



The Fatherhood Project NEWSLETTER



Child, Youth, Family and Social Development
Human Sciences Research Council

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Foreword

In the following issue, the Fatherhood Project will be giving voice to the silenced fathers in South Africa – gay fathers, disabled fathers, and the many incarcerated fathers held within the prison system. Numerous guest writers have contributed their thoughts and personal experience around this subject. Also included in this edition, is a profile of the Phoenix Zululand Restorative Justice Programme, with a few photos from our recent collaboration.

Up to a point - a man's life is shaped by environment, heredity, and movements and changes in the world about him. Then there comes a time when it lies within his grasp to shape the clay of his life into the sort of thing he wishes to be. Only the weak blame parents, their race, their times, lack of good fortune, or the quirks of fate. Everyone has it within his power to say, "This I am today; that I will be tomorrow."

- Louis L'Amour

Gay Men as Fathers: Challenging Stereotypes

by Glenn de Swardt

People generally don't equate a homosexual sexual orientation with parenting; gay men are deemed incapable of either procreating or of being fathers. While the gay movement in South Africa has achieved significant human rights milestones, including major statutory developments, legislation doesn't address people's perceptions or attitudes. Living in a hetero-normative society, most gay fathers and their children continue to experience ongoing homo-prejudice.

The concept of the nuclear family has evolved significantly over time, particularly since the 1950's, when society gradually became accustomed to divorce and single parents, and co-parenting became a norm. However, two gay men living together as a couple, have generally not been considered a family and only recently, with the advent of the Civil Union Act that allows for

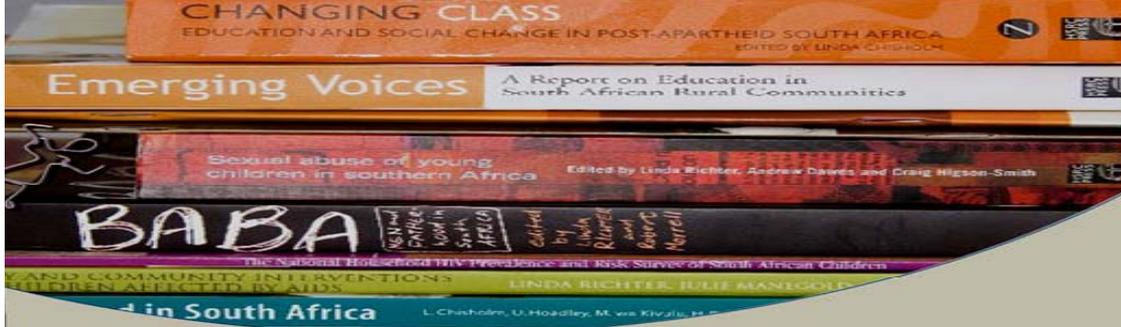
same-sex marriage, has South African society been compelled to question whether a gay couple and their children should be considered a nuclear family system.

Significantly, the public hearing conducted throughout South Africa prior to the evolution of the Civil Union Act publicly, and somewhat irrationally, questioned gay men's ability to parent children, both morally and developmentally. Homosexuality was compared to paedophilia, for example, and gay men were accused of lacking moral substance. If same-sex marriage and parenting by gay men is allowed, it is argued that our society would become morally corrupt. Such homo-prejudiced statements were invariably cloaked in fundamentalist religious dogma.

In truth, South African gay men have been legally allowed to adopt children since 2002. In addition to this, countless gay men are biological fathers. Due to heterosexist social pressures, countless gay men have entered into heterosexual marriages and others, who may identify as bisexual, have been sexually active with women at some time.

The issue of gay men parenting children remains controversial in some circles. The controversy generally concerns whether or not there will be negative consequences for children raised by gay fathers. The most significant statements against gay parents are as follows:

- **Their children will be more likely to be gay.** In truth, the vast majority of gay men were parented by heterosexuals in a heterosexual environment but continued to develop a homosexual identity. There is no reason whatsoever to suspect that the opposite could be true for the children of gay parents. Significant research has demonstrated that children raised by gay fathers are no more likely to become gay than children raised in a heterosexual environment.
- **Children require both female and male role models.** This argument applies equally to gay fathers and to single heterosexual parents. Children are exposed to role modelling, including gender role modelling, by their parents and peers, at school, through the media and through countless social interactions they experience on a daily basis. Gay fathers interact socially with both men and women, both heterosexual and gay people.



