strong, positive individual. She went on to

complete her online course in Early Childhood Development in 2017 and registered for a NQF Level 4 qualification in Child and Youth Care.

Matladi now works and is saving up to complete her education. She knows that she has no chance at a brighter future without education and this has been her driving force in receiving her qualifications in child care. She would like to open her own organisation one day, to help children who do not have parents to navigate through the troubles of life.

To watch our mental wellbeing segment that featured on TV music channel ONE Gospel, [click here](#)

## “Just 15 minutes a day gives a child a sense of belonging”

“One of the things that children often tell us is that all they want from adults in their life is time,” noted senior community services consultant Jacqueline Michael during a Child Protection Week webinar hosted by Girls & Boys Town SA. “They just want a bit of time. I know that the stress of daily living is up. But what we've found is that parents who spend even just fifteen minutes a day with their child, talking to them, relating to them, linking with them, give their child a sense of belonging.”

We need to do better to co-create a society in which children have safer spaces and are allowed to live lives that nurture their potential from birth. As Jacqueline Michael adds: “If we can grow sound relationships and sound families, we can begin to heal some of the hurt in our societies.”

To watch the full webinar, [click here](#)



### Now you can support us through MySchool

You can support Girls & Boys Town through the MySchool programme. If you do not have a MySchool/MyVillage/MyPlanet card yet, simply apply for your free card now and select Girls & Boys Town as your beneficiary. Once you start swiping your card, we will start receiving funds. Every swipe counts! To get your card call the Client Service Centre on 0860 100 445 or email [cs@myschool.co.za](mailto:cs@myschool.co.za).

You can find out more at [www.myschool.co.za/schools/](http://www.myschool.co.za/schools/)



### Know more about our bequest programme.

In response to enquiries from friends and donors, we have a bequest booklet available on our website, intended to be an easy-to-read guide for anyone who is interested in leaving a bequest to Girls & Boys Town.

By leaving a bequest to Girls & Boys Town, or ceding an endowment or insurance policy to us, you will ensure that we will always be here to keep on helping vulnerable young Girls & Boys for years to come ... empowering them to S.H.I.N.E.\*.

For more information on our Bequest programme and/ or to receive a copy of the brochure, please contact Gertrude Wilson on (011) 482 2655 or email her on [mailing@gbtown.org.za](mailto:mailing@gbtown.org.za).



*A progressive story that reflects the work we do at Girls & Boys Town South Africa*

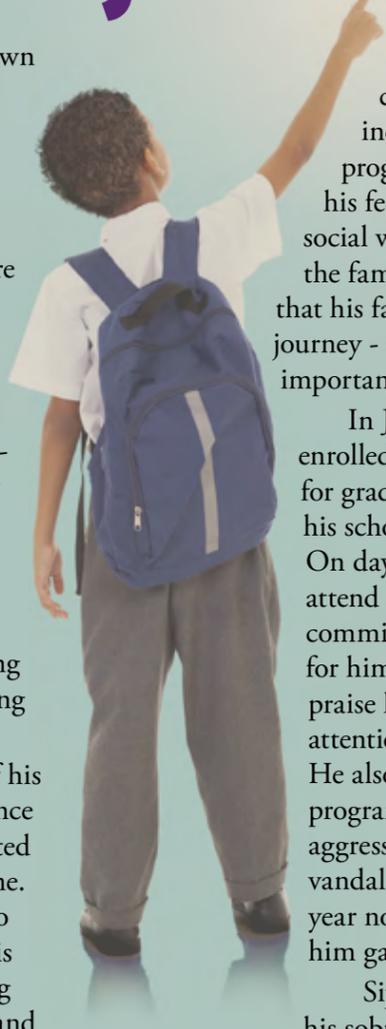
# Sipho's journey...

Sipho\* came to Girls & Boys Town South Africa in January 2019. He was not attending school, had poor impulse control, struggled with his behaviour, and had started experimenting with substances. His family was no longer able to take care of him.

He settled well into Girls & Boys Town and, after spending a few weeks in the GBTSA Learning Support Centre mastering school-going skills, was enrolled into a nearby school. He was academically on par and could read and write, but was easily influenced. The GBTSA educational staff worked with him, teaching social skills aimed at keeping him focused on schooling and making positive choices.

But gradually, and as a result of his belonging challenges, Sipho's substance use became more regular and we noted a deterioration of his personal hygiene. During this time, his family had also refused to host him for holidays. This significantly intensified his belonging crisis. He refused to attend school and had regular aggressive outbursts on campus. But our team did not give up on him.

In 2020, we brought Sipho back into the GBTSA Learning Support Centre and the social work team worked with him through individual sessions to increase his motivation, help him to deal with his emotional pain and past experiences of rejection and abandonment and to take responsibility for his decisions and behaviour. The Child and Youth Care team also paid a lot of attention to his personal hygiene, anger control strategies and having him report his whereabouts. Every positive achievement was praised and every negative



behaviour received care and consideration. He was also included in an off-campus art programme to help him express his feelings in a positive way. The social work team also stepped up the family reunification services so that his family could be a part of his journey - an element that was very important to Sipho.

In January 2021 Sipho was enrolled into a local Primary School for grade 7. Staff kept a close eye on his school attendance and progress. On days when he struggles to attend school, he is reminded of his commitment and goals he has set for himself. When at school, staff praise him for being there and pay attention to his homework tasks. He also attends the maths tutoring programme. He has not had an aggressive outburst on campus, nor vandalised any property, for over a year now and just a prompt makes him gain a sense of self-control.

Sipho is still challenged with his sobriety from time to time, but now asks for and accepts help when he feels overwhelmed with the urge to use chemicals. He still has to be reminded to report his whereabouts, but his turn-around journey is far more positive than negative.

