

JFAC Ep 11

Waves For Change

[00:00:00] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Let's take your average weekly grocery shop. Maybe, like me, you've got kids and you know what it's like trawling the supermarket aisles looking for deals as the cost of living keeps going up. Earlier this year an IOL article documented a comparative study on how much a basic basket of groceries cost -

[00:00:20] **Ntombini Marrengane:** nothing fancy, just the regulars like bread, maize meal, milk, soap, toilet paper...that kind of thing. The cheapest basket cost R394. According to a World Bank report released in 2020 over 30 million South Africans live on R992 a month per person. A joint press release from May 2023 by a number of organisations invested in youth wellbeing states that two thirds of children in South Africa live below the upper poverty line.

[00:00:48] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You do the maths on that one. This reality is not just felt in the stomachs of families around the country but if we look through a systems lens we can see how poverty impacts communities on numerous levels.

[00:01:09] **Ntombini Marrengane:** The link between poverty and socio economic challenges such as lowered physical and mental health, poor education, gangsterism and substance abuse has been well documented.

[00:01:24] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Welcome, I am Ntombini Marrengane, host of season three of the Just for a Change podcast. If you've been following this series, you'll know that I have conversations with change-makers, from South Africa and further afield. In this episode, we're going to be hearing more about an innovative programme that makes psychosocial support more accessible to the young people who need it most.

[00:01:48] **Ntombini Marrengane:** So what is psychosocial support? According to the Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support it refers to "the process of facilitating and strengthening resilience within individuals, families and communities to recover from and adapt to critical adversities with potentially damaging long-term impacts". And We'll hear more about this shortly.

[00:02:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** But just a note before we dive into this conversation - we'd love to hear from you. Please pop us an email with your stories of

changemaking work or if there's someone you would like to suggest as a guest, let us know! You can email us at berthacentre.gsb@uct.ac.za.

[00:02:36] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Today I'm joined by a change-maker who is invested in creating waves of change for young people. Ashleigh Heese is a current Bertha scholar and is completing her MPhil in inclusive innovation through the UCT Graduate School of Business. Ashleigh is the Partnerships and Innovation Manager at Waves for Change, an international organisation that provides child-friendly mental health services to children and young people in under-resourced communities.

[00:03:05] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Let's dive right into that conversation now. Welcome, Ashleigh. Thank you so much for joining me for this episode. It's a real privilege to have you share your story with us.

Ashleigh Heese: Thank you so much for having me. I'm really excited.

Ntombini Marrengane: I'd love to hear a little bit more about what shaped you and how you found yourself working in this field.

[00:03:24] **Ashleigh Heese:** I think it's quite an ongoing collection of things and I think I'm constantly still being shaped. To be honest, I haven't found my final form yet. But one of the big factors is I come from a family of educators, a family of actually predominantly, um, kind of on the maternal sides, the grandmothers and the great grandmothers who see education as a form of social liberation.

[00:03:48] **Ashleigh Heese:** And I've just managed to kind of combine my passion for mental health with that kind of family legacy of using education as a way to bring about [00:04:00] social change.

[00:04:01] **Ntombini Marrengane:** What does a day look like for you as the partnership and innovations manager at the Waves For Change?

[00:04:07] **Ashleigh Heese:** Sometimes there's quite a lot of fires to put out, but I think another way of looking at it is there's just lots of windows of opportunity to jump through.

[00:04:14] **Ashleigh Heese:** I'm lucky to work in quite an innovative, responsive organization, so there's always something new, always something fresh, which is really cool. It usually involves either running a training or supporting someone else to run a training or planning a training or doing lots and lots of training work at the moment. It often involves about a minimum of a hundred bad ideas to find one good idea.

[00:04:39] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I really loved what you said about education being a tool for social liberation. Could you speak more about that and how it manifests itself in your work?

[00:04:47] **Ashleigh Heese:** Hmm. So I think kind of speaking to the, the family history to start at my mom, um, she worked a lot in communities like Khayelitsha and [00:05:00] Gugulethu Langa and Ocean View as a teacher from kind of a very young age.

[00:05:02] **Ashleigh Heese:** And for her it was very tied to activism working with youth. My great-grandparents started Livingston High School and that was in response to the kind of oppressive education system at the time, and they saw education as liberation was kind of their motto. While I'm not necessarily working in a quite such a political space, although I guess in some ways mental health is quite political, but I see.