- **Children of gay fathers are more likely to be bullied.** This is a true reflection of children being bullied but is not the fault of gay fathers – rather, our intolerantly heterosexist society must assume responsibility for all expressions of homo-prejudice. Gay fathers themselves have often experienced bullying, as well as other prejudiced and discriminatory acts, and are more likely to be empathic towards a child being bullied at school. Children are bullied for countless reasons and our educational system needs to be encouraged to facilitate more tolerance of diversity in our schools.
- **Gay men lack basic parenting skills.** This assumption is partly upheld by the popular norm that women are the primary caregivers in heterosexual families, implying irrationally that men, and more so gay men, are less able to parent. A heterosexual identity does not necessarily make an individual an effective parent – parenting skills are not dependent on gender or sexual preferences. All children require love, stability, structure and consistency, mental and social stimulation and support to develop and grow, irrespective of the father’s sexual orientation.

There are very few support systems for gay fathers in South Africa. In some instances such fathers are not publicly ‘out’ as being gay and they’re very often socially isolated.

Glenn de Swardt is the manager for counselling and health services at the Triangle Project. The Triangle Project is a large organisation rendering services to the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community in Cape Town. They offer professional counselling to gay fathers as well as a gay parents support group.

They can be contacted on (021) 4483812 or via email at info@triangle.org.za



Cedric Nunn

Being a Gay Parent

by Michael Worsnip

The world, someone said to me once, is not divided into Black and White, East and West, Rich and Poor, Gay and Straight. The world is actually divided into people who have children and people who don't. And the more I am a parent, the more I am sure that this is, in fact, the truth!

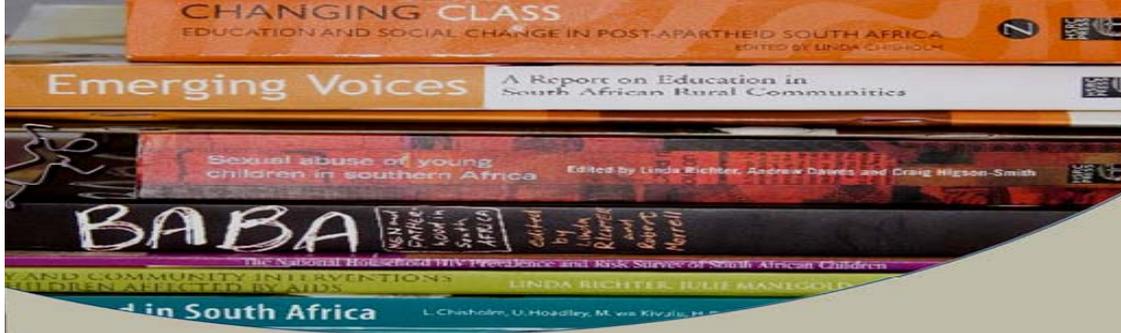
I never sought parenthood. In fact, I think it would be true to say that never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that I would be a parent. But when your partner says to you that they really, really, REALLY want children, you have to listen.

And so it was, seven years back, now, that we began discussions with social welfare about adoption. It took us a whole year to get through with the formalities (because I kept getting cold feet), but we did. And I am extremely pleased to say that at no point were we made to feel any different from any other of the couples and singles who were seeking adoption. We were just the same as everyone else. There was no difference. We were, most, if not all of us, crossing that great divide between being childless, to being parents.

When the first baby came, we were novices, just like anyone else. We had wanted the baby to be as young as possible. Child Welfare was a bit hesitant, because they worried that two men would find it difficult to handle. But we insisted, and I am very glad we did. Gabriel was 4 months old when he came to us. He is now almost 6 years old. His younger brother, Joshua is 4. It was difficult, of course. What did we know about childrearing? Nothing! My partner read the books. I obediently implemented what they told us to do. We knew nothing. We learned very quickly. Just like anyone else.

