

# JUST FOR A CHANGE: Season 2, Episode 8\_Mental well-being and youth\_Transcript

[00:00:00] **Luvuyo Maseko:** Welcome to season 2 of the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, with me, your host, Luvuyo Maseko. We love hearing and sharing stories about social innovation happening both locally and outside our borders in the global south.

In season 2 we put the spotlight on the changemakers behind some incredibly innovative approaches and solutions that are creating systemic change. And - we're also curious to find out what keeps them going. Join us as we discover how these changemakers are changing the way we're changing the world.

Welcome to season 2 of the **Just for a change podcast** with me, your host, Luvuyo Maseko.

A recent article by the World Health Organisation noted that globally, one in seven young people aged 10-19-years-old experience mental health challenges...with depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders at the forefront. In addition, suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-19 year-olds. In South Africa these figures are equally dire, The South African Depression and Anxiety Group reports that there are 23 known cases of suicide in South Africa every day, and for every person that commits suicide, 10 have attempted it. Before Covid-19, the organisation fielded 600 calls a day. Eighteen months later SADAG is fielding about 2,500 calls per day.

Failing to address mental health and wellbeing issues in our youth has far-reaching repercussions that stretch all the way into adulthood. To provide a little bit more context about 75% of adult disorders begin in childhood/youth. The Bertha Centre's youth innovation portfolio seeks to create an environment in which young people have opportunities to improve their lives by improving their employability and feelings of self-efficacy. We have been running a mental well-being campaign with three high-level objectives, including

- Emphasising the importance of mental health and psychosocial support for young people.
- Sharing best practice.
- Exploring if there are any policy level interventions required that would make it easier for the delivery and uptake of youth-focused psychosocial

support.

In this episode of the Just for a Change podcast, we'll be focussing on the topic of mental health and well-being for young people, as well as the systems lens that is needed to have a better understanding of this topic.

[00:02:39] Phumlani Nkontwana was recently appointed as a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business. With more than 10 years experience working on entrepreneurship and innovation throughout the African continent using his programme and data management skills, we asked him to give us some insight into the topic of systems change.

[00:02:58] **Phumlani Nkontwana:** Hi everyone Um, [00:03:00] my name is Phumlani and I'm really excited to, to connect with everyone. My view is that, uh, systems really is about innovation, um, and, uh, using innovation to solve wicked problems.

[00:03:19] And part of that. is about understanding issues of power and justice. And at the heart of systems change is really about an art of problematization that is different from the normal way of, uh, of problematizing issues. And the reason for this is that stakeholders in systems change often, either not completely known, or even if they are known, they are now. Um, easily accessible. Even if they are accessible, they tend to have so much power, um, that, that creates an [00:04:00] artificial barrier. So there is this process that you have to go through, um, um, and, and problematize differently and their part who are the stakeholders and how to engage them. [00:04:12] And that's where the innovation is. And of course in Africa, you can apply that. understanding of systems change in many domains, in many problem areas or Trinity areas in one area that I spend a lot of time thinking about is, um, youth and, um, and entrepreneurs. When you think about climate change, action, Um, you think about education, you think about health issues and it often is not about money.

[00:04:50] It's often not about lack of solutions. It is often really about the artificial barriers that have stayed in the [00:05:00] system, um, for, for a long time, um, many of which are cultural, many of which are mindset related and all really artificial. I think, you know, uh, Africans looking to solve African problems needs to understand this and needs to understand that systems change, uh, tools and processes can really be helpful. And convening differently . And creating strategic, intentional crowds that can create the right momentum to drive the necessary change.

[00:05:38] **Luvuyo Maseko:** I also chatted to Kentse Radebe, an expert in the field of mental health, and specifically youth mental health. Her voice will be no stranger to those of you who have been following the *Just for a Change*

podcast for a while. Kentse has recently taken up a new position at DG Murray Trust working within the youth sector.

One of Kentse's interests is in the processes and levers that lead to social innovation with a focus on health and mental health. She also has experience working within the mental health space at the South African College of Applied Psychology.

