

child rights

in focus

Research • Advocacy • Education

NEWSLETTER OF THE CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE • Issue Number 2 • November 2004

DIKWANKWETLA in Parliament!

By Namhla Mniki, HIV/AIDS Programme

In a ground-breaking exercise of children's participation in government policy-making, members of *Dikwankwetla – Children in Action* made presentations to members of Parliament in August. The event was the first public hearings on the Children's Bill, which is aimed at comprehensively addressing the needs of South African children.

Dikwankwetla is a group of 12 children who spent months learning about the Children's Bill to be able to tell members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Social Development and other duty-bearers what they liked and did not like about the Bill. The children related their experiences in an amazing display of bravery, asking that concrete measures be put in place to improve the lives of all children in South Africa.

They started their presentation by commenting on a range of socio-economic and political rights that they wanted to be included in the Children's Bill. One of them – Nkosi - stated, "I believe that we are free because we have rights – good rights!"

They also spoke about the need to protect children from abuse and neglect. Rebecca explained, "We know children who are beaten with broomsticks when they do not finish all the jobs they have... We do not think that this is right... We think that it is abuse..." They recommended increased awareness about child abuse, that abused children have access to counselling, and that child abuse perpetrators are removed from their homes and jailed.

Another child, Rebza, raised concerns about parents who neglect their children. She explained that she is taking care of her younger siblings with the help of her grandmother as a result of her mother's neglect. "This affects me mentally. I cannot cope with my school, and I don't have enough time to rest."

Other issues that *Dikwankwetla* raised included access to food, shelter and education. Kurt, in closing, stated, "we know that when it comes to children, you are not just members of Parliament; you are also mothers and fathers. We hope that you will act on what we are saying... because you are the ones who have power to determine the fate of this nation".

While members of Parliament were impressed with the children's contribution, they seemed amazed that the children were so articulate. Members of *Dikwankwetla* were excited by the experience; however some wondered whether the disbelief that was shown by members of Parliament suggested that children's ability to participate fully in such proceedings were undermined.

Dikwankwetla will take part in next year's further submissions and hearings on the Children's Bill, while they continue to talk to their communities and decision-makers about children's rights and the Children's Bill.

[back to contents page](#)



children's
institute

child rights in focus
Research • Advocacy • Education

The Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, aims to contribute to policies, laws and interventions, that promote equality and realise the rights and improve the conditions of all children in South Africa, through research, advocacy, education and technical support.



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

©2002-2004 Children's Institute, University of Cape Town