We were living, at the time, fairly near to Pretoria. The magistrate refused point blank to allow both of us to be the parents of the children, because, then, the law only allowed for different sexed couples to co-adopt. And we are still trying to sort out the problem today, with my partner being the legal parent, and me being the also-ran. Yes, it will be sorted out, but it has been a long, irritating and tedious road to travel to get legal recognition for what has, in reality, been quite clearly the case. We are both the children's parents. They know that. We know that. It has just taken time for the state to recognise that.

The children, at this point, see no problem with the



arrangement. Their school has been entirely unproblematic about the fact that they have two male parents. On Fathers day, we got cards from them. On Mothers Day, we also got cards from them. It has been extremely easy. When I have been to collect them from school, on occasion, I have heard some of the other kids shout "Gabriel's daddy is white". One child asked me why. I said, "Because he is adopted". The child said "Oh!" and that was the end of the matter. The teachers have treated us with the same respect as they do any other parent. Being a same-sexed couple has simply not been an issue.

When we were living in Pretoria, we attended church there. We had the children baptised, with both of us listed as parents on the baptismal register. No one had issues. It was a straightforward matter. People don't stare at us in the street anymore, or perhaps I have stopped noticing it.

And perhaps the thing I would most want to say about Gay childrearing is how ordinary it all is. All the same things that happen to us, happen to our heterosexual counterparts. The babies need their nappies changed. They need to be burped. They throw up over your arm. They say "Goo" and "Dada". When their temperatures spike at 40 in the middle of the night, gay parents get just as hysterical as straight parents. There is really no difference at all. And when the children have nightmares or want a hug, it doesn't matter to them whether their parent is gay or straight. Not one bit, believe me.

Perhaps our heterosexual counterparts don't get asked, as I have been, on several occasions, "But what do they call

you?" My answer is always the same. They call me whatever they want to call me. They call me "Dad" or "Daddy". They call me "Michael" – because that is my name. And if there is ever confusion, they sort it out fairly quickly. "No, I'm not talking to you, I'm talking to Daddy Leon". And do they have female influences in their lives? Of course they do.



Sibonelo Mkhize

Plenty. They have a female child-minder, whom they love and who loves them. They have aunts and a grandmother and friends and teachers. And how are they turning out? Well, the one wants to dismantle and destroy things. The other wants to do Ballet. They both do Karate. We let them do what they feel most comfortable with, like any good parent would.

Has it been hard? Undoubtedly. But not because we are gay. It has been hard because parenting is hard! Has it been rewarding? Again, undoubtedly. Speaking for myself, I can say without a shadow of regret that my life has been immeasurably enriched by these two little mites. I cannot imagine my life without them. I cannot describe the *wholeness* that children can bring. And to think I would never have known it, if my partner had not been broody! Or if I had been too fixed in my ways to have considered him.

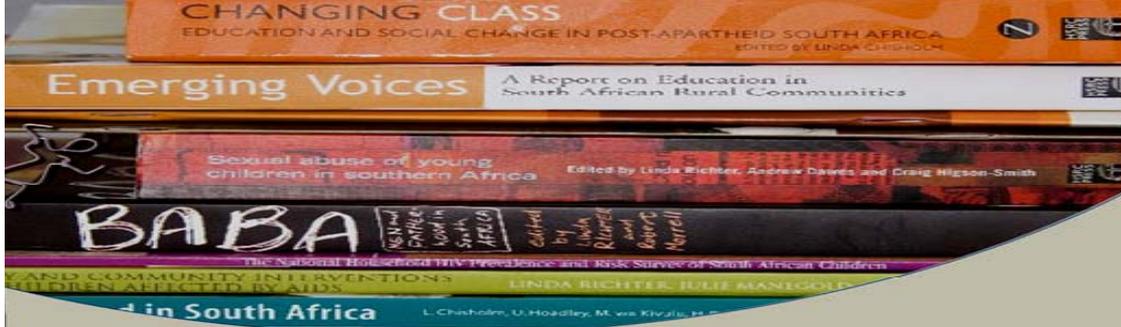
Michael trained in theology at the Rhodes, Cambridge and Manchester Universities. He is an ordained Anglican Priest and went into exile as a war resister in 1979. After teaching theology at the Federal Theological Seminary, he worked in KwaZulu Natal in the area of HIV/Aids, as well as with Land Rights and Land Restitution. This was followed by his position as Programme Manager for the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. He is currently based in Cape Town as the Director for the 2010 FIFA Soccer World Cup. In addition to this, he has written several books, including a novel "Remittance Man" published by the University of KwaZulu Natal press in May this year. His partner is Leon Putzier, and they have two children, Gabriel (6) and Joshua (4).