[00:06:11] I asked her some questions about why specifically within the youth context and understanding of systems change is important. And specifically why a system's perspective on youth mental health and wellbeing. It's critical to understanding and tackling this very important issue,

[00:06:26] **Kentse Radebe:** Being able to apply a systems approach to understanding the youth context in South Africa is actually quite critical. So, for example, if we unpack some of the challenges that young people in South Africa face. So for instance, access to education, significant barriers to entering the labor market resulting in an unemployment rate, looking at youth it's over 50% access to resources, living in an unequal society. We know that close to 50% of households in South Africa are living in poverty.

[00:06:57] That means that young people are coming from [00:07:00] households and communities, where there really is significant reduction in access to opportunities and access to resources. So when we're trying to think about how do we solve for some of these challenges that affect young people, we can't do that in isolation.

[00:07:15] Systems thinking really encourages us to see the patterns and the connections between the different elements in a system. I think what's really critical about this question around young people in mental health is that it really highlights how oftentimes we think about mental health as an after thought.

[00:07:31] We'll think about all the other aspects that are really impacting young people without really thinking about, well, what does that mean for young people's mental health? And I think what's really concerning about that is recognizing that how young people show up, whether it's at school, whether it's at organizations that they're part of in their communities.

[00:07:48] That's a critical part of who they are. When we're thinking about somebody's wellbeing. So their ability to cope with the normal stresses of daily life, to be able to work productively and to be able to make [00:08:00] contributions to their own communities. These are all critical aspects of having a positive mental wellbeing.

[00:08:06] However, what we know in South Africa is that oftentimes it's very difficult and challenging to access mental health resources. and when we acknowledge , the context of many young people are living in. So coming

from communities that are severely unequal, um, coming from households that are experiencing gender based violence, not having access to resources and opportunity to advance their own lives.

[00:08:28] These are all external stressors that would have an immense challenge on anybody who's going through that. So I think what's really critical here is not to separate the two, but when we're thinking about solutions or innovations that are directly impacting young people is to actually alongside that, think about their mental health.

[00:08:47] **Luvuyo Maseko:** So good to hear Kentse's voice on this podcast and while we'll miss her at the Bertha Centre we wish her a wonderful new season at DGMT and look forward to all the collabs that lie ahead.

With all of this in mind, I'm excited to introduce today's feature story guests. From the School of Hard Knocks we have Scott Sloan and from the South African Depression and Anxiety Group - also known as SADAG - we have Vanishaa Gordhan.

School of Hard Knocks uses sport, a research-based curriculum and in-depth mentoring to help youth improve their physical and mental well-being while SADAG is at the forefront of patient advocacy, education and destigmatisation of mental illness in the country. They assist patients and callers throughout South Africa with mental health queries.

[00:09:33] Welcome guys. It's so great to have you

[00:09:35] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** Thank you so much for having me

[00:09:37] **Scott Sloan:** Afternoon yes thanks for having us

[00:09:39] **Luvuyo Maseko:** , all right guys. Um, my first question is to both of you and it's, um, it is, it is probably one of the more difficult ones. So apologies in advance for starting off with one of these tougher questions, but to both of you, how would you explain the issue we're facing and what are the repercussions of not adequately addressing mental health [00:10:00] challenges, particularly as they relate to our young people. I'll start with you, Vanishaa.

[00:10:04] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** I think. there are those different, some blocks. And I know that you mentioned stigma already, and stigma is a big thing. It's about talking about your mental health, you know, knowing when to get treatment, knowing where to access that treatment is a huge problem. A lot of students, a lot of youth actually don't know.

[00:10:25] Do I need treatment? Do I need help? What kind of help do I need? Where do I get access to this help? And I think that's where the communication, the education knowledge is power. You know, it's important to know all of this know the warning signs. How am I feeling? How is my loved one feeling? How is my mom feeling?

[00:10:45] It's so important to know all of these things so that you know, what resources are available. So those are the big things I think that become challenges and then hinder. Um, achievement, hinder progress, hinder the concept of [00:11:00] I can do better

[00:11:02] **Luvuyo Maseko:** and Scott at the same question to you.

