

## Sexual Abuse Victim Empowerment program

South Africa (Cape Town) – Cape Mental Health

### SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Cape Mental Health runs a unique Sexual Abuse Victim Empowerment (SAVE) program that empowers intellectually disabled victims of sexual abuse and provides them with access to justice. The program helps survivors prepare for court proceedings and helps the legal system to understand their special needs. Clinical psychologists administer psychometric tests to determine the complainant's level of intellectual functioning and ability to consent to sexual intercourse. They also assess the competence of the complainant to act as witness and then make recommendations in a court report.

“The SAVE program attempts to offer people with intellectual disabilities who are victims of sexual abuse the same access to justice as the general population and to ensure conviction of the perpetrators.”

—Carol BOSCH, Project Manager, Cape Mental Health

### FACTS & FIGURES

- SAVE achieved a 28.1 percent conviction rate, greater than the 25 percent conviction rate indicated by the Law Commission for cases from the general population.
- From just a few cases beginning in 1990, the Department of Justice currently refers more than 100 cases per annum to SAVE for psychometric assessment, court preparation, case planning, and assistance.
- In February 2007, SAVE received a Silver Award from the Impumelelo Innovations Award Trust for its pioneering work, and in 2010 it received an award from the South African Federation for Mental Health for “Innovative Program in the Field of Intellectual Disability.”

### PROBLEMS TARGETED

People with intellectual disabilities are easy prey for sexual predators, and cases of sexual abuse are common.

## SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

- Provide psychological assessments of a victim's level of functioning, competence to act as a witness, and ability to consent to sexual intercourse.
- Provide court preparation, support, counselling, and sex education and sexuality awareness for complainants and their families.
- Provide expert witness by clinical psychologists as required and act as a liaison with all relevant agencies, in particular the South African Police Services and Justice Department.
- Raise awareness among public prosecutors and police when dealing with complainants with intellectual disability by training them in appropriate interviewing skills.
- Provide training and ongoing technical support to mental health societies, clinical psychologists, and related professionals across South Africa in order to extend the program nationally.

## OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

In 2013–2014, SAVE was able to extend support services to some 100 survivors on an annual budget of SAR694,676 (approximately \$87,000), which testifies to its affordability. In April 2013 the Cabinet of South Africa recommended that the SAVE model be integrated into the public sector gender-based violence intervention system and rolled-out across the country.

Photo: Yes

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