[00:05:29] **Ashleigh Heese:** The role of Waves for Change, a lot of what we're focusing on is training and supporting youth from communities to provide mental health services to children and adolescents in their communities. And so our role is, uh, a kind of a support system to them involves training, education that then kind of.

[00:05:51] **Ashleigh Heese:** Builds on their existing knowledge, their existing social capital, their existing passion, and hopefully just increases their [00:06:00] autonomy and their agency to deliver services themselves.

[00:06:04] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's really, that's really amazing that they're still a living testimony to your grandparents' passion. I actually lived around the corner from Livingston High School.

Ashleigh Heese: Oh really?

[00:06:12] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Um, that's, yeah, I can attest, uh, that the legacy continues. Can you share more with us about Waves for Change and your approach to offering the psychosocial support services that your organization does?

[00:06:26] **Ashleigh Heese:** Yeah, of course. Um, so Waves For Change uses combination of access to caring adults, which are usually youth from the same communities as our participants.

[00:06:39] **Ashleigh Heese:** And we train and support those youth to provide safe spaces for children and adolescents. And part of that safe space is sport. So we use the sport of surfing and there's a lot of therapeutic outcomes that come from sports

like surfing, um, or group physical activity. [00:07:00] And so we use that kind of very powerful combination of these caring adults, these mentors who have.

[00:07:07] **Ashleigh Heese:** A foundational understanding of wellbeing and mental health. They have tools and skills that equip them to create these safe spaces and to respond to some of the wellbeing needs of the youth that they serve. And then we just have a lot of fun at the beach, and the kids have an opportunity to experience mastery, to experience respite, to experience connection. All of which are, are really essential to their health and wellbeing.

[00:07:35] **Ntombini Marrengane:** What role does belonging and connection play in offering effective psychosocial support to children and young people who access your program?

[00:07:46] **Ashleigh Heese:** In our program, we have, we've kind of identified these five, what we call our, our key pillars.

[00:07:52] **Ashleigh Heese:** The core ingredients of our program. But the biggest driver of impact and change when it comes [00:08:00] to youth development and, and youth wellbeing is connection, social connection. So, you know, when we feel that we belong, we feel safe, which allows our systems to settle, which then allows us to be more open to learning, to sharing our feelings, to exploring, uh, potential futures and feelings of hope.

[00:08:22] **Ashleigh Heese:** It just allows for a lot more. Um, and so that sense of belonging is, is really, really key to safe spaces. That's also really key to our self-concept, how we think about ourselves and how we view ourselves and our self-esteem, how we value ourselves. And then connection to a caring adult is, is one of the biggest protective factors in a youth's life.

[00:08:46] **Ashleigh Heese:** So if they're experiencing a lot of adversity or stress, access to a caring adult is really one of the things that will reduce the negative impacts of, of that adversity and [00:09:00] that stress. And our coaches, um, connect to the use and they, they provide a really important co-regulation role. So by both kind of modeling the behaviors and the skills and the tools as a way of teaching the participants.

[00:09:19] **Ashleigh Heese:** But also by creating that safe space where the participants can then learn to self-regulate themselves.

[00:09:25] **Ntombini Marrengane:** That's really important. I'm wondering, just out of curiosity, over what type of time span do these relationships between the coaches and the participants develop and the skills building?

[00:09:41] **Ashleigh Heese:** Yeah, that's a great question. Our participants are in our program for a year and they attend once a week. So once a week we'll, um, provide transport from the school. We bring them to the beach where they can access their coach and their peers and the fun of [00:10:00] surfing. And we also have a psychosocial curriculum that's full of kind of activities that's.

[00:10:05] **Ashleigh Heese:** That teach self-regulation and connection and uh, various kind of tools for wellbeing. We found through, we do a lot of different research and monitoring at our program. It's, at Waves for Change and we found through a recent study, which was a heart rate variability study, that it takes about eight weeks for the participant systems to settle.

[00:10:28] **Ashleigh Heese:** So, It's taking around eight weeks or about two months for them to feel comfortable in the space, to feel relaxed. And so really a lot of the magic starts to happen after that. Those first eight weeks are, really, well, they're pretty magical themselves, but they're really about creating safe spaces and strong connections.

