

S3. Ep 3: Substance abuse and mental health - it's okay not to be okay

Ntombini Marrengane: [00:00:00] Please note that the views shared in this podcast are reflective of a personal story and experience. Our guest and the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship are not experts in the field of mental health and substance abuse. If you or anyone you know is struggling with either or both of these things, please seek professional help. We've shared some information in the show notes that will point you in the right direction.

Reporter: Such a sad week. Uh, the news of, uh, the death of rapper, Ricardo Makhado, popularly known as Ricky Rick, just 34 years old. An extraordinary, talented, uh, musician. Uh, and we are losing so many bright lights in our entertainment industry, Khuli Roberts recently, and that of course, before that actor Patrick Shy.

Black Coffee: In our country today, more than anywhere else in the world, when you are [00:01:00] an artist, you are expected to be perfect.

Ntombini Marrengane: Your name in lights, record deals and just living your best life - sounds like the dream right? But this is just one part of the story. In more recent years the spotlight has landed on mental health and substance abuse, with more public figures and everyday citizens sharing more openly about their mental health and substance abuse struggles.

One could argue that mental health and substance abuse are less taboo topics than they may previously have been. But rising suicide rates, alcohol and other substance abuse statistics allude to the fact that taboo or not - these issues are impacting people, perhaps now more than ever. This is a heavy topic, but today I plan on sharing a story of hope with you - your story [00:02:00] doesn't have to be the same as so many others. You and your loved ones can have a different narrative.

Welcome, I am Ntombini Marrengane. In season three of the *Just for a Change* podcast I have conversations with change-makers, from South Africa and further afield. We hear from innovators, social entrepreneurs, industry leaders, activists and more about the work they do, and what makes them tick. We'll find out how they keep the fire burning when it comes to tackling some of the most - to use a systems change term - wicked problems - facing the world today. Today I am joined by South African singer-songwriter, Tshegofatso Ketshabile, known professionally as Tshego. Welcome to the show, Tshego.

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

Ntombini Marrengane: Thank you so much for joining me today, it's a real privilege to have you share your story with us, Tshego. You were born in Atlanta, Georgia in the USA and rose to prominence in 2016 after releasing your hit single 'Hennessey'. Tell me a little bit more about your early years and what shaped you?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: So I was born in Atlanta, Georgia. Um, Purely, I feel like by a coincidence or, you know, God's plan. You know, my parents were both studying, um, uh, both ordained ministers. So at the time they were studying, I, I believe it was, uh, theology, and they were working on their masters and their doctorate degrees. Um, Um, so I mean, I'm a PK/pastors kid right?

There's a lot that, there's a lot of, uh, taboo that comes with that, you know? Mm-hmm. . Um, I think, you know, what shaped my, what shaped my, my early days, um, would definitely be my parents, you know, the way in the things they instilled in me, the way they raised us. Um, my sister, myself, and my brother. You know, as they were ministers and, you [00:04:00] know, preached about, you know, the word of God and you know the Bible, as much as they did that they told us and instilled in us that, you know, there's a world outside of this Bible.

There's thinking / critical thinking that you should do by yourself, um, outside of the word of God and outside of this Bible. So I'll forever be thankful. I mean, of course there were African parents, so,

you know, stuff like tattoos and getting my my ears pierced was still a battle for me.

Ntombini Marrengane: Tshego, most pastor's kids grow up in such a rigid environment, that there's a real temptation and excitement about rebelling. Did you experience that?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: I wouldn't say excitement, You know, I think all kids go through that phase, you know what I mean? We all go through that, uh, that teenage phase where, um, it's normal to kind of question everything, you know, and not just take it at, at its face value. Um, so I think I definitely went through it.

And again, my parents definitely instilled [00:05:00] that in me, you know, Um, they would, they would press us to, to ask questions. They would press us to, you know, not just take what they told to do and just run with it. So I was naturally inquisitive. Um, I naturally questioned everything and anything that didn't make sense to me, um, uh, whether it was logically or just in my gut.