"I didn't know people like you could have babies!"

by Laurence Clark

Almost a year ago to the day, my wife Adele and I walked down the aisle at our wedding to the sound of *Baby I Love You* by The Ramones. At the time I never dreamt how prophetic that tune would be!

Adele and I have the same impairment - cerebral palsy. I think we'd both been conditioned by society's all-pervading assumption that disability and human reproduction don't go together. So when we decided to start trying for a baby, we both automatically assumed that we'd need some sort of fertility treatment. In fact we even



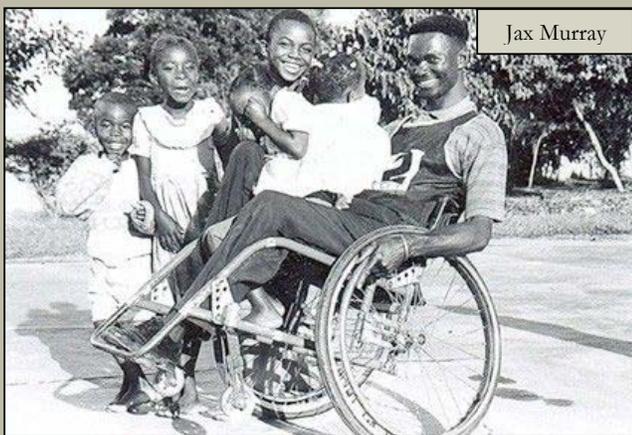
booked an appointment at the clinic, which we subsequently had to cancel once we discovered that Adele was already pregnant.

At this stage I should point out that, contrary to what I claim in my stand-up act, this baby was actually planned. You see, I normally tell this story about going on honeymoon and discovering at the airport that we'd forgotten Adele's contraceptive pills. At the time, the airport pharmacist refused to serve us, citing the fact that they weren't a "disability chemist" (whatever one of those is!). Whilst that *did* actually happen, it didn't directly contribute to us conceiving, as we eventually found another chemist willing to serve us.

Probably just like every other man in the world, I was insecure about my ability to conceive because I'd never actually tried to do it before. Indeed, this was something I'd hitherto actively avoided. My particular fear stemmed from GCSE Biology lessons at school, where I was taught that testicles are situated outside the body in order to keep them cool, and thus aid the production of sperm. Now as a wheelchair user, I spend a large part of the day sat down. According to my logic, this ought to raise the temperature of my testicles by a few degrees and potentially impair my ability to conceive. However, with the benefit of hindsight, this was quite clearly a load of b*ll**ks!

But if I was surprised by how quickly we'd conceived a baby, the rest of the world seemed equally amazed that we'd managed it at all. Sometimes, when we tell people we're expecting, you can see the cogs turn in their head as they think: "How the hell did they manage that then?" It's as if they're mentally twisting our bodies into some sort of weird *Kama Sutra* position!

Quite early on, a young woman behind the checkout in



Boots blurted out to Adele: "I didn't know people like you could have babies!" To compensate, the store gave Adele her purchase of vitamins for free, though somehow this seemed a poor recompense for the injury to her feelings.

Similarly, the majority of nursing staff at our local hospital seem to struggle with the idea of two disabled parents. On her last visit, Adele was given a spacious side room instead of going on the ward, in order to give me more space as a wheelchair user when visiting. One nurse was particularly vexed by this 'reasonable adjustment'. Whilst I was there, she told Adele that she should really be on the main ward, but there was no room for "The Chair" (meaning me!). I only hope that the ensuing heated discussion will cause her to think more carefully about how she refers to people - particularly in their presence!
(to be continued...)

