

## **Church and Community Unite in the Fight Against Drug Abuse**

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The local members of the Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA) stood up against the high rate of drug usage in a small location of Bathurst in the Eastern Cape and conducted a Drug Awareness Day campaign in the SDA building. The church members invited community leaders who were the speakers on the day. The community leaders spoke about the importance of the day noting how the drug usage rate is increasing every day among the youth in Bathurst.

The campaign kicked off on 12 May 2023 in the morning at 9:00 am when the first speaker addressed the community.

Member of the Isikhalo Movement, Miss Nomawabo Tshisa from Bathurst first explained that Isikhalo is a movement that stands as a voice of the community in all kinds of abuses, even substance abuse.

"I feel very honoured to be part of such an important campaign in most cases we only talk about GBV, and we forget about the killer disease called drug[s]," she said.

Bathurst is a small location but also a very dangerous place because of the rise in crime due to drug usage. At times, people consider drug distribution as a business not realising it is ruining the futures of youths.

Tshisa added, "Even in schools 'whoonga' is mostly used by students claiming that it makes them smarter and not lazy to study," continuing, "but also it's sad they see nothing wrong with its usage".

Mr Samuel Chitura (44) from SDA agreed with Tshisa.

"People tend to focus on other abuses but not substance abuse," said Chitura. May in the Adventist Calendar is a Drug Awareness month every year dedicated to fight, as the community, against this pandemic that is killing the youth of Bathurst and worldwide. He said, "The road will not be easy but it's worth the fight."

In the community, the economy is getting worse, so it is the responsibility of the members that children see the change in order to be able to change the community.

Captain Mhlauli from the Bathurst Police Station, together with Constable Andiswa Tokwe at Bathurst Police Station also part of the campaign showed appreciation for being part of an important campaign. Mhlauli also talked about how sad he is that he must be there for no better reason than to talk about a drug problem in the community. In schools, children are taught about drugs and its effects.

"Dagga is everywhere in Bathurst but the courts never filed any case against it, in the beginning of Covid-19 the police tried and failed to file a case against it," he said the captain.

On 26 May 2023 in Eastern Cape there will be a new lab after a long time without a lab in Port Elizabeth so there can easily be an identification for types of drugs as the police are not aware of. In several identified cases, a lot of victims take drinks in the form of spiking of drinks. He concluded, "A Tanzanian citizen residing in Bathurst was arrested for selling drugs, but no case was taken to court against him. It is our responsibility as South Africans to stand together and say no to drug distribution."

Mr Monki Nobebe from Bathurst, a former drug addict and a community leader also shared his experiences and the effects of drug usage. "I know [about] drugs and the drugs they use here in Bathurst is called tik, a pill that is mostly used during surgery that is now used as a bad drug."

He described it as salt and gas that looks like a piece of broken bottle, in contact with the tongue it cuts it open. He also warned people that a person under the influence of this drug only thinks of another person as a threat and may harm them. Addicts are unable to sleep but collapse experiencing what is informally known as a "black down". Nobebe says that around Bathurst children aged as young as 10 years old are using these drugs. "It also destroys the skin and once you start smoking you will be an addict for a long time."

A church speaker, also working at the Health Department of the Eastern Cape, Mr Bonakele Moyikwa who resides at Port Alfred concluded the whole campaign is against drugs which kill many young lives.

"There was a time when in churches we were not allowed to talk about HIV/Aids as it was considered a sin. We have uplifted ourselves to [a] Godly level and I have always loved to involve myself in community projects and was fortunate to work at mental institutions, and treated patients with mental breakdowns due to drugs," the speaker said.

The effects of drugs on some people are everlasting and permanent, they use the same injection to inject a group of addicts which leads to the spread of HIV/Aids. He continued explaining how drugs affect one's health generally and how they can make one change character. He said that illicit drug usage interferes with blood circulation and people do not pay attention to such things.

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