[00:11:05] **Scott Sloan:** I think that, um, there's a lot of studies out there that confirms this, but young people, um, you know, across the Cape flats, I guess in my experience experiencing an unprecedented amount of stress and anxiety, um, especially in the last 18 months.

[00:11:26] Um, uh, and primarily I think, uh, Judy experiences of trauma. And particularly of violence. And I know that our students, um, about half of them have experienced multiple traumas in the last six months. Um, about three quarters, at least one, um, And I guess most commonly it's it's about half of I've seen the violent crime, um, in the last few months.

[00:11:56] So I think that, um, one [00:12:00] of the issues is that we're living in quite the young people that have been quite a violent society and violence is definitely linked with, um, uh, trauma and trauma with brain development. Uh, and so that's one of the big issues. I think I think the other thing is. You know, healing good mental health is associated with positive relationships with peers and with adults and your friends and family.

[00:12:28] Um, and then one thing that we've, uh, uncovered in our own research is that young people kind of an issue of saying, don't have that many people to turn to. You don't have the language, but they maybe don't have someone to turn to. Um, and, and that's, that's a big issue, you know, but parents or caregivers are overworked, uh, perhaps not present as much as they would like to be.

[00:12:54] Um, and so that's a big thing. Um, And then I think just finally the some of the issues that we're facing, um, are because there's not really access to good mental health resources at a community level, you know, it's kind of locked into private and expensive, uh, healthcare solutions and it's not reaching people that it needs to reach.

[00:13:18] So, um, and in terms of consequences, um, Even when people are overwhelmed by trauma. I mean, to sort of describing it in terms of, behaviours, I think, which might be most helpful at impacts on, on decision-

making self-regulation and the processing of fears, memories, managing stress and. It could lead to acting out in harmful ways.

[00:13:46] Um, we might commonly associate with the fight fight flight. I think that's sort of in the common domains of, of most people's vocabulary. So, you know, fight response, which would often associate looks like, you know,

[00:14:00] maybe gang membership or, or, um, addictive acting out behaviors, but some, some of the probably lesser known or lesser knowledge consequences are supposed when young people, um, stay silent and avoid talking about the challenges and disconnecting from their feelings. Uh, we, we see this quite a bit, um, as a way of coping and this is sort of associated with, the flight response and, and that is associated with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and. suicidality. Um, so, so there's, yeah, the consequences of those are greyish.

[00:14:38] **Luvuyo Maseko:** I indeed, and, and Vanishaa may be over to you. One of the things we mentioned earlier, and Scott alluded to it as well, is. Um, we live in the majority of, of, of, of adults who go through suffer with mental health challenges. Um, a lot of it can be traced back to childhood. And, and I wonder from your point of view, [00:15:00] at what stage do you think is the right time to begin having conversations with young people about their mental health so that we don't deal with some of the negative behaviors that Scott outlined earlier?

[00:15:11] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** That's actually a good question. Because so SADAC always. had school talk. So we used to do school talks. We used to go to a school and we were mandated to do class by class talking about mental health, anxiety, depression, you know, how to cope with stress, how to cope with difficulties. Pre COVID we actually went into or started to go into primary schools where we were talking to like, you know, younger people about mental health, talking to younger people about anxiety, about stress, how to manage it.

[00:15:41] You know, it's been quite a need. We have, we've seen younger and younger people experiencing extreme stress where they don't know what to do or how to manage their school schedules, how to manage, you know, the exactly how he, Scott mentioned the trauma. They might've experienced where they'd be at home. Will they be at school?

[00:15:59] Whether [00:16:00] it be, you know, in the greater community. So there's lots of different aspects that are impacting a person. So mental health is something that you need to start the conversation earlier. You know, it's not even only about talking about mental health. Maybe let's change it up and say your mental wellness.

[00:16:16] Maybe just having that conversation from a very young age to say, how are you doing today? You know, how are you really doing today? Not how was your day at school today? Yeah, my day was fine. This happened, this happened, but maybe how are you feeling today? How are you really doing, how is your emotional space?