For the rest of this story and more of Laurence Clark's interesting fathering articles, be sure to visit:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/ouch/features/laurence_baby.shtml

Cooking rice: Towards a fatherhood of the 'thrillingly mundane'

by Adam Cooper

"I have a laaitie (child). I have a laaitie and that troubles me. I want to see my laaitie, I don't see him any more, his mother doesn't want to bring him, because his mother doesn't want to bring him to such a place, because this is another kind of place. She doesn't want the child to see this place. Tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, the child remembers the places that he has seen. After that, in the end he ends up here and then how will he feel? How would he like it if he comes to his father and his father is in such a place? He'll follow in his father's footsteps and all of that..."

These are the words of Jerome, a 16-year old boy awaiting trial for two counts of murder, in a place of safety near Cape Town. Jerome joined the "Dixie Boys" gang when he was twelve years old and soon became temporarily empowered through shooting guns, selling drugs, going to parties and having many girlfriends. After the birth of his son, Jerome gave up this gangster lifestyle and worked as a tiler in the area where he was born. He received R500 a



week for this work, not nearly as lucrative a return as his gangster exploits. Jerome returned to his life of gangsterism and excitement and was soon arrested. He is now awaiting trial and feels a great deal of shame and confusion, as the respect he commands as a revered gangster is the opposite of what he becomes as an incarcerated father, where he is not a role-model for his son.

Many young men like Jerome substantially shape their masculinities in relation to the images they see in the media - the muscles of Stallone and Schwarzenegger, the martyrdom of Tupac Shakur and Al Pacino in Scarface - popular depictions of masculine heroism. These public portrayals of what it means to achieve respectable masculinity do not provide young men with healthy 'fatherly' role models. In popular depictions, being a man depends upon taking extreme risks, violence and disregarding the needs of others. Societal discourses of masculinity fail to provide examples of empathy, compassion and nurturing, essential values for parenting.

I recently asked a new mother what she enjoyed about having a child. She answered almost instinctively that she treasured the first steps, the first words, the stories before bed. It suddenly occurred to me that young men's socialisation omits lessons on valuing the 'thrillingly mundane' - the everyday pleasures - appreciating the simple joys of human interaction and development. Young men are ubiquitously bombarded by examples of heroes and role models overcoming extreme risk and winning against the odds. Yet hearing your child's first word often involves 'heroically' overcoming difficult circumstances to be a part of parenting. I can only imagine the thrill young men like Jerome would have, if their child's first word was 'dada'.

This is not to insinuate that no fathers form an integral part of childcare and observing the development of their children. It is also not to suggest that boys like Jerome are incapable of appreciating the 'thrillingly mundane':

I was my mother's best child, best child. I do everything that she tells me. If she gets home from work then I make her a cup of tea, when she comes home she's tired. She comes home, the house is clean, neat - we help her with everything. Now and then I put the rice on, maybe make the food, the rice, cook the food so lightly so that when she comes home she just have to finish the food off, I like helping my mother. Such a mother...Yes that's my best mother, that's the best woman in the world.

Fathers like Jerome need to be encouraged to 'put on the rice' for their own children, to appreciate the joys inherent in the everyday realities of their children's lives.

We need to teach them to appreciate the thrillingly mundane, through the lessons they learn at home, at school, in the community and on television. Jerome's comments about his 'laaitie' conclude with him referring to a perpetual cycle of incarceration and fathers like him as negative role models. He is repeating sentiments that others, probably his boy's mother, have directed at him. One way to start to break the belief that this kind of cycle is inevitable is to show young men opportunities for pleasure that are contained in sharing the everyday joys of watching children grow and develop and how they can contribute and take pride in this process.

Adam Cooper is a researcher in the Child, Youth, Family and Social Development Unit of the HSRC. He is working in the area of youth crime, with a special interest in issues of gender. One of his current projects involves the development of a local crime prevention toolkit, with a review of exit strategies for children involved with gangs.

DID YOU KNOW...

- Adoption by same-sex couples is legal in Guam, Andorra, Belgium, Iceland, the Netherlands, Sweden, South Africa, Spain, the United Kingdom and some parts of Canada and the United States.
- About 80% of all serving male prisoners in South Africa are fathers.