[00:10:48] **Ashleigh Heese:** And after roughly eight weeks, we're starting to see, okay, that's when the participants really trust their coaches, their peers themselves in the space and then we can start to introduce some of those, [00:11:00] uh, slightly deeper skills like mindfulness or thinking about one's strengths or setting goals for the future, and that continues for the rest of the year.

[00:11:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think that's really powerful because when we think about efforts to facilitate social change a lot of times the emphasis is just counting numbers and not really looking at processes. And what you've explained is that the process is actually foundational in order for the youth or the young person participating in the program to start to reap the benefits of actually being in a longer relationship with their coach and their peers.

[00:11:39] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Why do you think innovative approaches to mental health support are important, specifically in the South African context.

[00:11:46] **Ashleigh Heese:** There just is such a huge treatment gap in the South African context. There's um, high need and very few services to meet that need. So for example, in Khayelitsha, one of the communities where we work in Cape Town, [00:12:00] there's a 92% treatment gap.

[00:12:03] **Ashleigh Heese:** So 92% of people who need access to mental health services aren't getting them. And there's a whole lot of reasons for that but there's just, there is no one service, uh, conventional or not conventional, innovative or not innovative, that can meet that need currently. And so we really, really need, in order

to increase access to mental health services, we're gonna have to broaden the type of services available.

[00:12:32] **Ashleigh Heese:** I also think that, you know, mental health is a spectrum that we're all constantly moving along and there isn't one type of prevention or promotion or intervention or treatment that's gonna meet everyone's needs, right? And I think especially when we're talking about youth, conventional approaches aren't always necessarily youth friendly.

[00:12:58] **Ashleigh Heese:** Right? And so [00:13:00] we're not anti the more conventional mental health approaches. We think they're really essential and really, really valuable. So I'm talking psychologists, psychiatrists, et cetera. That work is so needed. It just can't do it alone. Right? We, it's overburdened. And so we have to come up with, um, a whole variety of other ways to respond to the needs of our communities and, and yeah South African people.

[00:13:25] **Ashleigh Heese:** When we think about mental health at, at ways for change, We're trying also to not think about, I mean, this is obviously where there's a high need, and so a lot of energy does get focused here, but we try not to only think about the kind of pathologized approach to mental health, which really focuses on the kind of illness end of the spectrum.

[00:13:46] **Ashleigh Heese:** Um, we're trying to also think about wellbeing, like true wellbeing, which is about so much more than not just being sick, right? It's about, uh, supporting youth to be able to reach their full potential to [00:14:00] support community cohesion, um, healthy relationships, all of these things. And that also needs to be innovative, right?

[00:14:09] **Ashleigh Heese:** So if we're looking at a broader understanding of what is mental health and wellbeing and it's not just illness, it's it's kind of true wellbeing. And that's really exciting cuz there's so many innovative opportunities and ways to support youth wellbeing and really easy ways to support youth wellbeing, actually, there's some quite simple things we can do and so that's also really exciting as well.

[00:14:34] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think what you've mentioned is really important because we do kind of get distracted and focused on sort of crisis intervention instead of health promotion and wellbeing promotion, um, even in, in society in general.

[00:14:51] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Um, so making that very relatively small investment. In promotion of wellbeing [00:15:00] and habits and attitudes, we don't focus enough on promotion of wellbeing. It's all about managing crisis, and that's really

encouraging to hear that Waves for Change sees the opportunity. Um, the untapped opportunity I would argue in, in helping the next generation.

[00:15:21] **Ntombini Marrengane:** In, in the course of our talking, you've already mentioned two barriers, um, to young people accessing the support they need. You've mentioned a limited number of service providers, and you've also mentioned this focus on sort of the crisis end of the conversation. What are some of the other barriers for young people in accessing the psychosocial support that they need?

[00:15:45] **Ashleigh Heese:** Stigma is a really big one. I do think it's shifting, which is exciting, especially in the younger generations, but there is still some stigma around mental health. You know. Which kind of relates to what I was, I was saying about often conversations are about mental [00:16:00] health, lean towards conversations around mental illness and there's a lot of stigma and taboo around that.