Um, so I wouldn't say. I wouldn't say I was tempted or excited too. I think it was just like the natural process of growing up, you know, and, and kind of, um, creating your own set of standards, you know, kind of creating your own path through this weird thing that we called life. You know?

Ntombini Marrengane: As you know, in this episode, we're focusing on mental health and substance abuse. Why do you think this topic is often still something that carries so much stigma?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: That's a good question. Um, I, I'm not an expert on that. I can't be an expert, but, you know, just from, just [00:06:00] from growing up myself and what my parents have told me, because, you know, again, I came, I come, I come from a very open family.

You know, uh, we, we talk, you know, we've always been pushed to talk and have these conversations. Therapy is not new to me. Um, And I think in a, and I think that's in contrast to a lot of other families. You know, I do know, you know, from what I hear from my

friends and growing up, you know, they've, they've told me, you know, what their backgrounds look like and you know how their parents will tell them that, you know, um, depression is not a real thing.

Um, you know how you should be strong and just keep moving and, you know, all these things. I think they, they kind of instil, you know, that stigma in talking out about your problem. You should be strong. You know, don't talk to people about your problems, you know, just, you know, just fight through it. Um, you'll get over it, you know, just one day at a time.

I think these, um, have all contributed to the fact that, you know, it's been stigmatized, especially in black families, you know, especially in, in [00:07:00] black families, um, where the Bible is the answer to everything, you know. Sit, sit and pray and you know, your problems will, you know, somehow disappear. So I think it, it's a lot, it is a lot to do with the parents.

I'm not gonna lie. And our parents, parents and their parents, you know, it's just this a long cycle of, um, you'll get through it, you know, everyone's going through it, you'll get through it, you know, just be strong.

Ntombini Marrengane: Yeah. I think you're right. There's definitely a generational legacy of people. Sort of not focusing on their problems and just, um, to, to use a phrase, you know, just bucking down or pulling up their socks and moving forward, regardless of whatever they might be experiencing within or in reaction to what's happening outside of themselves.

Um, and some people might not necessarily understand the link between, um, therapy and talking and being open as you just mentioned. And [00:08:00] mental health challenges and finding, finding ways to actually manage them a bit better. So it's really amazing that your parents, um, made that space for you from day one.

Um, to be able to question and to be able to talk about how you feel. Some people may not necessarily understand the link be-

tween mental health challenges and substance abuse. How do you think these two issues are linked?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Um, Again, I'm not an expert, but you know, from, you know, having multiple substances, um, around me, you know, for as long as I can remember being in this industry, um, I think it affects everyone differently for sure.

Um, um, I think if you're in a weakened, um, or not healthy mental mind state then the substance abuse is definitely going to contribute to, um, a downward, you know, cycle or, you know, even more of a depression. Um, the less understanding you have of your mental mind state, [00:09:00] I think definitely the substances has just make it, um, But harder to navigate, you know?

Um, and whatever it is, whether it is, you know, making critical decisions about, you know, um, how your day is supposed to go, or you know, what you don't want to put, involve yourself in. Um, I feel like the substances will definitely impair judgment, um, for myself. You know, I, everyone knows my story, you know, I've been, I've been an addict before.

Um, to hard substances. And, um, for me it was a little bit different because I feel like I've always been very aware of my mental state. You know, just coming from the background that I, that I came from. Um, and still in, in being very aware of my mental state, I, I still somehow found myself wound up in these substances in a way that I didn't want to be involved in and didn't understand why I was involved in them to begin with.

You know, so even from [00:10:00] me being very aware of my mental mind state and, you know, my surroundings and what it is, what my goals were, you know, what it, what it was that I didn't want to get in, um, I still somehow ended up involved in those things. Um, so I think that shows you that, you know, even with a perfect mental mind states, um, or a sober one, as soon as you start.

Involving these substances, um, you could very easily find yourself in a position that you didn't want to or imagine yourself being in.