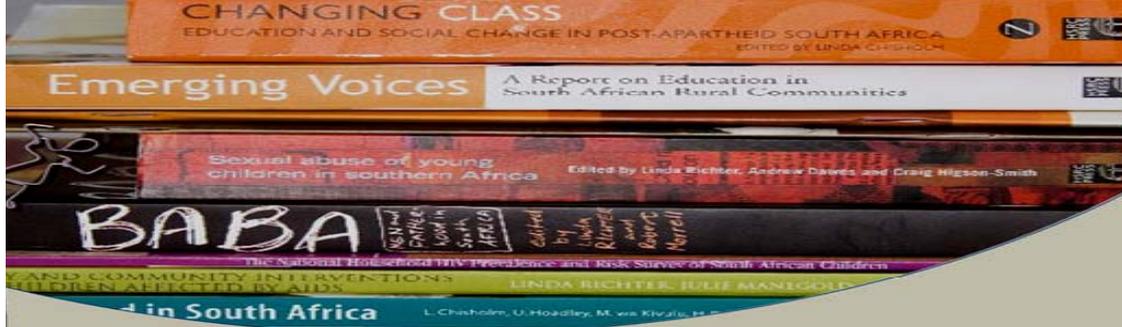
VOICE OF THE COMMUNITY

Phoenix Zululand: Restorative Justice Programme

by Leigh Adams

Phoenix Zululand, a project funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, provides a safe space for prisoners and their families to connect and restore damaged social ties. They offer various interventions like *Family Conferencing* and the *Starting with Us* and *Conversations in Families* programmes. These two programmes are essentially preparatory courses, with written assignments and other tasks to enable the personal reflection needed for the family conferencing.

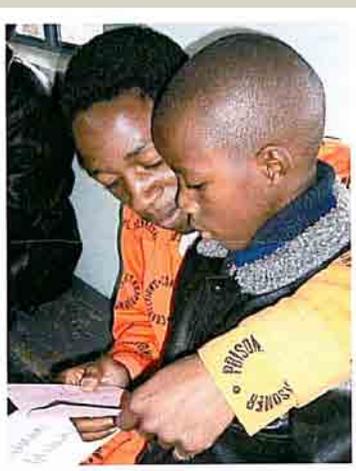
Each family conferencing session deals with 8 prisoners



and their immediate families. The discussion is typically led by senior facilitator, Nonceba Lushaba, with the help of some of the other 25 facilitators. Being a facilitator is an emotionally challenging job, requiring individuals to draw on both counselling and mediating skills to encourage participants to open up to the experience and to manage the feelings of resentment and shame that may emerge. Facilitators, however, stress the celebratory nature of these sessions by focusing on the positive aspects of the reunion, and not the pain. The sessions are directed at being mutually beneficial for all involved, allowing both parties to acknowledge their areas of weakness and insecurity in order to build honest, healthy ways of interacting. Formulating these programmes does much to show offenders that not only do they add value to their immediate family but also to society at large.

The message of fatherhood is particularly important in this environment, as many offenders have children of their own, some of which they have never met. For many prisoners, fatherhood is an abstract concept, based on their own experiences of a father's violence. Phoenix Zululand recognises the need to promote father-child involvement, by minimising children's feelings of abandonment and correcting the deficient mindset that most prisoners have about male caregiving skills.

The message of fatherhood is deeply tied to the issue of social responsibility. Therefore, fathers who learn to



engage with and appreciate their own biological children, can translate these values into the way in which they guide other young children in the community, by acting as social fathers.

Pictures from one of the recent family conferencing sessions: Father, Qhawe, reads to his son.

Photos have become an important medium for the way in which the programme messages succeed. Not only are these pictures a way of connecting with the outside world, but it instils pride in the prisoners and offers them a tangible way in which to reflect on the positive outcomes of the family conferencing. The project is however realistic about the change it can effect, considering the many social barriers.