[00:16:35] Maybe when kids start maybe withdrawing, you know, they used to be this outgoing, super energetic student or person, and now they withdrawing a little bit, you know, they might be spending a little bit more time in their room. Maybe starting with that conversation. You know, I've noticed that you've been patrolling.

[00:16:54] is something the matter did something happened and let's have that conversation and open that dialogue.

[00:17:00] **Scott Sloan:** It's encouraging to hear Vanishaa. Um, cause as she's speaking, you know, I'm seeing, you know, interactions between our team and, and, and the young people you work with, you know, and. It's funny, you ask that question, you know, how you really feeling, and for the first month or two months, you get a sort of blank stare, you know, and that leads back to the sort of the lack of vocabulary for it, you know, but we not only are we persistent, but we begin to teach some of that vocabulary, you know, and it's amazing that, uh, what might first seem like a lost cause, you know, after a few months of, of trust, the trust being built up and.

[00:17:38] But do you really do get some hard answers to that question? And then, then you're beginning of a platform to, to develop and change it. She's someone for the better, or they have the potential to change themselves for the better. So it is amazing how simple it is. Isn't it? I mean, you just have to be consistent in that and say, how are you really doing? You know, and that. pay off.

[00:18:00] **Luvuyo Maseko:** And, and, and to pull on that thread, Scott, maybe a word of advice you would have for someone listening to this, who who's maybe working, working with a group of young people that they're finding it hard to connect to. You mentioned a little bit about that consistency about always being there, perhaps. How have you found that, that come to the fore in your work? How do you guys go about creating those safe spaces so that eventually a young person can speak to you about these issues?

[00:18:28] **Scott Sloan:** Yeah. I mean, it's, it's key. It's key. And we we've learnt this the hard way. You know, we, we are a young organization. We, we had a very tough, um, first 18 months. Um, we didn't, um, look after our staff perhaps, so we didn't identify the, the right staff, you know, and, um, In the process of kind of working to find, uh, grit, great, team members, you know,

we let, we let down our students and they let us know where, you know, when, when people moved on, you know, it hurt, [00:19:00] um, for all of us, you know?

[00:19:01] And so we, we made a very, uh, big, uh, we make it extremely important that if you're going to come and work with young people in our organization, you have to commit to, to a minimum of two years or length of time, you know? And, and we. Um, you know, within, within the boundaries that we have, we will look after our staff because they're the most important people in the organization.

[00:19:25] And, um, so I think the one thing we do is that we, we really, uh, put a lot of emphasis on staff's longevity and their wellbeing, so that they stick around long enough to build those trusting relationships. So yeah, building that trust with, with an adolescent is, is so imperative and I speak from doing it, doing it badly.

[00:19:46] Um, I doing it wrong and getting it right, because hopefully, um, and I think the other thing is like, I think there's enough evidence out there that, you know, if you do stick, stick at it and develop that emotional vocabulary, you, you will get results. If, if you. Um, I have positive, um, adult relationships and with adolescents, you will get something at the end a minute and you need to be prepared for that and make sure you have, you're qualified and trained to have difficult conversations.

[00:20:16] **Luvuyo Maseko:** I mean, it's so interesting what you say. I mean, there's a lot of spaces where they talk about leading with your heart, but you, you think specifically with this, this, it rings. Even more true. And, and I want to maybe ask Vanishaa from your guys' experience, particularly because a lot of the calls that you guys feel that happens over, over the phone or WhatsApp or something along those lines, how do you guys go about creating those safe spaces when that, when you don't have that face to face engagement with a young person, how has that come to life in your guys's experience?

[00:20:49] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** So I think it's important to highlight that SADAG has gotten significantly busy within the COVID space. And, you know, we getting over 2,500 calls [00:21:00] right now, a day compared to the 600 to 700 calls that we got pre-COVID. And I think it's important to highlight here is that there's so much more need. So many more people are feeling stressed or feeling overwhelmed.