Ntombini Marrengane: Absolutely. In a Twitter post from December, 2020, you stated that, “aA smart as I was, I made mistakes too. I was fully a drug addict when I made Hennessy. That's the song that made drugs not make sense anymore. At least I'm good with my demons. We are good friends.” Can you tell me more about this journey you took and how you reached this conclusion? Drugs don't make sense for you anymore and what it means to make friends with your demons, specifically around drug abuse?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: So, yeah. Um, I'd have to start with my sister.

My sister's [00:11:00] definitely, uh, my best friend and has been for multiple, multiple years. Um, so she calls me every day and asks me how I'm doing, you know, um, how my day's going, you know, what my challenges are, you know how I'm feeling, you know? Um, and I don't know, honestly, I don't know why she does it.

Especially around this time when I was having these, um, substance abuse problems, um, that really just kept me afloat, you know? Um, we in its own way, you know, it just kept me above my head, above water. And, um, I remember one day, um, Ricky, Rick. Um, called me and, um, I was supposed to do some work for him, but I had been delaying, you know, I've been kind of procrastinating.

Um, and he calls me one day and he is like, “Listen, boy, uh, I don't know if you, you want us to, uh, stop believing in you, but if you do, just let us know so we can stop wasting our time.” [00:12:00] And that, that really, that really like that really. I don't know what it did, but spiritually in my spirit, you know, that was the epiphany I needed.

And I, and I can tell you now, from that day, I haven't touched anything, you know, And I think, I think it was a bit of ego, um, that woke me up and said, Listen man, you've got dreams. You know, you wanna be this big superstar. You wanna be, you know, performing on, on the biggest stages you wanna have, you know, you wanna, you know, have these big interviews.

You wanna, you know, travel the world. But none of that is gonna happen if you continue down this, this, this rabbit hole of staying indoors and just, you know, abusing these substances. And in your head, you think you're doing something because you're making music all day, every day, but now you're not leaving the house.

You know, now you're not going for these interviews, now you're not doing the work, um, that's gonna get you into these places. [00:13:00] So those were the two things that, that, that kind of got me out of it. I didn't need to, luckily I didn't need to go to, to rehab, you know? Um, like I know a lot of other people do, but my dreams and the fear of not accomplishing my goals literally snapped me out of it, you know? I don't know if that answerS your question.

Ntombini Marrengane: It does. It really sounds like that was your moment of truth. Um, and that your sister in calling you every day, um, she was using the means she had available to let you know that she was there and that, um, you are loved. Right? And I think probably when we're struggling with things internally, in our own minds, our own internal dialogue, that's something that's pretty easy to forget. We can just do a lot of negative self talk. So to have someone from the outside phoning you every day and saying, We need you, we love you. Um, that's really powerful.

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Yeah. And yeah, I actually [00:14:00] never thought about it like that. That's, that I, I've never thought about it like that, but that makes sense.

Ntombini Marrengane: Yeah. Yeah. Um, and wow, Ricky, Rick, it's amazing that he could be there to deliver that home truth to you in a way that you could hear, um, Yeah, because I'm sure he wasn't the first person to say something to you, but for whatever reason,

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: I mean, he, he really, he really, he really was. He really was. Well him and him and my, him and my daughter's godfather now, Nate Thomas, who, who basically shoots all my videos right now. Um, cuz at some point I was, I was living with him, And, um, when I started down that journey, he saw it. And,

um, and he would always just like, pick on me about it. Like, you know, he just, you know, he would say mean things about it, you know, rightfully so, you know, But again, I just took it as a joke, you know, He, he said it jokingly.

Yeah. You know what I mean? So So when Ricky said it the way he said it, like, Boy, just let us know if we must stop believing in [00:15:00] you. That, that really cut me.

Ntombini Marrengane: Rapper Gigi Lamayne said this a while ago on Twitter “I recently tried to take my life. It was because of a buildup of things in my life, from society pressures to me questioning my existence. I felt like life was a lot. The cyberbullying is something I thought wasn't getting to me because I'd read things and it wouldn't get to me but I guess it went in subconsciously”. Talk to me about your experience with this and can you also touch on how you deal with bullies online?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Yo, man, that, that one is, is, is close to me too. Um, shit, I mean, I haven't used Twitter in like three years. Maybe even more. Good for you. Maybe, maybe even more. Um, you know, I just go to Twitter to post and I leave, you know, I'll go post some brand work, go post that I'm, you know, dropping something new and then I'll leave.

