

CMR GAUTENG-OOS

Verwaarlosing styg tydens pandemie

Die dogtertjie word opgemerk waar sy op 'n swart sak langs 'n ry asblikke in 'n stegie lê en slaap. Sy is omtrent drie jaar oud. Langs haar is 'n plastiekbottel met loutwarm water. Mense wat haar opgemerk het, probeer uitvind wat haar naam is, hoe sy daar gekom het, wie haar daar gelos het. Of sy weet waar haar huis is.

Teen die tyd wat 'n maatskaplike werker op die toneel is, het die kind se oppasser uit die nabygeleë winkelsentrum gekom en verduidelik dat sy nêrens het om die kind te los terwyl sy werk nie. Daar moes opgetree word om te verseker dat die dogtertjie veilig sou wees en versorg word.

Kinderverwaarlosing is 'n kriminele oortreding volgens die Kinderwet 38 van 2005. Volgens dié Wet het alle kinders die reg op beskerming, veilige behuising, mediese sorg, kos en klere. Dit is die ouers se verantwoordelikheid. En in gevalle waar die ouers afwesig is, of nie na die kinders kan omsien nie, staan maatskaplike werkers in om sulke kinders, onder gesag van die Kinderhof, te kan ondersteun.

Henda van der Merwe, direkteur van CMR Gauteng-Oos, verduidelik : “Daar word gekyk na die kind en die gesin se omstandighede en altyd gepoog om 'n kind by 'n familielid of in 'n ander veilige plek te plaas om na hom/haar om te sien. Maar terwyl ons na die praktiese omstandighede omsien, moet ons bedag wees daarop dat kinders ernstige emosionele trauma ervaar as hul verwaarloos word.”

En trauma wat vroeg ervaar word, selfs in geringe graad, werk deur na komplekse trauma wat as volwassenes deurlopend 'n rol in mense se lewens speel.

“Van die vroegste tekens by kinders is gedragsprobleme, leerprobleme, en aandagspantekorte. Langertermynprobleme, wat tot in volwassenheid hul plekke in mense se lewens staanmaak, sluit emosionele probleme in soos byvoorbeeld die onvermoë om ander mense te vertrou. Dit kan jaloesie, paranoïese wantroue, selfs ernstige geestesgesondheidsprobleme soos depressie of angsvorstuurings tot gevolg hê.

“'n Kind wat verwaarloos word, begin glo dat die lewe lyk soos sy dit ervaar. Vanuit die oogpunt waar sy op 'n swart sak lê en wag vir die dag om verby te gaan. Vroeë kindontwikkeling speel nie 'n rol in haar lewe nie. Sy bestaan maar net,” benadruk van der Merwe.

Van der Merwe sê maatskaplike werkers kom elke dag met dié soort realiteite in aanraking. “Daar is gevalle van kinders wat op ouderdom ses nog nooit gekookte kos gehad het nie, hul is op brood en worsies grootgemaak. Wanvoeding is die gevolg en hul tandjies vrot letterlik uit hul monde. En dit kom oral voor, dis glad nie kultuurgroepgebonde nie.

“As 'n Kinder- en Gesinsorganisasie met statutêre magte, doen ons wat ons kan. Maar langtermyn emosionele skade wat op 'n vroeë tyd in 'n kind se lewe inslaan, verg groter insette.”

CMR Gauteng-Oos se 13 kantore in Pretoria reik jaarliks na meer as 27 000 mense uit.

14 Februarie 2022

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Child neglect increases during the pandemic

The little girl is noticed where she is sleeping on a black refuse bag next to a row of dirt bins in an alley. She is about three years old. Next to her is a plastic bottle with lukewarm water. People who found her tried to find out what her name is, who left her there, if she knows where her home is.

By the time the social worker was on the scene, the child's caregiver had come from the nearby shopping centre and explained that she had nowhere to leave the child while she was at work. Steps had to be taken to ensure that the child would be safe and cared for.

Child neglect is a criminal offence according to the Children's Act 38 of 2005. According to this law all children have the right to protection, safe housing, medical care, clothing and food. This is the parents' responsibility. In cases where the parents are absent, or unable to care for the children, social workers step in to support such children, under the authority of the Children's Court. Henda van der Merwe, director of CMR Gauteng-Oos, explains: "We assess the child and family's situation and always try to place a child with a family member or otherwise in a safe place. But while we can help with practical details, we have to remember that a child suffers serious emotional trauma if she is neglected."

And trauma experienced early in life, even to a light degree, becomes complex trauma which continues to play a role into adulthood.

"The earliest signs in children are behavioural problems, learning difficulties, and attention span deficits. Long term problems, which can take hold in a person's life, includes emotional problems like the inability to trust people. It can lead to uncontrolled jealousy, paranoid distrust, even more serious mental health problems like depression or anxiety disorder.

"A neglected child starts believing that life looks the way she is experiencing it. From the vantage point of lying on the ground on a black bag waiting for the day to pass. Early child development plays no role in her life, she merely exists," van der Merwe stresses.

Van der Merwe says social workers are faced with these realities every day. "We have had cases of children who, at the age of six, had not seen cooked food, since they have been brought up on a daily diet of bread and red sausages. Malnutrition is the result, and their teeth literally rot from their mouths. And this we see everywhere, not just in certain areas.

"As a Child and Family Organisation with statutory powers, we do what we can. But long-term emotional trauma which starts early in a child's life, demands more specialised input.

CMR Gauteng-Oos operates from 13 satellite offices across Pretoria and reaches more than 27 000 people annually.

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