[00:21:13] They're not sure what to do and they're reaching out. Um, SADAG has been around for the past 28 years, and I think there's a lot of trust when it comes to, you know, what SADAG does, the information we give. The toolkits that we have. If you look on our website, you'll see umpteenth amount of information. We have webinars, we have videos, we have so much



information and I think it's because we also trusted in those helplines are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. That trust has been created that if someone reaches out to SADAG, they're able to get a counselor on the phone. Where, they can explain how they're feeling. We're also coming now towards teen suicide prevention week, and that's a big activation for [00:22:00] SADAG.

[00:22:00] We, we used to go into school pre-COVID. We were able to go into schools, do the talks, you know, speak to kids class by class, giving them that information, you know, doing a teacher talk. So we also providing the teacher with the information that the kids are learning. So they're able to like, you know, piggyback off each other.

[00:22:19] So they also know what the warning signs are. They know, you know what to look out for. They're aware of the communication in the conversations that that kids are having. And then what we added was, and now we doing it via zoom is we have the parents talks where we also give that information. So it's also, it's important to have all the information around mental health, all the warning signs or, you know, those are the coping skills. So self-help tips get spread across the board so that everyone feels supported and understood.

[00:22:53] **Luvuyo Maseko:** Thank you. Thank you so much for that. And as I was listening to both your guys's answers, it's just, it's [00:23:00] hard to not feel re-energized sometimes it's very easy to, to sort of lose your vuma and you're gees within this space and it's always really great to come across individuals who as passionate and committed as, as you guys are and it's so clear with the way you guys are providing your answers. The next question I have is to both of you, but I'll start, I'll start with Scott. From your point of view, who do you think should take the lead in tackling and addressing youth related mental health issues?

[00:23:28] **Scott Sloan:** That's a big question. Um, uh, I mean, it would be easy, uh, you know, from my perspective to say, oh, you know, like community based organizations or NGOs like ourselves, but I mean, I think the problem is too vast and the resources available to organizations like ourselves are just too limited, you know, I think it has to come from government. Um, and you know, I think as Vanishaa was saying, you [00:24:00] know, if, if teachers could be included in solution, um, I think that's, that's probably the lowest hanging fruit, you know? I mean, um, Uh, I think that if you'd kind of calculate a look at who's spending the most time with, with the youth of South Africa, um, you know, it given the sort of situation at home, you know, and, and if, if, um, caregivers or work is teachers is, you know, so.

[00:24:29] Um, I think that if the department of education were willing to include, uh, trauma awareness or, or mental wellbeing, um, tools into their

teacher training, um, you know, it would be a massive advantage for young people, but, but also for teacher wellbeing, I think as well to begin to kind of understand what what they're seeing in front of them, you knew it and be able to look at kind of, uh, child behaviors, not, not as symptoms of, [00:25:00] of, you know, that being a bad child, but, but to someone who's undergoing or are experiencing, um, trauma or, or, um, you know, traumatic events at home or are, um, on the way to school. So, um, yeah. Uh, the department of education is a crucial part of the caregiving environment and potentially the child support network, uh, that's needed to, to improve wellbeing.

[00:25:27] **Luvuyo Maseko:** Um, and, and, and, and, and Vanishaa to you, Scott mentioned a little bit about the role of teachers and the department of education, and that speaks to the public sector. And I wonder from your experience, um, what roles do you think or entities and the public and private sector should have in addressing this issue.

[00:25:46] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** I want to say that I would love if exactly when he said that, you know, including wellbeing in the teacher's course so that they also understanding and they have that already, you know, on their back foot. So when they're going into [00:26:00] teaching. They are they meeting the students and exactly that they spending the most time with the youth. So they have to have that know-how. And I think even when we go into schools or when we have the teacher talks, there's so much that the teachers are unaware or not sure what to do, or even what the role is.

[00:26:19] So I think defining those roles become very important in what are those boundaries? What are those roles that you are? Like how far is too to find, when do the parents get involved in how. defining those. And I think department of educational government actually putting more infrastructure or more education or more knowledge in that space, or even psycho-social education becomes a huge part there.