Um, and that also turned into me not reading my comments on, on [00:16:00] Instagram. You know, I also just post and leave and you, you find that, you know, brands, they wanna see a certain level of engagement. You know, on your social, on your social channels. Now, that also makes it hard because now to engage, you have to go into your comments and you kind of have to like, um, engage on what they're saying about you.

You know what I mean? And not everything they have to say about you is not, you know, or warranted or, you know, I understand If it was you know, Uh, constructive criticism, you know, all, all for it. Uh, but even with constructive criticism, it's, it's, it's not always necessary. You don't always wanna hear it, you know?

Um, but, but definitely Twitter, um, was the one that made me understand that, you know, it's just for my own mental health and, you know, my sanity and just like, for me, feeling good about myself every day. Um, rather, I just, you know, do not.

Ntombini Marrengane: It's not just [00:17:00] public figures who deal with stress, though life is stressful for all of us. We all experience trauma at some time. How do you think we can make the world both in person and online a safer place for people. Do you have any stress management tips that have helped you cope with life stressors? You've mentioned not reading the comments. What else is there?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: That's definitely one. Um, number two, um, find, find peace in being alone. You know, like this, that's one of my favorite things to do. Like, just be alone and, you know, not being weird or awkward, you know, in your own silence and with your own thoughts. I think once you can do that, then you know that you're, you're, you're going in the right direction.

At least, you know, I know a lot of people, when they sit with themselves, that's when you know the worst thoughts consume them. Mm. You know, and I think that's a good benchmark in being able to tell where you. Mentally with your health, you know? Um, um, but yeah, I would [00:18:00] definitely suggest that like, bless and peace and, and, and, and, and being by yourself, you know, talking and having these conversations with yourself.

Um, Um, I know people that go out to the club every weekend from Thursday to Sunday and it's not because they have money or they like doing it. They have energy though. Cause , no, they definitely have energy, but, But where's that energy coming from? The energy is coming from them not being able to be alone.

Wow. Do you understand that energy is, is, is pushing them out the door? Mm-hmm. You know, because they just cannot stand being by themselves. A lot of them are having those suicidal thoughts when they're alone. They're not having those suicidal thoughts when they're drinking and with friends. And it's always jokes, you know?

But as soon as that ends and you know, Monday comes around and those thoughts start back up. So what they look for the next, you know, the next, um, substance, you know, the next [00:19:00] event that's gonna push them out their door that, you know, is not gonna keep them by themselves. You know? So for me, that's, that's been very important.

Ntombini Marrengane: I think that's a really, really important point because what you're describing about going out to the club, or whether it's using a substance or over indulging in alcohol, those are all behaviors that are about escapism. And what you're explaining is that when you're at peace with yourself, you actually don't need to escape.

Um, Exactly, and you can, you can sit with the calm or sit with the negative thoughts and understand that it's just a thought. It's not you, it's not them. Yeah. It's a thought and it'll pass. Um, it will pass. And I think that that is a, that's a lovely place to be. Yeah. That's pretty amazing. I think , what, what I wanna know is, where does the FOMO go? Do you stop having it ?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Um, well, I don't think, well, you know, like the FOMO doesn't really go [00:20:00] anywhere. It just gets better. You know what I mean? It's, Tell me more. It's like dealing with the death. It's like dealing with the death of someone. Okay. You know what I mean? Doesn't really, it doesn't really disappear, you know?

Mm-hmm. you're gonna miss them. You're gonna, one day you're gonna wake up and miss them more than the next day, you know what I mean? Or one day you're gonna miss them a little less and be okay with missing them, you know, than other days. I, I feel like it's the same kind of, You just have to, you just kind of have to breathe through it and live through it.

