

TO TALK TO
CHILDREN SO THAT
THEY FEEL SAFE

3
THEY NEED TO KNOW
REPORT

MEMEZA
BAZONUZWA
SPEAK-OUT



Project Name:

Afrika Tikkun Child Protection Project

A long-term process to embed a culture of safeguarding

Date: June 2019

Afrika Tikkun is a large South African child and youth development organisation that aims to develop young people from Cradle to Career. Operating in Johannesburg and Cape Town, Afrika Tikkun:

Employs **550 staff**, the majority of whom come from the target communities.

Staff engage with **over 5000 young people** on an ongoing basis, for example:

- 1146 children attend Early Childhood Development programmes daily
- 1839 children attend after-school programmes at least 3 times a week
- 749 children participate in school outreach programmes
- 345 children attend Saturday schools

This means that Afrika Tikkun staff have a significant amount of contact time with children and the opportunity to play a meaningful role in promoting their safety and wellbeing.

Identifying the problem

Afrika Tikkun takes the responsibility for safeguarding the children in its care very seriously and has had a Child Protection Policy in place for several years. Despite having systems in place, Afrika Tikkun management identified gaps in the practice and culture of safeguarding throughout the organisation, which needed to be addressed. Therefore, in early 2017, Afrika Tikkun embarked on an organisation-wide Child Protection Project.

The Project was designed to engage all staff, young people and other stakeholders, over a three-year period, to address 'red areas' in the Keeping Children Safe (KCS) Minimum Child

Safeguarding Standards and firmly embed safeguarding into the culture of Afrika Tikkun. This was an ambitious undertaking because it required everyone to confront the high level of violence prevalent in South African society and lower the collective tolerance of violence.

The Project aimed to empower all children, young people, staff and visitors to Afrika Tikkun centres to recognise and actively prevent harm. In addition, the Child Protection Project helped everyone to understand what action to take when things go wrong and children have been hurt or their rights violated. This case study outlines the progress and outcomes of the Project.

Listening to children's voices

Organisational reflection on policy and practice often misses out the views and perspectives of children themselves. Afrika Tikkun's Child Protection Project considered the voice of children paramount, so this is where the process started. Almost 300 children from Grade 1 and Grade 12 were carefully collected using various methods.

- Focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were conducted to learn about children's protection issues at home, in the community, at schools and at Afrika Tikkun centres. Children shared their experiences and made suggestions on how to make Afrika Tikkun a safer environment for children.
- 95 high school children were sampled to complete an empowerment questionnaire
- 28 children helped validate the baseline findings and plan ways to share the findings of the research with other children, staff and parents. It was during the validation workshop that the idea for the Memeza



Bazokuzwa (Speak out and you will be heard) Campaign was born.

Baseline Findings showed that Afrika Tikkun has a way to go to meet child safeguarding standards

Much like several other research studies undertaken in South Africa, the place where children felt their safety was most at risk was in the neighbourhoods where they live. Children made reference to their fear of general crime, gangsters and bullying prevalent in their communities, and most were aware of dangerous areas that they avoided to stay safe.

Children reported feeling generally safe at Afrika Tikkun, and many said that the centres were places where they felt sheltered. Some raised concerns about bullying and teasing while attending Afrika Tikkun programmes but admitted that they often took part in excluding or teasing others.

Some important areas where adults made children feel threatened while at the centres were raised. Fears of abduction from the Afrika Tikkun entrances and car parks or on their journeys to and from Afrika Tikkun were discussed. In addition, a small number of children reported having experienced corporal punishment or discriminatory behaviour by an Afrika Tikkun staff member¹.

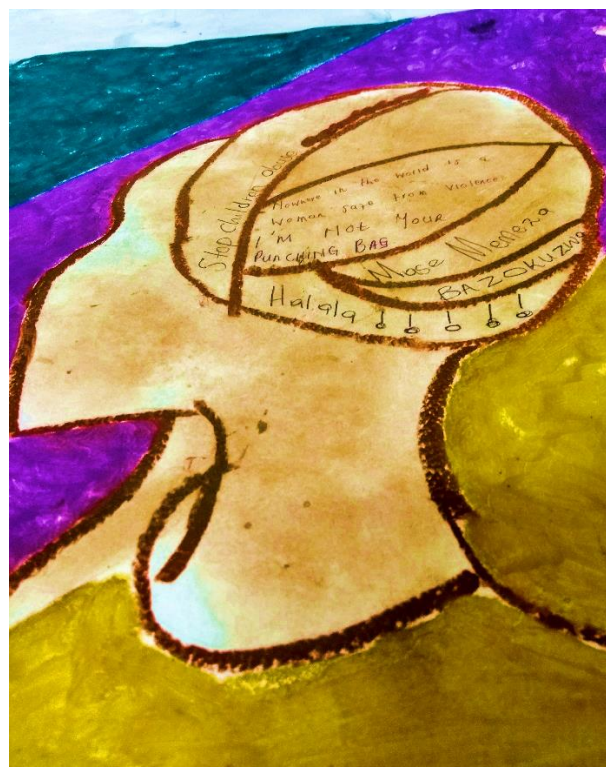
Children generally had a clear idea of how to report these incidents- most preferred to tell their trusted Afrika Tikkun facilitators. Regardless, some reasons why they might choose to remain silent emerged. These included favouritism by staff and fear of judgement.