[00:26:46] , You know, teaching those, those simple warning signs. Teaching, you know, what do you do when the student comes to you and tells you, you. This has happened to me at home, or, you know what I'm [00:27:00] experiencing these thoughts, these negative thoughts. What does a teacher do? What do they say? And I think when you mentioned, like, who should lead, you know, I think it's everyone.

[00:27:11] I think it's the old, like, you know, everyone needs to play their role or play the path within the space so that we're actually creating a youth person. That he's able to manage themselves and manage the stress, but knows that they can have these conversations. So I think it's so comes down to that open communication and having that knowledge play a big role.

[00:27:35] **Luvuyo Maseko:** I love that. Part of what I have I've found through my own conversations. And both of you have alluded to the issue of access is that I think we sometimes place too, too much of an emphasis on who can work in, in, in working with young people to address these issues or talking to them about their mental health.

[00:27:55] Um, do you think part of the problem is our [00:28:00] expectations? Do you think it's necessary for someone, for example, to study up until a master's level, then go do the community service for them to be able to practice within this space? Do you think there's a middle ground there and, and I'll sort of direct this to both of you and I'll start with Vanishaa.

[00:28:16] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** I mean, when you're talking about that sort of education space, you're talking about a psychologist, right. But you do have social workers. You do have registered counselors, you have, you know, different people. And I think that's also something that I actually wrote down. I was like, it's so important to know that access to treatment doesn't only mean a psychologist. You know, it doesn't only mean a psychiatrist. It means the occupational therapist. It means the social worker. It means the registered counselor. If you have to take your child there it means the educational psychologist. If the child is needing that help. So there's different, there's different needs for that child.

[00:28:57] And I think defining those needs and creating that [00:29:00] understanding of, you know, what does a psychologist do? What, what is their role?. What treatment do they actually supply versus the psychiatrist? What treatment do they supply? So I think knowing all of those also makes a very big difference in where you're going to get that treatment for their child, if they need it.

[00:29:20] **Luvuyo Maseko:** And Scott, perhaps the same question to you.

[00:29:23] **Scott Sloan:** Yeah, Luvuyo is, I mean, this is an innovation, uh, podcasts and, uh, I mean, ostensibly it's the innovation is, is, is, you know what Bertha is all a about, you know? And I think we must first say that. I think that like the prevailing infrastructure around mental health at the minute is not suitable to reach, to reach young people and in a way that, that they need to. And I think we need to look at new ways of, of approaching it, you know, and, um, I can immensely proud that the School of Hard Knocks or trying something new and something different. Um, and you know, we, we, our, our model is primarily best writers of lay counselling model. So, um, someone, a young person with youth development experience could really do you kind of 3, 6, 12 months, um, of know self-study or, or structured study. We, we kind of do both. Um, and as long as they report to register counsellor, that they, um, are able to provide that year-round, um, mentoring and, and, uh, support to young people. So we, um, yeah, our model is basically based

around, um, being able to provide kind of year-round support for about the price of two sessions with the, um, a psychotherapist or therapist in private healthcare. So, so, but R5,000 per child per year, we're [00:31:00] giving 26 sessions, um, with the lay counsellor. And if needs be, um, if, if it goes beyond their skillset, they can access our, our counsellor social worker. And then if it goes beyond their skillset, so. Uh, the healthcare system should have some funds for . So, um, I think that, um, you know, the mental health care, it doesn't have to be. Uh, expensive. Uh, I think there is an alternative or different ways of approaching it, uh, to sit, to suit the situation that we're in. I think we are one of a number of organizations to kind of going down this lay-counselling route.

[00:31:41] And I think it's something that we're trying to build a research base around. I know, I know some of our peers have already got some great research, but this, this approach, and then. I think it's, it's exactly what's what's needed. I don't think we can rely on, on, um, the kind of all the traditional structures [00:32:00] to, to solve this, these problems.