And, and, and again, this is where the critical thinking comes in. It's like, Okay, cool. I wanna go out to this event, but do I wanna go out to this event because I really wanna have a good time and, you know, I wanna see my friends and be wholesome about it, or it's because I'm bored sitting at a home by myself.

You know what I mean? Or is it because these thoughts are running around in my head? You know what I mean? I mean, just this past weekend I wanted to go out, but I told myself, Listen, I've got this rule as soon as it passes a certain time and I'm still thinking about it, that means it's not worth it, [00:21:00] you know what I mean?

If I'm still, if I'm still, if it hits 9 or 10 and I'm still thinking about it, it's not. You know what I mean? It's not worth it. That means that I'm, that I'm, I'm on the fence about it because I don't really know why I want to go? You know, what's making me wanna go, you know, you, you kind of just have to ask yourself these, these, um, questions, and I mean, that, those are questions that I've, I've asked myself, me personally, I have social anxiety and people don't, people don't believe it.

Ntombini Marrengane: Yes, because you're an entertainer.

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Right? You have to entertain people about yourself. So how can you be uncomfortable with people? Tell us because my dream cuz cuz I've decided my dream and my passions are bigger than, than, you know, my fears. That's how. You know, that's, that for me, it's that simple.

It's because my dreams just the same thing that got me to stop the substance abuse is the same thing that gets me up and into that zone of [00:22:00] fear, you know, and, and, and allows me to conquer it. You know, I've got my, I've got my, you know, systems in place that help me with that. You know, people know before a show don't, don't talk to me.

Because you're not going to get, you're not gonna get a conversation outta me because I'm concentrated on this anxiety building up that I need to, you know, manage well enough for me to go on stage and, and perform my, my duties, you know, so I've got these systems in, in place, you know what I mean? So, I mean, um, if also everyone could do the same, if everyone could, you know, go to therapy and, you know, figure out what systems work for them, specifically.

You know what I mean? Because I don't think it's a, it's a one solution fits all thing at all, you know?

Ntombini Marrengane: Absolutely. And I think if we just from that point, look at, um, the numbers around people who sadly and their own lives each year, [00:23:00] According to the World Health organization, 700,000 people take their own lives every year.

And it's the fourth highest cause of death amongst people between the ages of 15 and 29 years old. And that's true. The, yeah, those statistics are astounding. Um, and it affects every part of our society. Um, you've just talked about just, just about knowing. That you can walk yourself through these steps.

And I think that that's something that particularly youth, um, struggle with, especially if they haven't had it modelled. You explained how your parents, uh, made that space for you. Um, why do you think it's so hard for others?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: You know, that's a good question, like I've been asked, but you know, I, I, I thank God every day.

I thank God every day that I have the family that I have, and that I have the parents that I have. Um, I, I, I, I'm truly definitely blessed because I [00:24:00] know my parents come from these broken homes. You know, I know my parents have experienced substance abuse in the family and, and abuse, um, and, you know, not even being raised by their own parents and having to jump from home to home and, you know, having to fend for themselves.

So you, you kind of ask yourself like, how, how have these people who have gone through so much hurt, how can they still, you know, turn around and care for others and, you know, be empathetic for others um, you know, in a way that's outside of themselves? I was talking to my therapist even, uh, when, when my session with him ended, he started sharing with me, you know, a little bit of the pain that he's gone through and how his parents are are still racist.

And, um, how when he grew up, he was trained. He was trained, um, every day - Him and his sister from the age of seven and 10, they were trained, um, for this war that they thought was [00:25:00] coming from the blacks, you know,? And how his parents, his father specifically, still every Wednesday goes and trains with his friends, you know, at a bunker that is mind blowing, black gold.

That is blowing. Wow. Wow, wow. You know what I mean? And you know, his story gets deeper. Um, and he was held hostage in Zimbabwe and, um, for a couple of like, I think he said four months in a jail cell where they held him hostage because he was trying to get supplies over the border to help , you know, so sure.