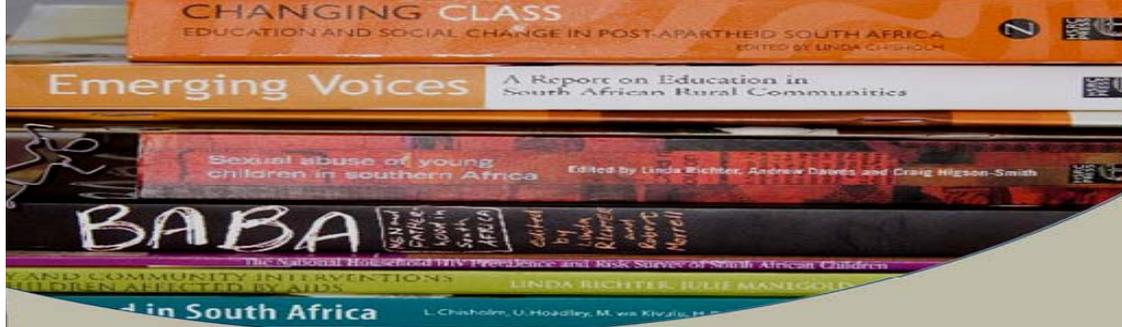
“Families are the worst jailers”. This is a view held by many prisoners who face continued resistance from family members. One form of isolation is *social amnesia*, whereby families choose to forget their incarcerated relatives. This attitude causes problems in the family conferencing attendance, further undermining the offender's self worth. Despite serving the sentence or gaining parole, many families still stigmatise their relatives and are unwilling to give them any retribution. This lack of support often hampers the process of healthy social integration, driving offenders back into the gangs in which they feel they do belong.

Another admirable effort by Phoenix Zululand is the *Voice Beyond the Walls* Project. This programme involves developing radio plays and storytelling within the prison environment. Participants are fully engaged with the process – from the initial conceptualisation through the story development and finally the performance. Benefits for the prisoners are personal skills development and positive group interaction, while the act of storytelling and expressing personal narratives helps create value in the participants' lives and helps them frame new futures. These radio programmes have been known to have considerable audience reach, allowing the public to understand the challenges of prison life and thereby encourage the support needed from families and communities to aid social reintegration.

A project of this nature has various challenges in regards to participant disinterest and immaturity, interpersonal conflict, as well as the distracting environment in which to conduct the workshops. However, due to the dedication of facilitators, these problems have begun to change over time with feelings of resistance being replaced by a greater sense of shared responsibility, discipline and group cohesion.

Phoenix Zululand is not trying to provide concrete solutions or formalised therapy for participants, but rather aims to enable offenders and their families to reflect on their own unique context and the ways in which they can provide support for each other. Fatherhood is an important aspect of the project, motivating men with troubled histories to recognise the positive ways in which they can shape their children's lives. By offering these opportunities, it is hoped a stronger family foundation will be created, leading to sustained contact with participants outside of the sessions.

For more information about this project please email the Programme Director Richard Aitken at: phoenix.zululand@telkomsa.net



RECENT EVENTS

Developing Radio Programmes with Phoenix Zululand and SIT

by Leigh Adams

From the 30th October until the 1st November, the Fatherhood Project Team, Ngunyi and Leigh, travelled to Eshowe Prison to assist in the development of radio programmes with fatherhood/parenting themes.

The project is the brainchild of the Phoenix Zululand Restorative Justice Programme (profiled in the previous article). Also assisting in this process were four students from the School for International Training, lead by John Daniel, as well as overseas visitor Catherine Jenkins. During the course of 3 days, we engaged in an intensive workshopping process, with the final day scheduled for the recording of our story material. Below are a few pictures from this exciting journey.



Day 1
“Snapshot” of our Family Portraits (Mom, Dad and children)

Relaxation exercises and other drama activities



Day 2
Using pictures, proverbs and poems to describe our fathering stories



Day 3

The recording begins – everyone gets a turn...