Among Afrika Tikkun staff, understanding of the organisational safeguarding policies and procedures was mixed and weaker than expected. Procedures (like making written referrals, mandatory reporting and correct lines of communication) were neither clear, widely understood nor consistently practiced. While the Social Work teams had good knowledge of the statutory processes and reported following them in their work, they were less familiar with internal Afrika Tikkun. Staff members who work directly with children were not able to clearly articulate the limit of their roles in investigating suspected or reported abuse. Some shared that they would investigate matters themselves, before referring cases to the police or social workers responsible for investigation. This placed their safety

and the safety of children in their care at risk, as well as the integrity of any future criminal case.

In terms of attitudes, staff expressed a level of tolerance of violence against children and a reluctance to routinely challenge the widespread culture of silence around child protection issues in the communities. This barrier to effective child protection is widespread in the South African context.

The baseline findings were a concern and highlighted the importance of the Child Protection Project to not only address awareness and practice of Afrika Tikkun Child Protection Policies and procedures, but also to change attitudes and engender a culture of safeguarding children throughout our organisation. The need for training and better understanding of safeguarding was clear. Furthermore, the baseline study highlighted that neither staff, children, nor parents were familiar with Afrika Tikkun's Code of Conduct and many asked for guidelines governing appropriate behaviour between staff, with children and between children. Lastly, no clear guidelines were given to visiting adults to Afrika Tikkun, like donors or volunteers. The presence of adult 'strangers' on site was flagged by children as a concern.



¹ An ethical protocol was used during the research that allowed for the appropriate follow up and referral of child protection threats spoken about during the research data collection.

Comprehensive action was taken

Each phase of the Child Protection Project process was based on learning from the previous phase. Following the baseline study:

1. Afrika Tikkun management, staff and the executive committee were engaged at baseline findings **dissemination workshops**, so they could understand the problem. They were consulted during several workshops on **updates made to the Child Protection Policy and procedures**, the Afrika Tikkun Code of Conduct and the Disciplinary Codes.
2. Social Workers at each centre became **designated Child Protection Officers**, and ultimate accountability for safeguarding was assigned to the Afrika Tikkun CEO.
3. Comprehensive **training** for children and adults was developed. The revised Child Protection Policy was introduced to everyone from frontline workers to Afrika Tikkun head office staff through three half-day training sessions in 2018. The training included signing the Afrika Tikkun Code of Conduct and **employees were required to recommit to upholding the rules and values of the organisation**. In 2019, refresher and catch-up training continued, while training was extended to parents and caregivers.



4. Trained Peer Educators (between the ages of 11 and 20) assisted in developing two manuals and teaching resources for educating children and young people about child protection. The training was cascaded throughout the child and youth development teams

and was implemented among thousands of young people who attend Afrika Tikkun programmes.

5. Children and young people engaged planning the **Memeza Bazokuzwa communication strategy and awareness campaign** about child protection. This included co-creation of creative multi-media communications to raise awareness about child safeguarding and what to do when children are at risk or have been harmed (including posters, songs, community parades and theatre productions). The Campaign was incorporated into activities throughout the year and tied to key events during Child Protection Week (late May in South Africa) and the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Affecting Women and Children (December). A Memeza Award was also introduced into the annual prizegiving.
6. 529 staff and associates underwent **staff security vetting**. 21 were found to have previously undisclosed criminal records. These included 17 theft crime convictions, and 12 violent crime convictions (including rape, murder and assault). This highlighted the need to conduct in-house background checks with all new recruits, and regularly (every two years) among staff.
7. Safeguarding measures were integrated into the **evaluation tools** for Afrika Tikkun's programmes for children. These included biannual surveys that asked questions like 'how safe do you feel at Afrika Tikkun?' and put in place a summary report on the cases reported and responded to. Safeguarding was also included into the Afrika Tikkun Audit and Risk Committee report.
8. A standard emailer and brochure with **Visitor's Guidelines** was developed. This armed fundraisers and centre managers with the tools to familiarise visiting adults to Centres with what is and is not ok when interacting with Afrika Tikkun beneficiaries.
9. Follow up participatory research was conducted to evaluate change in attitudes, child protection knowledge and practice. 25 **Junior Social Researchers** (in high school) were trained to conduct interviews and focus groups with their peers. In late 2018 they undertook research to assess how safe children felt at Afrika Tikkun. Based on their findings and suggestions, **name badges** to identify Afrika Tikkun staff, and lanyards to identify visiting adults who signed in at security were introduced.



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2017 (Baseline)

Met 4 KCS
Minimum Child
Safeguarding
Standards

11 child
protection cases
reported &
handled (Oct 2016- Mar 2017)



11

14

17

40

46

2019

Met 22 KCS
Minimum Child
Safeguarding
Standards

46 child
protection cases
reported &
handled (Oct 2018- Mar 2019)