Instead, they detained him and, and three times they told him they were gonna kill him and they, and they took him out to execute him and just shot blank bullets, you know, at him you know. So three times he thought he was gonna die and still, and he's showing me the wounds of, you know, where they tortured him.

And still this human being is able to sit here and help me go through my problems that compared to his problems are nothing, You know, that, that is basically the question you just asked me. I don't know [00:26:00] how, you know, I I, and I don't know why.

Ntombini Marrengane: what I hear you saying to is that what your parents were able to do in spite of their own challenges and painful experiences but they were able to express how it made them feel and teach you and your siblings, um, some of those same tools. And it sounds like even in within a therapeutic relationship that being able to express what's going on for you already just creates the conditions for empathy. Yeah.

Research shows across the board that many young people are living in highly stressed environments with various debilitating traumas and lack of safe places where they can voice the realities they face, confined systems or people that can help them address their psychosocial challenges. It's also no secret that access is a big problem that many people face when it comes to getting help. What do you think we can do to address this? [00:27:00]

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Uh, you know what , um, Yeah, this is, And I think in a, in a, in a country like South Africa especially, you know, these concerns are, are very prevalent. You know, when you talk about access, you know, um, I think, you know, that's number one because, you know, someone in a, in a, in an abusive environment, you know, if they still had access, if they had access of some sort to information or help or felt like they could get, You know, by accessing something, um, then we'd be in a far better position than we are, and I don't know how we fix that problem.

Um, do we make our internet cheaper? Do we make our phones cheaper? Do we, um, make, um, these numbers toll free? Um, do we put more into campaigns about, you know, where to find these numbers and these people that can [00:28:00] help you for free. I don't know, because I remember my sister sending me toll free numbers. You know, at some stage,

Ntombini Marrengane: if you're listening to this and think you need help, please take a look at some free resources we've linked in the show notes. Tshego, you've talked a lot about the role your family has played in your journey. Do you have any advice for family members of those who are battling with mental health or substance abuse issues?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: You know, I think, um, number one would be to, um, to be vigilant so you can recognize these things.

Um, so you can recognize changes in someone's mood or, you know, um, even physical appearance, you know, in, in regards to substances. Um, also to, to listen. And, and not to minimize the problems that these people or whoever this person might be, whether it's your friend, family member, um, colleague, um, not to minimize the problems that they bring to you because [00:29:00] you never know, it could be out of, um, them feeling safe enough with you to tell you these things.

Or just them being desperate enough, you know, to have to tell someone, you know, before, you know, before the next option, and you never know the next option for them might be suicide. So you don't wanna be that person that wasn't there to listen, um,

wasn't taking them seriously. Um, you know, and at the end of the day, you know, dealing with, um, the passing of a, a friend, um, who took his life, um, his own life, we had multiple conversations.

You know, we had multiple conversations about, you know, the things that he was, he was going through and the, and the things that he was feeling, you know, multiple times we told him to go for therapy and to go see someone and, you know, at the same time realizing that, you know, maybe. There is nothing you can do, but I do know that I feel so much better now, [00:30:00] knowing that I was there every time to listen, every time this person picked up the phone, whether it was five or four or six in the morning or two in the morning, I picked up the phone and listened and had conversations.

Um, Knowing that I did everything that I could do to help this person, you know, um, I, I just think, you know, um, I call it spiritual fitness, you know, just to be spiritually fit, um, and to treat people with care and to treat their problems with care. So I think if we can just start there, um, then we would've solved a lot of problems.

Ntombini Marrengane: How do you think taking ownership of your challenges has helped create a different narrative in your life?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: I mean, taking ownership is responsibility. I mean, who else do you wanna be responsible for your life? I think, you know, um, every human being is responsible for their own life. Um, obviously you're responsible for the lives of the kids that you bring into this world.

And just even on a, a community basis, um, you are responsible in some way, you [00:31:00] know, for your neighbor. That's how it should be. You cannot help someone else believe if view yourself as drowning you know? So, um, definitely taking ownership of how you're feeling, when you're feeling it, what these things are that make you, um, feel this way, um, will help you be a better help to the next person.