[00:32:02] **Luvuyo Maseko:** Mm Hmm. I sense there's a bit of a challenge then in, in Scott's answer. And I think the challenge is, is to, to all of us operating within the space and particularly listeners, if you have an innovative idea that can look to address the issues that we're talking about in a more equitable way.

[00:32:19] Please should shoot us an email, the whole hope here is , that we can begin to collaborate and find co-created solutions that work for our context. All too often within this space, we like to prioritize and focus on the issues. So my last question is more on a positive note and perhaps I'll start with you Vanishaa and it's. What is your hope for the future? What does your utopia look like when it comes to working with our young people?.

[00:32:45] **Vanishaa Gordhan:** We often always thinking about like, what's wrong and what are we going to do about it instead of what we think would be like the major, greatest thing in the world. And I think I would love if we were able to talk about mental health as [00:33:00] openly as we talk about anything else, you know, talk about our feelings, also, you know, teach the young people of today that, you know, it's okay to feel not ok.

[00:33:10] It's okay to reach out. It's okay. To, you know, say that I'm not having a good day or I'm not feeling well. I think that's what I would really hope that the future looks like because they are the future.

[00:33:23] **Scott Sloan:** I mean, I definitely think that echo Vanishaa's sort of, it's saying that, you know, I hope, I hope that we have a language and vocabulary that mental health is. This means that we have a supporting environment to talk about our ourselves and our feelings. It's something we can, everyone can aspire to. Um, uh, I mean, I think a great short answer would be a world or a country where, uh, you know, our rules don't have to

exist, you know? So put us out of business, you know, we would, we would need to provide, uh, the care that we, uh, that we do provide.

[00:33:58] **Luvuyo Maseko:** Thank you. Thank you [00:34:00] guys so much for, for sharing your time and your, and your, and your immense insights with us. We really do appreciate it. Thanks again to Vanishaa Gordhan, from SADAG and Scott Sloan from The School of Hard Knocks. Now it's time to move over to our positive outlook story by Simnikiwe Xanga we'll be joined by Amanda from Community Keepers.

[00:34:20] **Simnikiwe Xanga :** Thanks Luvuyo and hello to all our listeners.

Building a culture of wellbeing - especially in our youth - is critical for a thriving society. In this episode's positive outlook story, we'll be hearing from Community Keepers - an organisation whose mission it is to invest in the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of learners and their caregivers, including educators, parents and guardians. The organisation believes that as we do this, we can create supportive school communities where learning and development can prosper.

[00:34:58] Just to note to our listeners, [00:35:00] this podcast was recorded remotely and due to technical challenges at the time of recording you may notice that the audio in this segment is different from the rest of the podcast.

On that note, I'd like to welcome our guest, Amanda van der Vyver of Community Keepers. Welcome, Amanda.

Amanda, I'm so excited to have you today to be speaking to you, just jumping right into the conversation. Could you tell us about the work you're doing in school or planning to do??

[00:35:32] **Amanda van der Vyver :** Um are an NGO, we do work in 39 schools currently so we have, um, school-based office. So that means that we have an office in the 39 schools. And in these offices, we have therapists to provide psycho-social support services to our learners. and parents other caregivers, as well as the educators of that school by means of individual therapy sessions by means of some group sessions so preventative work that does not feel, um, group sessions in class.

[00:36:07] Different grades, um, as well as group therapy sessions. And then we do some training with, um, with education that would be, some staff development, um, teaching them about mental health and how to help the learners in their classrooms and how having to deal with that as well. as some sessions with parents. we will have workshops with parents on different topics. [00:36:29] so that they can also further assist their learners isn't as I would like to propose.

[00:36:34] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : It definitely sounds like very important work. And so I'm just also curious in hearing your views on. Some of the success stories that have come out of this work that community Keepers has done.

[00:36:46] **Amanda van der Vyver** : Yes. I think there are so many success stories some of us can say because we have permission to and some we can't. Um but I want to invite people to go have a look at our social media pages, we share quotes, we share stories from learners but if, I think if I have to say in general, you know, there's a theme of the success stories, is that learners have this space where they can talk they have a space where they can go. So we would hear comments by learners saying that they could talk to this, to this lady. I could talk to this auntie, um, I could talk to this teacher and they sometimes call out therapists teaches as well, um, about what was going on, um, all these seen learners or acting, asking class, and we can get them into an office and we have punching bags in our playrooms, they can punch and they can shout and they can get you that let things out instead of punching the guy next to them in class.

