

School Bullying, GBV and Intervention Program

Southern African School Mediation Initiative

Rotary Club of Parktown Excalibur

South Africa

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The Southern African School Mediation Initiative (SASMI) is a proactive “stop-the-violence empowerment” program. The aim is to give all students, teachers and agencies the help to transform their schools into safer, more caring, and more effective learning environments by using a peer-to-peer conflict management process as a first response to addressing bullying, intimidation, harassment and GBV in schools.

Highly-publicized tragedies have intensified educators’ focus on bullying, GBV and other forms of violence are taking place daily in schools. Minister Angie Motshekga, Basic Education Department, in December of 2015 reported that, there were “over” 1 million reported incidents of violence against pupils in South African schools. The National School Violence Study Report, by the Center for Justice and Crime Prevention, the South African Council of Educators report, along with many other established institutional research investigations all independently came to similar conclusions, i.e. school violence and bullying is rampant, and too many children avoid attending school because they are afraid, while many others attend school in fear.

There are good reasons for concern. For one, a large number of students report that they have either been bullied or have been involved in bullying other students. Secondly, research has demonstrated that bullying can have a far-reaching impact upon student’s emotional wellbeing and academic performance. In addition, advances in technology have increased the methods, the incidences, and the impact of bullying behavior.

Many factors make bullying a challenging issue to address. Most incidences of bullying behavior are quick and have a duration of less than one minute. And while we take note of the over 1 million reported incidences we underestimate the frequency of bullying in schools throughout the South African school system. A lot of unnoticed bullying, intimidation and harassment takes place off school property while coming and going from school. Additionally, most bullying takes place out of ear and eye shot of educators. Equally note-worthy is, most young people do not report bullying to their teachers or other adults; in part because they believe that they will not be able to help.

One unique challenge of preventing bullying in schools is that it requires coordinated efforts of all adults in a school: administrators, teachers, parents and School Governing Board (SGB). Young people must receive consistent and believable messages that adults will intervene to prevent bullying and trust that these interventions will be swift and effective-to ensure that

students will come forward to report incidences of violence and unwanted behaviour.

The Southern African School Mediation Initiative strives to enable students, teachers and administrators to implement a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention tailored to their unique needs. Our vision is to help create and sustain a school culture in which bullying is not tolerated and where students and adults feel safe, supported, to perform to the best of their abilities while promoting respect, tolerance, and empathy.

Aims & Activities

The Southern African School Mediation Initiative is a non-governmental organization in partnership with Rotary Club of Parktown our aim is to:

- **Design:** Conflict management and violence reduction training and a program support to students, teachers, administrators and school governing boards.
- **Train & Develop:** A cadre of professionals able to respond, address and support students and teachers in and during school traumatic eventualities.
- **Assertively Act & Promote:** The development and implementation of comprehensive, effective and sustainable conflict management programs in primary and secondary schools, in-order to reduce high incident rates of violence, bullying, GBV, intimidation and harassment.
- **Establish & Maintain:** A baseline standard of program design, procedure, process and ethics for educators and students by monitoring and evaluating programs, and by offering continued support and training.
- **Participate:** Conduct and take part in scientific evaluation of studies and analysis pertaining to various methodologies and the impact of the program interventions which their effectiveness will be utilized in improving school safety. Evaluate and discover what works and what best practices are applied.

What We Do And How We Do It.

To achieve our goal of reducing incidence of bullying, GBV and other forms of unwanted social behavior in schools, we train, and train some more, in the various intervention processes available globally. We use best practice, evidence-based tools and skills, in multi-cultural learning environments. Then we synthesis, adapt and contextualize the process to fit our unique environment, demands, needs and diversity in order to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Our Program Implementation Consists Of Four Priorities:

1. The anchor platform intervention: Consisting of training and implementing a sustainable peer-to-peer mediation base conflict management program. As designed, peer-to-peer

mediation offers an opportunity for students to use soft-diplomacy intervention as a first-step option.

'Peer mediation is both a program and a process' where students of the same age group, facilitate resolving disputes between two people or a small group. When used correctly noticeable changes include improved self-esteem, listening and critical thinking skills, whilst creating climate for learning, reduced disciplinary actions and less fights.

Peer-to-peer mediation conflict management is not a panacea for all altercations of violence in school; there will be times when police intervention is necessary and required. For example, knowing that there is an effective mediation process available at schools gives police an alternative tool and format to work with parent(s) of a child or situation that has risen to the level of criminal or felonious behavior.