Ntombini Marrengane: How has your creative outlet helped you in your journey towards healing?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: Wow. I think that's a big one. . I mean, I think it makes me sane, you know, period. You know, just knowing that no matter how I'm feeling, um, you know, it's weird because, you know, I'll get headaches and when I have a headache, you know, they'll tell you, you know, you shouldn't be around noisy, you know, places and what, what, what but truly, when I, I'll literally get up and go to the studio cause I know to about cure my headache and for some reason, You know what I mean?

So, um, I, I feel like it, it definitely keeps me sane through [00:32:00] my problems. You know, I lost my mom last year, mid last year. Um, I've got her picture sitting here and I've got a candle, you know, it's no problem. You know, it's life, you know, again, it's life. Um, it, it's, it's, um, yeah, I've got her picture here.

I've got a candle with a picture on it. Um, so I, I put it around, I put it around me and make sure it's around me as I create. I don't know. It just, it's, it's just like the place I know I can go and the thing I know I can do the best. Um, that's gonna make me forget about, you know, the rest of my problems without having to dive into these substances.

Ntombini Marrengane: It sounds, it sounds like it's a big part of your healing. Huge, huge part. Yeah. The title of this podcast is It's Okay Not to Be Okay. Can you share any advice from your life with listeners who might be stuck in cycles of mental health or substance abuse challenges?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: I mean, listen, it's very simple. If you are stuck. If you are stuck, it means you need to help. [00:33:00] Right, Because I mean, if you didn't need help, you'd be able to get yourself out of it, right? Um, you know, when your car gets stuck on the side of the road and you can easily change that tire, you do it. You know. But if it's not a problem that you can fix with changing that tire, um, then you're stuck.

You need to call roadside assistance so they can come with tools that you don't have, and expertise and skills that you don't have to get you moving on that road.

Ntombini Marrengane: And it's actually okay to ask for help.

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: and it's a hundred percent fine.

Ntombini Marrengane: According to a UNICEF South Africa report, more than a quarter of young people don't speak up about their mental health struggles because they don't believe it's serious enough. What would you say to these young people? Can you share a message of hope with young people who may be walking through the same struggles themselves, or perhaps even have someone close to them who is?

Tshegofatso Ketshabile: It's very simple. You know, if you, if you, if you have a destination in mind and you wanna get to this destination, it's gonna require a lot of work.

And a lot of that work is being spiritually and mentally fit, [00:34:00] you know? Um, and you have to do some type of maintenance spiritually and mentally. Um, to, to, to reach these goals. A lot of people reach these goals and end up, you know, um, not being mentally fit to handle them, um, not being mentally fit to handle the problems that come with it, you know, so sweeping it under the rug, I can guarantee you that if it's not going to rear it's, it's, it's ugly head up in your life.

Um, it's definitely going to rear its head in the relationships that you keep and even your kids. You know, so if, if you care enough for the people around you, um, then it's worth getting the help.

Ntombini Marrengane: Thank you, Tsehgo, for sharing your story with us and for inspiring hope that things can be different. Wishing you all the best in your career and in being an advocate for speaking up about these issues.

Thank you again. I've been so impacted by this episode and Tsehgo's story. If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health and/or substance abuse challenges then please reach out to someone who can help you. Often the best place is to bring those issues out into the light of day, with someone you trust. And if you are the person on the receiving end of this information,

try to offer support, not judgement by listening and pointing your friend or family member towards mental health resources.

We have collated the contact numbers and details of some organisations that offer free support for the issues spoken about in this episode. The Bertha Centre has also put together an incredible directory of support available to young people in South Africa on its website. All of these links and resources are listed in the show notes of this episode. Perhaps you'd like to take some time to save these numbers into your phone - the right response at a critical time may just save someone's life and remember that it's okay not to be okay.

And that brings us to the end of another episode. Thank you for tuning in to season 3 of the **Just for a change** podcast, powered by the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

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