[00:37:45] So I think those are the success stories that people have spaces to talk and, um, process, their difficulties. We know that learners in our communities are all over the country. Um, has difficulties that they [00:38:00] experienced. Um, and, and they can come and talk about that they can get some advice, they have an ally, um, in, in the school of, of an adult who that such positive role models for them, for them as well. So we've seen learners who have been suspended over and over because of things like fighting or acting out. Yeah, stop that fighting or you see people, um, or learners maybe have difficult relationships with their parents, so they can turn to their parents and start communicating with them.

[00:38:30] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : So exciting to hear you speak about some of these platforms that young people can, uh, engage in, in, especially the spaces as you mentioned. I'd also like to hear from you what challenges are independent of your own programs, but continue to escape solutions. If you can share that with us.

[00:38:52] **Amanda van der Vyver** : I think one of the many challenges that our learners face. And I think with the Covid pandemic, we, we saw that that be something that was almost as I was, I was at was magnified. Um, some of our challenges. I think something that is still quite difficult and difficulties to get by is that there's still a stigma about, about mental health challenges. So no, nobody thinks when my child says, if my stomach hurts or I fell or i hurt my knee.

[00:39:29] but the moment when a learner says he is feeling sad or, um, somebody say that I have anxiety or they feel depressed. Um, there is kind of a awkward silence because it's something that you shouldn't speak up when

you think we would think that, you know, it's, it's 2022, um, people are more open about this but i think it is still a stigma.

[00:39:54] Um, so learners are, sometimes are afraid to come to the [00:40:00] officers because they're afraid that somebody will see them coming to our offices. Um, somebody will see that are asking for help. So this idea of, um, asking for help or coming for therapy, seeing therapists, um, makes you weak. Um, I think that is something that. So it has a long way to go.

[00:40:19] Um, to be free of that, that it's easy to say, let's go and fetch a learner from a class, um, we don't have to be afraid somebody's going to see because the learner, it doesn't want anybody to see i'm fetching them to moving towards a stage. where we can go and say say, ok it's your turn, it's your turn, because everybody comes to therapy because it's okay to ask for help. And it's okay to come to therapy.

[00:40:45] **Simnikiwe Xanga** : I'm sure this can sometimes feel like an overwhelming space to work in. Do you have anything hopeful that you'd like to share with us?

[00:40:54] **Amanda van der Vyver** : If I think, I think our hope is that learners. do [00:41:00] have voices and they are resilient, and children are, resilient. Um, and we can build resilience, it's easy to build resilience and it's easy to build self-efficacy and help learners, , be stronger. Um, help learners know that they can master the things that they are trying, build confidence. It's, it's not, it's not as difficult task. Anybody can listen to a child anybody smile, um, to a child, or help them or tell them well done. Um, and, and it's easy sometimes we have to do a lot oh, it's a big task, but it's a small, tasks, it's letting your child-like drive with you to the shop so that you can spend some time with him and ask them how their day was. It's a small thing that will build that resilience in our children so that they know that they have the skills to be the better [00:42:00] person to win over uh, um, their circumstances. Um, and I think that is, I think that is hopeful

[00:42:09] **Luvuyo Maseko**: The issues we're facing are complex, but thankfully there is hope. In the end, we believe that the effective delivery of educational and employment programmes cannot be provided in isolation. Neither can they be provided without focussing on the importance of mental health and overall well-being. Young people require more than just material or educational support, they require psychosocial development and support as well, which involves the strengthening of the 'psychosocial muscles' that are vital to human development.

[00:42:44] Thank you for tuning in to season 2 of the **Just for a change**, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship. If you're curious about what innovation is happening in Africa and the global south and who the movers and shakers behind these initiatives are, then

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