The Southern African School Mediation Initiative uses mediation as a base platform because it has been proven to be effective. It is engaging and a fun life-skill to learn for adolescents, while at the same time offering the best impacting change solution for many types of problems:

Types of problems include

- ❖ Social media improprieties
- ❖ Relationship difficulties/harassment
- ❖ Malicious rumour and gossip
- ❖ Cheating and stealing
- ❖ Racial and cultural confrontations
- ❖ Vandalism
- ❖ Classroom or extracurricular disputes
- ❖ Bullying, minor assaults and fighting

We use Mr. Richard Cohen's well established process: Schoolmediation.com; Cohen's process and program designed has been most effective, low management, and sustainable compared to other program formats. It has also proven very effective in uprooting and transforming schools. Peer mediation works successfully by taking advantage of the power of peer influence. Other than the home, and community, the school is where adolescents and young adults learn to navigate social space, explore and test what is acceptable social interactions and behavior. Peers, and often teachers--as mentors, are able to influence peer pressure: adolescence and teenager dress, haircut, choice of music and overall attitude in order to be accepted.

The power of peer pressure or social influence, in order to gain acceptance, leads young people to drink, smoke, do drugs, engage in sexual activity, and is a significant contributing factor in many youth gender-based violence incidents. Such power of influence can be used to transform and improve school safety and academic performance; however it takes a resounding full commitment throughout the school. Our Peer-to-Peer mediation process has been seen as engaging and extremely helpful.

2. To create safe space(s) or zones around the school property, and where possible, throughout the community. This is a response to awareness that much violence happens and unfolds will adolescents and youth are moving between home and school. Other than classrooms, where the teacher usually sits and the principal's office,

children need other spaces and zones (on and off school property) where they feel safe and free from fear. The safe zones serves as a place where one can secure help or assistance, if needed. These safe spaces or safe zones should be well recognized and clearly designated. They should also be spaces where every student, teacher, principal and active community person should shield and protect children.

You might ask, Why not just send or have a child go to the administrative and or principal's office. As an adult, that certainly sounds reasonable, but children and youth associate the principal's offices as places where punishment is handed out. The bully might feel that he/she is being squealed on. Hence, the bully becomes more punitive and harsh in his/her attacks.

Additionally, if possible, these spaces should be well lit, have a recordable CCTV camera. In some cases, an emergency panic button would be good. The safe zone/or safe space concept desperately needs to be revived. As a Rotary partner organization, we focus great attention to improving the school's library resources and environment. Assigning someone to the library immediately after school hours is important. The safe zone or space should have the status of being sacred space. The safe space is protected and shielded by the entire student, teacher and administrative body. As a part of Rotary, we particularly like assuring that every school has adequate resources and equipment in the designated library.

3. To recognize the added value in collaborative partnerships. In order for us to be effective in transforming the school, we recognize that our program could benefit from additional help. Sustaining change happens best when in partnership with others and the community. As a result, our budget is inclusive of a R100 000.00 per school, for a mini-grants package. Through, a number of small mini-grants we can encourage, and invite other NGOs, with unique and varied specialties and missions, into the school to do what they do best. These mini-grants are aimed at improving students and the schools moral, sense of self-worth, identity and dignity. For example, given the small grant amount of R100 000.00 we could invite the University of Johannesburg Optometry Department's mobile community unit to come and test and donate eye glasses to those in need. By testing the entire school no child feels singled out because of their economic status. Other NGO's focus on shoes and may assist in assuring everyone in the school has a comfortable fitting pair of shoes. Particular care is focused on gender and personal hygiene.

These mini-grants specifically target the needs of the children, and improving their mental and public health status. Thus, restoring and improving one's sense of self and self-dignity. Over the course of the year, our facilitator continues to monitor the attitude and social climate of the school and recommends relevant impact solutions that these mini-grants target. Again, teachers, principals and administrators and their needs are not targeted in this regard. School resources should not be dependent or expect our mini-grant to replace the basic funding and accounting management of the school.

4. The Southern African School Mediation Initiative believes a school is a community center. With this in mind, we would like to offer support and skills-based courses after school hours and or on weekends, primarily designed for the students, but open to all. These courses are aimed at building confidence, resilience, self-respect, and gender-based violence awareness. How to ask for a date? A course for teenagers on how to talk about safe sex, which will positively impact mitigating HIV AIDS. These tentative courses are aimed at breaking social barriers and stigma associated with gender opposites. Other course possibilities that are a fun learning experience, with an impacting and enlighten experience. SASMI has already moved forward in developing courses on learning science, biology, and physics through cooking. We have previously reached out and spoken with the Culinary Arts Association of South Africa and the South African Chiefs Association at the University of Johannesburg concerning our goals and both have stated they are enthusiastic about the idea, and welcome an opportunity to formulate and teach the course. Such a course would, also include an opportunity to learn how to read and evaluate brand labels and shop while being informed.

- **Trauma-Proof Children:** We have reached out to Dr. Levine, author of *Trauma-proofing your Kids*, to see if he would train four of our team members as senior trainers. After which we can evaluate and contextualize his process to service our local needs. Quote: “Millions of children have experienced bullying, violence (real or in the media), abuse or sexual molestation. Many other kids have been traumatized from more “ordinary” ordeals such as terrifying medical procedures, accidents, loss and parental separation.”