[00:16:07] **Ashleigh Heese:** Cost. It's very, very cost prohibitive to, to access mental health services or the free services are often quite overburdened, right? Um, and again, there's not that many of them, so perhaps you have to travel far, which is again expensive. And then I think, and I, uh, I don't really know what the word is for this one.

[00:16:27] **Ashleigh Heese:** I don't know if it's, um, appropriateness or relevance or, um, desirability, but there's a lot about kind of conventional mental health services that even if they have the potential to be really beneficial, aren't very attractive to youth and potentially don't feel like something that they want to do or they feel very far removed from their lives.

[00:16:56] **Ashleigh Heese:** It can feel quite unnatural for some people to go [00:17:00] and talk to a stranger about your feelings or your deep and personal experiences. Conventional services aren't always super, um, appropriate or relevant, even if they are accessible.

[00:17:12] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think that speaks a lot to the different way that young people see challenges and see their future in our rapidly changing world. It makes a lot of sense to me that they're not as keen on perhaps traditional talk therapy treatments. Talking to a stranger, as you've said, when the world around them is so dynamic and it makes sense that actually the ways that we access these services and the ways that we support young people also need to become dynamic in order to meet them where they are.

[00:17:50] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Just a quick note for my daughter, who you may remember from episode one of season three. A reminder to all our listeners that the Bertha Centre youth portfolio [00:18:00] team has some excellent youth mental

health resources including a list of affordable and free counselling services. We've linked that in the show notes of this episode.

[00:18:14] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Now we are living in an age where young people socialize by themselves on a device, um, and the people that they're connecting with over shared interests don't necessarily reside in the same physical location. So then it's a completely digital relationship, and that is, yeah, uncharted territory. What it means in the long run.

[00:18:39] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And of course, COVID has also had its impact on the ways we think about getting together. Um, it's just not the same anymore. How has adopting a systems lens impacted the way you see the work of organizations like Waves For Change?

[00:18:56] **Ashleigh Heese:** Yeah, a lot. Uh, in ways I'm still trying to figure out,
[00:19:00] to be honest. I haven't, um, You know, quite come up the other side of it.

[00:19:04] **Ashleigh Heese:** But I think one of the, the things that I appreciate, which might sound a little bit strange, is I've really appreciated kind of recognizing that it doesn't matter how strong or not strong our program is, it doesn't act in isolation and it can't do everything and I quite appreciate the opportunities that come with seeing the limits of our work and then exploring what else is out there.

[00:19:27] **Ashleigh Heese:** So that's been one of the, the big impacts. And then another way is we have, uh, we do quite a lot of partnerships work, so we made the decision a while ago. We're not trying to grow Waves for Change, but we do feel really excited by the service. We feel really motivated that more people, more youth should have access to mental health services.

[00:19:51] **Ashleigh Heese:** And so we're trying to do a kind of scale through partnerships approach. And that's required a bit of a System's lens as well and so
[00:20:00] that's been really exciting.

[00:20:02] **Ntombini Marrengane:** I think that's really amazing. Since joining the MPhil, how has that impacted the way you see things and how were you drawn to the MPhil program at the Bertha Centre?

[00:20:15] **Ashleigh Heese:** I'm very lucky to work for a very innovative organization. I really appreciate that. I think what the MPhil is helping me do, although I. I think intentionally part of the process is kind of to rock our worlds a little bit, um, in a good way, but definitely kind of, you know, shake the solid ground that we think we're standing on.

[00:20:36] **Ashleigh Heese:** Um but I think it's, it's really helped me to structure how I think about innovation, um, and how I think about complexity and scale. And it's also just provided on a personal level this, this really strong push to, to kind of keep learning, right? And, and, um, to find that balance. Obviously, we. [00:21:00] Like I said at the beginning, we don't wanna be innovative just for innovation's sake, but to, to keep learning and, and to not kind of get to that, that stage of the life cycle where you.

[00:21:13] **Ashleigh Heese:** Get a little bit conservative and a little bit safe and, and you rest on the things that you've been doing for a long time. And

[00:21:19] **Ntombini Marrengane:** what are some of the targeted ways in which Waves for Change has applied the learning, um, from its past experiences and, and turned those into innovations?

[00:21:29] **Ashleigh Heese:** Yeah, we're, we're really honest about the, the things that we, we get wrong.

