

Sharing Our Stories

'A Journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step'

Lao Tzu

LifeLine Pietermaritzburg Running of Talk Circles

The talk circles in LifeLine Pietermaritzburg started in **Msinga** which is a 100% rural and very cultural community in KZN. To negotiate entry to the community the process started with requesting meetings with **Izinduna** and the chief in the community. The aim of the meetings was to request them to grant us permission to work in their community. Respecting the procedures of the community was very important as there are procedures that need to be followed in order to work in that community. During the meeting all the traditional leaders (Izinduna) were present to hear what we had to say as LifeLine.

When the traditional leaders granted LifeLine permission to work in the area it was important to specify what the aim for working in the community was. An awareness presentation was done for the community so that they can get an opportunity to listen and comment their view of what LifeLine does. This was also an opportunity to listen to the communities' challenges and also good things happening in their community. The community has more knowledge about their community more than us, the ability to listen and respect their views was fundamental in the process of contact making and building a relationship with the community members. The community members interested with the development of their community were selected to volunteer their time to contribute to their community. **Izimbizo** were called by ambassadors (volunteers) to talk to the community about the issues of abuse in their area. Those who had passion and were interested in the change of their community formed part of the talk circle group which consisted of 10 to 15 people within each talk circle. There were 27 talk circle groups facilitated by the 18 ambassadors.

Topics which were discussed in the talk circles included rape, domestic violence, child abuse and HIV and AIDS the talk circles discussions were not limited to only these topic but the group members also come up with topics relevant to them. Development especially when people are involved is a process and knowledge give people power and motivates them to take action. Training which forms part of development was vital to the ambassadors because in the talk circle there is information sharing which takes place.

The success of the implementation of the talk circles involves allowing the people to drive the process. The talk circle has allowed the people to find a platform to talk about their issues bothering them and the way forward about those issues.

During the talk circles discussions it became apparent that there were certain cultural practices which were conducted and harmful to the people in the community. There are young men who force girls to date them by strangling them and raping them and this practice is called **ukuklinywa** (strangle) when the girl is raped she does not have a choice but to accept the proposed love. There other practice which is **ukuthwala** (abduction) where a girl is taken against her will and forced to marry that particular person who abducted her. During the talk circle discussion the members of the talk circle realized that what was happening was in fact dangerous because a person can get infected with HIV. Within the group there were members who have assisted their friends in abduction and strangling girls. They are the ones who wanted to pass the message to the wide community about the dangers of these practices. What was encouraging was that they are the ones who wanted to take action in passing the information especially to the children in school who are usually the target of this practice. They feel they have power to do something about their problem. They decided what to do about the problem they have identified in the community. They are negotiating with school to start doing presentations on the issue of **ukuthwala and ukuklinywa**.

The members of the talk circles have taken action to address some of issues they face in their community. Partnerships with sectors of the government like the SAPS, Department of health, Social development, and municipality form part of our networking team. Currently there are talk circles taking place in the communities of Msinga. When working with communities the process is not a linear one but a reflective process which must be flexible because people and communities are unique.

Kind Regards
Thembeke Magojo (Champion)