Dr. Levine, and through his books brings basic and simple yet powerful tools to keep children safe from danger and to help them “*bounce back*” after feeling scared and overwhelmed. In his books: creating resilient kids no matter what misfortune has besieged them. *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids* is a treasure trove of simple-to-follow “stress-busting,” boundary-setting, sensory/motor-awareness activities that counteract trauma’s effect on a child’s body, mind and spirit. It includes a chapter on how to navigate the inevitable difficulties that arise during the various ages and stages of development, this ground-breaking book simplifies an often mystifying and complex subject, empowering parents to raise truly confident and joyful kids despite stressful and turbulent times. Several times throughout the year he has agreed to offer his resources and training over the Internet. Additionally, there are several previous trained people here in South Africa that is willing to participate.

- **First Responders Training:** Crisis debriefing (CDT) or Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) Training. South Africa has a critical shortage of professionals available to respond and trained in response to school(s) and or community incidents of high trauma. It is our belief that schools and communities are better served if there were more professionals geographically dispersed able to quickly respond to the need of adolescence and teenagers in the event of small and large traumatic events; a geographically spread out small hand full of teachers and administrator capable and trained in CDT. It is our hope that as we implement our conflict management program, training should include training teachers, school governing board members, parents and community representatives CISD. In this way we also address the shortage of trained CDT/CISD. This training is intended for use by counselors, psychologist, social workers, and community representative’s workers, to better serve in a crisis. Over time the entire SASMI team will be trained in this regard.

Training will provide individuals with the following: summary of APS crisis debriefing team procedures, a procedural flow chart, a CDT manager’s checklist, and guidelines for debriefing. Training: critical incident stress reactions, children’s response to trauma, coping with children’s reactions to trauma, myths and facts about suicide, “do’s and don’ts” related to suicidal threats, responding to a student’s death announcement of a crisis event, review and list of community resources, a sample debriefing summary sheet.

- Teacher Self-Care and coping skills and Managing Secondary Traumatic Stress due to exposure to traumatic events in the course of their daily work skills.

Progress Reporting:

Results Based Accountability (RBA) framework

Profile:

Richard Cohen, Founder and Director

School Mediation Associates:

Since founding School Mediation Associates in 1984, Richard has worked with hundreds of schools and has had the pleasure of training over 40,000 young people and educators to be school leaders. He conducts trainings on a wide range of subjects including mediation, conflict resolution, managing difficult conversations, student mentorship, restorative practices, leadership, negotiation, and bullying prevention. He has also mediated countless school-based disputes. Richard has written two books: [Students Resolving Conflict: Peer Mediation in Schools](#) (GoodYear, 1995), and [The School Mediator's Field Guide: Prejudice, Sexual Harassment, Large Groups, and other Daily Challenges](#) (School Mediation Associates, 1999). He also publishes a free e-newsletter, "The School Mediator," with subscribers in more than 70 countries. Richard has served as a Senior Adjunct Professor at the University of Massachusetts and at Cambridge College. He is a recipient of The Association for Conflict Resolution's William Kreidler Award for "distinguished service to the field of conflict resolution."

Anthony Smith, Managing Director, Mediator and Senior Trainer

Southern African School Mediation Initiative:

Mr. Smith is a Professional Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) specialist, trainer, and mediator; he worked for School Mediation Associates in the mid 1990's. His educational background is in economics, sociology, clinical psychology and history from Oberlin College and Harvard University where he received his B.A. Mr. Smith completed and received his ADR credentials and training from Harvard University Law School; academic adviser was Mr. Roger Fisher; Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Independent Mediation Association of South Africa. Professionally, he has held many titles and positions at Harvard University. For three years, Mr. Smith served as the Boston Municipal Court, Roxbury Division's court appointed ADR person and has fulfilled other state appointed responsibilities and interventions. While a graduate student at Harvard University he studied clinical psychology; the well-respected late Brendan Maher and Barbara Maher were his supervisors. Mr. Smith worked in the Boston communities of Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, Mattapan, and Revere addressing gang violence and in this capacity he developed a young men group therapy support program in partnership with Maria Contreras, from the Soldiers of Health community base program. In 1995/96 he became a certified Ombudsman. To date, he has developed and worked on many projects internationally serving disadvantaged communities. Anthony Smith is clinically trained in psychology with specific focus in PTSD, Defence Mechanisms, and group therapy. He also holds advance certification in Gender-based Violence awareness and training from the Global Human Rights Leadership Institution. He has taught courses in history and psychology at Harvard University, as a Teaching Fellow and Assistant.

Mr. Smith is currently pursuing an advanced joint degree in Non-profit Management and Strategic Management, Harvard University.

The Southern African School Mediation Initiative is governed and receives oversight from the Rotary Club of Parktown Excalibur.