[00:21:34] **Ashleigh Heese:** It feels important, um, honest with ourselves and anyone else who will ask, really. We value learning a lot. I think some of the ways that we have always been and continue to be innovative, um, one of the things we're really strong on is evaluation and research. We're trying lots of different ways to work with different types of organizations.

[00:21:58] **Ashleigh Heese:** We've worked, [00:22:00] we've got partners, I think in about 14 different countries at the moment. We're working with lots of different types of organizations. So we're, we're, we're. We're really open, I think is the word that comes to mind. We're really open. We want to collaborate. We want to share, you know, we believe rising tide lifts or boats.

[00:22:19] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Can you share with us any stories of impact that you've seen coming out of your work recently?

[00:22:24] **Ashleigh Heese:** In general, some of the most exciting impact for me personally over the past couple of years has been really seeing our partners integrate this kind of co-created knowledge and skillset and model. Um, integrating it into their own work and then running with it.

[00:22:41] **Ashleigh Heese:** And so that's been really incredible. I think shifting mindsets has been really incredible. You know, often we, when we start a partnership or when we start with our own team, internally with our coaches, the initial conversations around mental health are, [00:23:00] they're not wrong, they're just perhaps narrow, um, unconventional.

[00:23:04] **Ashleigh Heese:** And to kind of see that shift in how we're approaching mental health and understanding mental health. Um, I find that really exciting. If you say the word mental health service to someone, I think there's quite a particular image that comes to mind potentially, you know, it's quite clinical. Maybe there's a white coat.

[00:23:25] **Ashleigh Heese:** I don't know. A lot of the spaces that I get to be in, which are incredibly evidence-based, impactful, professional, high quality mental health services. There's play, there's singing. You know, we had one of our, our, our meetups recently with our Khayelitsha network, which is 23 organizations, our Cape Town Network, sorry, it's 23 organizations working together for a year to provide mental health services.

[00:23:56] **Ashleigh Heese:** And we had one of our, we have a monthly meetup, which is just a space [00:24:00] to connect and learn and share ideas and challenges and things like that. And you know, if you say mental health training, what comes to mind might not be what happened and we were sitting in this room and I would say of the three hours that we were together, probably at least an hour was spent just song and dance.

[00:24:22] **Ashleigh Heese:** Just cultural songs, just the most amazing energy in the room. And then everyone in that room could say, this is about belonging, and belonging is essential for mental health, and it has these mental health outcomes and it da da da dah da da da. But it was also play and song and connection, and it was so human.

[00:24:42] **Ashleigh Heese:** And so that combination for me just feels, uh, so, so thrilling. Um, that it can be a space that looks like that and is evidence-based, high quality services.

[00:25:01] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You know, that's really, really exciting. So, It is exciting and these kind of rich experiences which don't fit a template of mental health services are really important for helping to shift the conversation on how we think.

[00:25:20] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Uh, About supporting youth and empowering youth. Um, you've given some great examples of impact and I just wondered if there were any challenges in this work that you would like to share with us.

[00:25:34] **Ashleigh Heese:** There's always the day-to-day realities of the nonprofit sector. I think, you know, we're, we're working with wicked problems, complex problems, and so there's a lot of challenges that come with that.

[00:25:46] **Ashleigh Heese:** I think an interesting one at the moment. Well, not just at the moment always is kind of this, um, I'm using inverted commas, but the burden of proof, right? If you're [00:26:00] gonna be innovative, you get challenged a lot to, well, not even challenged, just asked to kind of provide evidence or proof that what you're doing is working.

[00:26:10] **Ashleigh Heese:** That's good. That's right. We should, um, I'm not saying, you know, just give us money for free or, or refer us your participants for free, of course. But it's an interesting challenge to capture, right? So that, that visual that I just described about 60 people in a room and it's song and dance, and then somehow putting that in a report to funders and saying, this is an evidence-based mental health service.

[00:26:38] **Ashleigh Heese:** It's an interesting challenge to have. It's a challenge I'm very grateful that we have, because, you know, it means that there's something working. We just need to be able to, to capture it and, and tell that story.