Importantly, he has been inaugurated as a Prefect at school – a truly wonderful achievement and such outstanding outcomes for all. We are exceptionally proud of Sipho – and of our team who did not give up on him, no matter how much he tried to push us away at the time.

*\*Youth's name has been changed*



*Youth at campuses around the country are being updated on fire and health and safety training by local firefighters.*

## PROGRESS REPORT

### Repairs to our fire-damaged family home

Already overburdened by the weight of life circumstances such as physical and emotional abuse, which led to them being placed in our care in the first place, the girls of one of our family homes have now had to contend with the trauma of a fire at their home.

Girls and staff were all able to escape safely with no one harmed, following all our health and safety fire drill precautions. An emergency temporary accommodation has been arranged for the girls until the repairs are completed.

Our children really need the certainties and securities that go hand in hand with a place called 'home'. It is a need that our girls' current temporary situation simply cannot fully provide.

But, with the combined and very powerful support you have shown us, we can now reassure all of our vulnerable young girls that a repaired, refreshed, and renewed family home will be restored – and embrace them as they heal and grow into successful young woman.

Although there are a few more delays in restoring the building than we anticipated, your generosity has given us the advantage to plan forward. We have had several consultations with insurers, construction engineers, fire department and other stakeholders involved to ensure that when the rebuild resumes, progress will be as swift as possible.

Naturally safety, youth care legislation, and housing development regulations will remain a top priority. Meanwhile, all of our youth are undergoing further fire and health and safety training under the guidance of local fire fighters.

We commit to keeping you abreast of all the phases of progress as they happen.

## Good Samaritans' Mandela Day visit

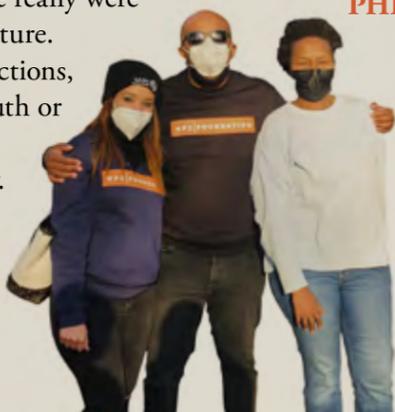
In the midst of hard lockdown, a group of good Samaritans thought of our youth and decided to pay us a surprise visit. They brought sweet treats, for fun, but also books to encourage the culture of reading, with ambitions of getting our youth to join book clubs, and take part in readathons and spelling bees. We really were humbled and grateful for this gesture. Sadly, due to the prevailing restrictions, our visitors didn't get to meet youth or do a campus tour, but our representative welcomed them warmly.

This surprise was all the work of our young friend Miss Preteen SA 2020 who, together with her parents, mobilised another foundation to get it all

happening and possible. We are so grateful to our young ambassador and her family for what they have done. The energy and powerful gestures of young philanthropist like her are helping vulnerable youth to believe again – and to thrive!

### DO YOU KNOW A BUDDING YOUNG PHILANTHROPIST?

Is there a budding philanthropist in your family who would be interested in joining this movement where young people reach out to other young people? Your support will go a long way. Interested to join? Please send us an e-mail with "Budding Philanthropist" subject line to: [mailing@gbtown.org.za](mailto:mailing@gbtown.org.za)





# going **green!** ...and **orange!** ...and **red, too!**



**O**ur Vegetable Garden Project started four years ago in KZN, driven by the Support Services Department and some of the youth that took keen interest in agriculture. Our Vision at that time was to grow this initiative into a sustainability project for the kitchen and, in our first year, celebrated a harvest 15 cauliflower, 80 bunches of spinach, 12 broccoli, 9kg of beetroot, 18kg of tomatoes, 5kg of green peas and 30 heads of lettuce. A happy beginning!

With the aid of other organisations who help us with landscaping, seedlings and other necessities, our gardens have become another winning accolade in our journey to reach sustainability. Scaling up the project has grown in leaps and bounds with more businesses coming on-board to help with the key upskilling of the youth involved.

Now, on a national scale, it is having a hugely positive impact on

the campuses, on our youth, and on surrounding disadvantaged neighbouring communities who we help.

Across all regions, youth are responsible for maintenance of the gardens, learning self-sustainability by supplementing their meals with the produce they have planted themselves. We sometimes supply our youth with seedlings when they go to their homes to start door gardens for their families and we have had very positive feedback from this. We have also provided fresh vegetables for them to take to their families as part of their food parcels.

Our Garden Project has been wonderful. We are now able to align our planting according to our campus menus around the country, create well-balanced meals... and help reduce the strain on our food budget!



**S**ome of our young people experience real fear at night due to previous traumatic experiences.

Now, thanks to the generosity of our donors, we have controlled and illuminated environments which allow youth to safely use outdoor campus spaces at night – explore, play outdoor games and night-time sports, all in safer spaces - and sleep better knowing that the campus lights are burning brightly.

Younger children particularly struggle to settle for the evening as, after dinner, they still have excess energy. Now, staff often play 'hide and seek' or other games with them outside in the evenings, getting them ready to settle for bedtime.

Previously very difficult to do in the evenings, therapeutic activities like games, swimming and outdoor sport are now a reality too.

This renewed sense of safety has brought with it a more relaxed and happier spirit among the staff and youth at our campuses.

## We're safe 'n sound with the lights on!



**T**his spring we held a sports day with youth from other youth care centres aimed at promoting a healthy lifestyle, collaboration, and teamwork - while having fun.

After the match, young people from their respective organisations had the opportunity to engage and share their experiences. Our focus is on improving the skills of coping with challenges, reducing distress and feeling less lonely, isolated or judged.

Now, post-lockdown, we're continuing to be optimistic and aim to play with more local teams as part of re-integrating our youth with the community.