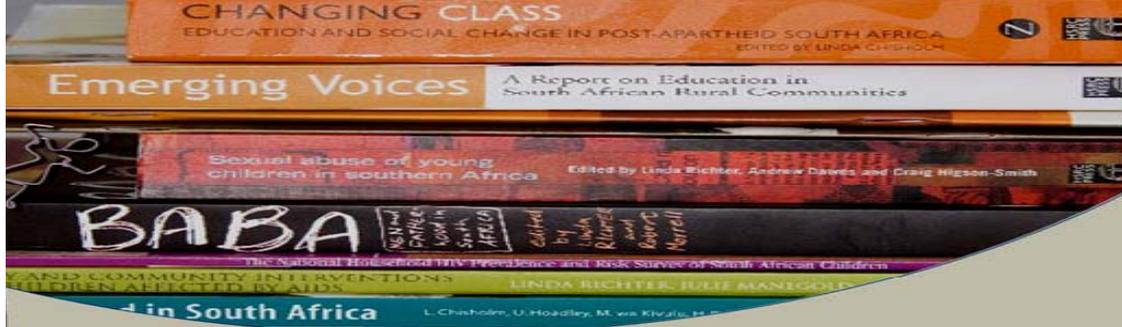


Announcements

Disability South Africa Expo and Conference 2007

The 3rd SA Disability Conference and Expo was held from the 1st until the 3rd November 2007 in Gallagher Estate, Johannesburg.

Some of the expo highlights included a display of wheelchair basketball, in which the Puma's took on the Discovery Eagles. This was accompanied by a wheelchair tennis demonstration and wheelchair dancing. Celebrity athlete Oscar Pistorius, the world's fastest runner with no legs, was present during the course of these days. On the technical side, the expo highlighted the latest disability equipment as well as provided large public demonstrations on wheelchair repair, wound dressing and other topics.



While the expo provided information to increase general public awareness and inclusion practices, the conference facilitated communication between government, NGOs, healthcare professionals and disabled consumers. The theme for the conference was Universal Access and Human Rights. Although special emphasis was made to work and employment, the issues regarding equal participation in community life translate into family rights and parenting practices, which are of interest to the Fatherhood Project.

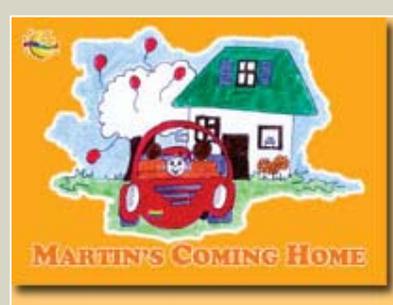
For more information, please visit <http://www.fairconsultants.com/Disability07.htm>

Bedtime Stories is the first series of South African books written for children with same-gender parents. The storybooks explain to children that their family is just as normal as the next, and that they can be proud of where they come from.

"I am a unique child. I have two parents of the same gender. They both love me very much, and I could never ask for a better home. Up until now, there have not been any kiddies' books that describe my family..."

The **Bedtime Stories: My Family Series** is not only for children with gay or lesbian parents - even children with heterosexual parents can benefit from the storybooks. Children with heterosexual parents need to be exposed to the fact that we live in a very diverse world, and by doing this children learn not only respect, but also love for others, regardless of the sexual orientation of their or other children's parents.

The much-anticipated first book in the **My Family Series** is now available! **Martin's Coming Home** is a story about a newborn baby (Martin) who is brought into the world by his two lesbian mothers. The book focuses on the welcoming of Martin to his new home by his family.



The theme of **Martin's Coming Home** is that of the love which his parents have for him, and his acceptance into the world as a newborn baby by his family.

The story unfolds, and describes the wishes of goodwill that the family has for the little baby boy. Eventually his parents tuck him into bed for the first time, and Martin is as content as can be - just as any newborn baby should be!

With beautiful illustrations and uplifting words, **Martin's Coming Home** is without a doubt a must-have for any young child in today's society.

Martin's Coming Home was released this year and is written by Lisa Sonnekus and illustrated by Marion Visser.

Special thanks to the authors, as well as Anthony from PMB LGBT Society and Damon Rose, editor of BBC Ouch, for their assistance in putting together this newsletter edition. Thanks also to the Phoenix Team - Richard Aitken, Jane Argall, Ida Gartrell and Nonceba Lushaba for the opportunity to participate in their admirable project, as well as granting permission for use of some of their pictures in this newsletter.

What to look forward to next month...
The following newsletter will examine the representation of fathers in both international and South African media. How do these images and pieces of text affect our understanding of men today?



Cedric Nunn

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