[00:26:54] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Yeah. Storytelling is critical. Um, in this work, in the work of social impact, resilience is [00:27:00] a big theme that often comes up when talking about psychosocial support. What do you think about that and how do you see developing resilience as a key component of this work?

[00:27:10] **Ashleigh Heese:** In the early days of the program, there was sometimes language around, uh, kind of teaching resilience, not necessarily from Waves for Change, but in the space and we were always quite uncomfortable with that because we always felt like our participants were, you know, the most resilient people we know.

[00:27:25] **Ashleigh Heese:** The amount of adversity that they're experiencing, um, the level of challenges that they're dealing with, um, and yet are still. Showing up every day. Um, you know, they were teaching us about resilience, if anything. I do think though, that we can't deny that there's a huge impact on our participants when they are experiencing so much adversity.

[00:27:55] **Ashleigh Heese:** You know, if you're existing in this very [00:28:00] challenging world, it has a huge impact on your thoughts and your feelings and your behavior. There's buildup of toxic stress, which impacts your cognitive functioning. It's increased risk of noncommunicable diseases, you know, it, it goes on and on. And so what we do need to do is, is support our participants to kind of build that strong internal world that provides some tools.

[00:28:25] **Ashleigh Heese:** To deal with that adversity in a healthy way and we do need to provide them with opportunities where their systems can settle and regulate

and they have access to people who they can talk to and things like that. Um, and that's very, very essential for their health. And so that, I guess that kind of contributes towards resilience.

[00:28:49] **Ashleigh Heese:** It contributes towards health, but our participants already are very resilient. So it's, it's a, it's a weird dynamic.

[00:28:59] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Well, I think it [00:29:00] also has to do with how one defines resilience, right? Because it's not just pull up your socks and get on with it. It's the things that you, that you mentioned, it's about, um, being able to ground oneself, um, and have internal resources, um, which you tap into.

[00:29:21] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Um, Not just sort of the outward displays of resilience, you know, keep going and so on, but really finding the internal mental strength to even if one cannot overcome an immediate challenge, to find a way to not let it, um, overwhelm a person.

[00:29:44] **Ashleigh Heese:** Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. But I loved what you said about, um, you know, maybe shifting what resilience looks like. And so, you know, perhaps for our participants, yes, they are [00:30:00] already very resilient, but maybe after some time in the program for them, an extra part of resilience is being able to ask for help when they need it, which maybe they didn't do before or something like that

[00:30:10] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Or feel that they have a safe space to go and decompress even if nothing actually changes in the immediate surroundings just to have that soft spot.

[00:30:23] **Ashleigh Heese:** Yeah, it was really interesting. We do quite a lot of self-report data with our participants and we've shifted over the years what kinds of tools we do, but there used to be one where they would kind of describe emotions at the baseline, at the beginning of the program and then again later, and we'd sometimes get a lot of participants and they were kind of listing more about sadness and anger and loneliness or things like that.

[00:30:50] **Ashleigh Heese:** After being in the program for quite a while, and we, we kind of had this initial panic of, oh my God, we're making all our children really sad and angry. It really was [00:31:00] when we kind of explored deeper, was that they developed language for a variety of emotions and they felt a little bit more comfortable expressing those emotions, which for us is actually a huge, you know, obviously that's quite a big win for resilience and for psychosocial support.

[00:31:17] **Ashleigh Heese:** Um, and so again, it's, it's just interesting when we think about how are we measuring these things and, and how do we define something

like resilience? Um, maybe being able to say, wow, today I feel a bit sad. And I need some help.

[00:31:31] **Ntombini Marrengane:** No, that is massive. That is massive. Especially when a young person has not necessarily had, um, models for this kind of, um, for this kind of self-awareness and being able to verbalize and then think constructively about those feelings.

[00:31:58] **Ntombini Marrengane:** Um, it's massive. [00:32:00] It's massive because you can be angry and that anger can turn to rage, right?

Ashleigh Heese: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

Ntombini Marrengane: But if you can, if you have the wherewithal to really dig and examine and understand perhaps its sadness under that, you've, you've actually taken a massive step.

[00:32:22] **Ashleigh Heese:** Exactly. And also one of the key steps in self-regulation is self-awareness, right?

