****

**YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FORUM MEETING MINUTES**

**30th June 2021**

**10:00-12:00 (Zoom)**

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Present: Rimitchu Vitu, Tsotang Matebela, Bronwyn Solomons, Lorraine Karelse, Leroy de Klerk, Marsha Leght, Wayne Marshall, Zia Abrahams, Naomi Chicha, Liesl Conradie, Charlie Hill, Janice King, Rushni Collins, Jenny Claasen

1. **Welcome, apologies and Introductions**

Rushni welcomed all to the meeting and introductions went around.

1. **Presentation by Change Makers**

**Change-Makers** are graduates of the Mamelani Youth Programme. We had 3 members of Changemakers in our meeting today: Bronwyn, Rimitchu, Tsotang, to share their experiences. They have made an oral submission to Parliament on the 14th May 2021, to ensure that services and supports for youth transitioning from Child and Youth Care centres receive greater priority in our country’s Children’s Act.

We started by them answering four questions:

1. **Why are you advocating for transitional care and why is this important for you?**

**Bronwyn:**

* To share her own experience going through the system and moving out
* The challenges she faced after moving out
* need for more guidance for youth moving out as some mistakes could have been avoided

**Rimitchu:**

* Change Makers creates platform to share experiences in center
* The lack of exposure to the outside world that caused him to be scared to move out
* Opportunity to speak in Parliament – what worked and what needs to be changed
* The need for youth to be better prepared for life outside the center
* He wants to motivate youth still living in the centers

**Tsotang:**

* He is passionate about young people still in the centers- they can learn from his experience
* How he was woken up affected his attitude- defensive and angry behaviour
* Sometimes organisations and their staff are reluctant to change as they are comfortable in the way they do things
* The importance of building relationships between adults and youth in order to develop trust
* Young people must be heard

1. **How would you describe your experience growing up in a CYCC?**

**Tsotang:**

* At the home from 9 years old
* There were about 35 boys and about 3 staff members-staff unable to give boys enough attention
* No liberty to confide in staff-what you said could later be used against you
* Relationships between the staff and boys could not be formed and trust could not be established
* Input and opinion were not asked- attending programmes was compulsory
* Going home for December holiday was compulsory even though no protection at home
* Good memories of friends made in the center, they became like family

**Rimitchu:**

* Moved into the home in 2005 and stayed for 13 years- grateful for growing up in center
* Had a mixed experience in the home, was called names and made fun of by other children
* Experience lack of identity- speech challenge and could not pronounce his own name
* Staff arrange for visits to speech doctor
* Develop alternative ways to express himself- drawing, facial expressions and dance
* Grew attached to staff and children, they became his family

**Bronwyn**:

* In center from 7 years old (in safe house for 8 months before that)
* Fitting in with others children was hard – called names by some of them
* Took part in extramural activities to avoid time at the home
* Lack of autonomy, privacy and confidentiality - CYCW spoke about them in front of others
* Took away the things that helped them cope with Centre life, as punishment

1. **What are some of the challenges you faced in the center?**

**Tsotang:**

* Staff did not develop relationships with children and he did not feel supported enough

**Bronwyn:**

* They were not allowed to go out and had to follow a routine
* Lack of privacy e.g., bathroom had to use it all at a certain time and no space for a quiet moment
* Too few staff during the day for the amount of children

**Rimitchu:**

* Lack of bond between staff and children- would have wanted staff to be more like family
* Someone available to have a conversation with
* also experienced punishment where things were taken away that helped the cope with centre life

1. **Which programme did you find support from?**

**Tsotang:**

* Most supported in sports, especially soccer
* Mamelani did workshops over the years in the centre
* Build relationships with staff of Mamelani as they were always willing to listen and support him
* Relationships with Mamelani staff that continued after he left centre

**Bronwyn:**

* Cooking and baking programme, gave access to kitchen which they did not normally had and gave children at home an opportunity to bond
* Took part in sports, like netball brought children in home closer together
* Mamelani did mentoring at the home
* Preferred activities outside of centre like, volunteered at another home or in the community and took part in extramural activities at school
* Attending group therapy sessions with other girls and being able to speak to someone that was not part of the home

**Rimitchu:**

* Cooking programme stood out for him- he enjoyed it and he also learned how to cook
* Enjoyed the art programme- fell in love with art and the art teacher showed them how to look at life
* Mamelani- helped him discover who he is.

1. **How life is after you left the centre. What are you busy doing?**

**Tsotang:**

* Separated from those he grew up with- which was difficult- formed Alumni Group to stay in contact
* He is an intern at Mamelani and focusing on equipping himself
* Strongly connected to his family, now
* To continue sharing his experiences with other young people and to bring about change

**Bronwyn:**

* life out of centre can be challenging at times, not as easy as she expected it to be
* had to adjustment as support that was given in the centre is no longer there
* now has opportunity to make own decision and face the consequences

**Rimitchu:**

* Have community-based dance movement- Cape Town Freestylers
* Own business- Rimi Designers
* Part of Change Makers

1. **Q & A session**

**Leroy:**

* The importance of making children in centres feel that they are part of the real world
* Creating age-appropriate opportunities for young people in centres
* Differentiation between younger and older children in centres
* Practical and implementable changes to create a different experience
* Create opportunities for young people in care that will support them when they do leave care
* Teenagers in youth care could be allowed to take risk and experiment
* The ratio of YCCW to the children should be smaller -less pressure on them
* Centres are set up for child protection with massive legislation that is governing them- prevents people from taking risks.
* **Liezl:**
* Children should have choice to attend programmes or not, not to be forced on them
* Ask for ideas and possible solutions from them and allow them to take ownership plan
* **Rushni:**
* The importance of seeing it from a child perspective not just admin side
* Thanked Change Makers for their Presentation
* Encouraged all to forward any questions and comments to forum

1. **Other**

* None

1. **Next Meeting: 2nd September 2021**