

An email received:

Dear Charlotte di Vita.

I am writing to you to express my gratitude for your generous donation to help rape survivors here in Pietermaritzburg. Up till now counselling has been done almost entirely by volunteers (the volunteer at the local crisis centre has seen an average of 25 survivors a month for the last 6 months).

By employing counsellors, we will not only be able to improve the counselling and reduce the trauma for the survivor, but also be able to follow up more cases for a longer period of time. I am pleased to inform you that we have also managed to secure funds for "Care Packs", containing essentials for the survivor (e.g. panties, pads, soap, facecloth, bodylotion etc). We have also made up dresses for the survivors who sometimes arrive only with a blanket supplied by the police !

We are presently training the counsellors, but expect to have them in place by the end of this month. They are really a lovely bunch of enthusiastic women, and I would like to share some of their stories with you.

Nonkululeko (Nonku for short) has volunteered at our local crisis centre since October 2002. They are desperately short staffed and welcomed her with open arms. I am not sure who was most pleased when I told them we were able to employ her - she or the doctors and nurses she works with. The day I told her she could not stop hugging me! (the Zulus are quite reserved, so getting a hug is really special!)

Nonku is a single parent of a boy aged 13 and a girl aged 9. The children's father has not been helping her financially and she has relied on her mother and sister for financial support. Her son was sent to live with the sister as she could not afford to pay his transport to school every day. I have seen her once a week these past months and I know how she has struggled and what it means for her that she will be paid a salary at the end of the month.

Busisiwe is also a single mother with 2 boys. She volunteered at the local Family Violence, Child Abuse and Sexual Offences (FCS) unit of the police last year. They can't wait to get her back, and she tells me that this job has given her back her independence and pride as a person, she looks forward to being able to help make a difference for the rape survivors.

Philile grew up in what was then the Child Protection Unit, her father being a policeman. She is determined to help make a difference and plans to become a lawyer, because she finds the juridicial system lacking in sympathy for the rape survivors. She will liaise with the courts and will be preparing the survivors for the courtcases.

Nontobeko has had no prior experience with rape, but when she was 15, her mother and stepfather were gunned down in front of her in a case of "taxi violence" (her stepfather being a taxidriver). Her father died a couple of years ago, she has no biological sibilings, but lives with her grandmother and an aunt. She will be based at Edendale Hospital, where they are starting a crisis centre shortly. Edendale hospital have also

asked me to address domestic violence. One of Nontobeko's first tasks will be to go to Casualty and talk to the women that are at the hospital after being battered by their husband/boyfriend. The aim is to start support groups at the hospital and elsewhere as the need arises.

Violence against women and children is a big problem here - rape is only part of the problem. I asked the counsellors to write down how this project had made a change in THEIR lives.

I will conclude with quotes from what they wrote:

"It is a great honour for me to be in this project as it is going to give me an opportunity to work with and serve my community."

"Thanks for giving me the opportunity to make a difference in peoples lives."

"I always wanted to study more, but I have got no money to do that, and now I will be able to study further and at the same time help other women"

"I promise to become a good counsellor".

You have already made a huge difference in all our lives and this project is going to have major impact on a lot of women's lives. Please accept our gratitude !!

Yours sincerely.
Fritse Muller
Project manager.