[00:32:27] **Ashleigh Heese:** So in order for anyone, I'm not even gonna pick on children for any human being to, you know, manage their emotions, they have to be able to name them, and we don't always have the space at our program to go very deep. And it's not always very appropriate when a child, you know, shares a feeling, to ask them to open up about why necessarily, but if they can name that feeling for themselves and then eventually get to the point where they feel comfortable sharing it with someone else, [00:33:00] then together we can come up with healthy ways to respond to that emotion.

[00:33:05] **Ashleigh Heese:** But that first step of being able to kind of self monitor and, and check in with oneself is, is so essential.

[00:33:14] **Ntombini Marrengane:** And I think that's part of what's so amazing about your work is that you're actually seeding change in the generation to come. What's your dream or vision for the future? How would you like to see this work grow and develop?

[00:33:29] **Ashleigh Heese:** It's gonna sound quite simple and I could, I guess I could give a, a more complex answer, but the, the kind of simple answer is just more youth led safe spaces in communities and that could look like a bunch of young men who once a week go for a walk around the block together and just check in and say, Hey, how's your week been?

[00:33:52] **Ashleigh Heese:** You know, it doesn't have to be formal or structured necessarily, although those are also great. You know, I think we all know [00:34:00] that feeling - you can be feeling really bad and then bump into someone friendly in the street and they say, "Hey, how you doing? I've missed you." And you know, it turns the day around.

[00:34:09] **Ashleigh Heese:** It's a, it's a small sentence in comparison to perhaps whatever you're dealing with, but it can make all the difference. And so I guess my, my hope, which is not super complex or grand, um, but would be that, you know, more of us are kind of acting on that awareness of how those small things can make a difference.

[00:34:28] **Ashleigh Heese:** And you know, like I said, even if it's just intentionally getting together with five people from your community and checking in on each other, then yeah, that would be really cool.

[00:34:42] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You define it quite simply, but it's actually quite a profound idea. We, we are in a way, using these methods and tools as a way to come back to our humanity.

[00:34:54] **Ntombini Marrengane:** You know, teaching young people that they matter, teaching them that their feelings are valid, [00:35:00] teaching them that they're important and others care about their wellbeing. I mean, those are some pretty profound lessons, although we might say it's just saying, "Hey, I've missed you." Um, there's a lot in there.

[00:35:16] **Ntombini Marrengane:** There's a lot in there. Thank you so much, Ashleigh, for sharing your story with us. We so appreciate it.

[00:35:23] **Ashleigh Heese:** Of course. Oh my gosh. Thank you for the opportunity. It was really wonderful.

[00:35:26] **Ntombini Marrengane:** In wrapping up this episode, we'd like to play a clip of one of the young men impacted by the Waves for Change program. I think this really does say it all.

[00:35:38] **Voice Clip:** When I was 14, the founder of Waves For Change came to my school. They were looking for children who have been exposed or were suffering with trauma and wanted to find a way to heal them. Waves For Change is a nonprofit organization that uses surfing as a tool to educate children, to [00:36:00] equip them with good decision making.

[00:36:02] **Voice Clip:** Coping skills, giving them a safe space, and also giving them better opportunities. I was one of the first ones from my community to pick up a surfboard and become a mentor. My name is Luxolo. I was born in 1997. Crime, gangsterism, violence. You grow up being exposed on it here in Khayelitsha. Children would fight like from my community and the community next to it, like they'll fight with sharp blades, pangas, and knives.

[00:36:39] **Voice Clip:** The war wasn't optional, like you weren't asked, do you wanna join or not? To protect myself, I joined the gang. When you are in gangs, you feel protected, you feel untouchable.

[00:36:55] **Voice Clip:** Waves for change said to me, the project wasn't about them. It was [00:37:00] about making me a mentor, a role model for me to then take my own breakthrough back to my community and say, me being with the kids in the ocean is the best thing they remind me when I was their age. Most of them you can see that the ocean is the only place that where they feel welcome, where they felt their sense of belonging or where they have hope

[00:37:21] **Ntombini Marrengane:** 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. If you're interested in hearing more conversations with change-makers, then make sure you subscribe to this podcast so that you don't miss any of our upcoming episodes! If you've enjoyed this content, I'd also like to invite you to rate and review it wherever you listen to your podcasts and feel free to share it with your friends, family and colleagues. Let's stay inspired and keep changing the way we're changing the world.