



Giving Youth a Second Chance in South Africa

A single mother of two, Sharon Daniels said that her teenage son's arrest in May 2003 was one of the worst days of her life.

"Police came to the door of our small cottage and arrested Delano. He looked so helpless in the handcuffs, yet so guilty. Here was the child I raised alone for sixteen years, through many hardships, having taught him all the values and morals necessary to fit into society — things like honesty, the difference between right and wrong, integrity, good manners."

Sharon was unable to persuade the victim to drop the charges. Delano had helped his friend "revenge" the owner of a bar who had refused to serve liquor to the under-age teen. So the boys broke into the tavern when it was closed and stole money from the cash register.

Delano entered a criminal rehabilitation program funded by USAID known as *Khulisa* - Zulu for "let the young child grow." *Khulisa*'s prevention and rehabilitation services steer young South Africans away from crime and target places where young people are in jeopardy of becoming hardened criminals.

The fifteen-week program emphasizes community service so the youth can pay back society. Youngsters also learn to talk about their experiences publicly as they recount their crime and what they have learned to avoid repeating their mistakes.



Photo: USAID/South Africa Reverie Zurba

Sharon and her son, Delano, are living proof that South Africa's crime problem can be reduced by youth diversion program USAID supports.

USAID is working with the South African Department of Justice and nongovernmental organizations to help reform children who take the dangerous step into crime. In its brief six-year history, more than 500 children have been diverted back into productive society by *Khulisa*.

USAID gave *Khulisa* a grant to pilot a new rehabilitation program for young offenders ages 12-18 in the Alexandra Township outside Johannesburg. The project, referred to as "New Directions," is an alternative to the formal criminal system of prison sentences. Programs are based on the principles of "restorative justice" - focusing on the mediated settlement of conflicts arising from crime and resolving underlying problems that caused the crime in the first place.

More than 80% of the participants have remained crime-free. The successful program has the capacity to handle thousands of young people and will soon branch out into several new communities.

Now that Delano has graduated from *Khulisa*'s program, his mother says, "Delano would never have learned remorse and how to take responsibility for his actions, even when making a wrong decision." Delano has decided he'd like to be a film-maker. Delano says his first offense against the law will likely be his last. He has changed his attitude and started a new way of life.

South Africa has more than 50,000 offenders between the ages of 12-25. The repeat offences rate is exceptionally high, with an estimated 85% of the released offenders relapsing into crime within six months of release. However, this downward spiral is being reversed through *Khulisa*'s outreach to young people. Hostility and contempt are being replaced with respect for the law of the land and human rights.

