

CHILD ABUSE FIGURES NOT ACCURATE

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The scourge of child abuse and the number of children who go missing is feared to be far greater in the province than official records show. Since late last year, 125 cases of child abuse have been documented by the department of social development. It is feared this is only a fraction of all incidents.

“The problem is that most incidents are not reported,” said the department’s spokesperson, Ipeleng Morake.

“Not all people come forward to report cases that involve the abuse of children and we believe that the problem is deeper than what we are actually exposed to.

“That is one of the ongoing challenges we are faced with.”

Social development MEC Sisi Ntombela has reiterated her call to communities across South Africa to treat every child as one of their own.

“That is how we can fight this scourge, if we all come together for the interest of the child,” she said.

Ntombela made her call during Child Protection Week. She will launch the province’s programme in Ficksburg today.

Morake said Ficksburg was chosen because of its spate of cases of missing children and cross-border trafficking into neighbouring Lesotho.

Childline in Bloemfontein said another area that experienced a high number of missing children was Bloemfontein.

Morake said there was an acute shortage of social workers in the province, as there was nationally, and that programmes such as Masupatsela had helped lift the burden.

The Masupatsela Youth Pioneer Programme is a nationwide Department of Social Development initiative that recruits, trains and absorbs the unemployed and out-of-school youth of South Africa.

In the Free State, the youngsters do door-to-door campaigns and profile households, report suspected cases of domestic abuse and help with poverty alleviation programmes.

“Because we do not have enough social workers, the Masupatsela youth continue to be our foot soldiers in our communities,” said Morake.

She said 38 social work graduates from the University of Free State were employed by the department in March.

“We continue to appeal to all social workers to go to their nearest social development office because we really need their skills,” she said.

Child Protection Week takes place from May 30 to June 4 to raise awareness about the need to protect children against any form of abuse.

Bathabile Dlamini, Minister of Social Development in statement this week Families and communities are the first line of response. The aim of the Child Protection Week campaign is to strengthen families and communities to play a role in identifying children need support earlier and linking them with appropriate services provided by government and community based organisations,” said .

The department said other activities to take place during Child Protection Week and beyond included the launch of the Early Childhood Development campaign, to be held today at KwaMhlanga in Mpumalanga; the launch of a children services directory in Durban tomorrow; commemoration of International Day for Families to be celebrated in Mthatha, Eastern Cape on Friday; as well as the commemoration of International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking, event to take place on June 26 at Sasolburg in Free State.

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