



Anna Baron (45 years)

## “They promise *takkies* and Billabong t-shirts”

I grew up in Ceres, a small village near Worcester. I was the only child. I grew up with my mother. I came to Cape Town in 1983. I was seventeen years old. I had a baby at that time, a son. He was twenty-four years old when he died. He committed suicide. He hung himself. It was too much for him. There was a time when he was on drugs and he had a girlfriend but she broke up with him. He was a very sensitive person. He was on Mandrax. I think he started when he was eighteen years old. In that time I started working in the community, helping children who were starting doing drugs, and now my own child fell victim to that. I couldn't understand because he grew up in a very spiritual house. He was happy in school. I think it was friends that influenced him.

My mother found him. He sent my mother to the shop and when she came back he was hanging there. I was at work at the time, they phoned me. It was a shock for me. But at that time I didn't realize it, because I had to arrange everything for the funeral. Six months later I realized what had happened. At that time I felt very depressed.

I did get support from the community. Especially New World Foundation was there for me. I did counseling and training. I started with a women's group. The life skills training really inspired me. It inspired me to start a women's group. We called ourselves “Women of Purpose”. We were doing workshops and different trainings and support groups. One of the ladies, she lost her son in the gang violence, so we had a bereavement support group. I coordinated that group for the organization “Women Circle”. I had a soup kitchen as well, at my home. We would do it for the children.

When I started the training at New World Foundation, I realized there is still light at the end of the tunnel, when you want to study. That really made an impact on me. I want to study community development. I learned that we women can reach a goal, that we can achieve something in life. That's why I'm still busy now with my matric. Three years ago I took a friend of mine to the University of the Western Cape. She's going to finish her nursing training. She's in her fourth year now. I like to empower women. I know there is hope. I want to study counseling too. That is really a need in our communities. There's a lot of mothers with their children on drugs. My dream is to uplift the community. I want to show people that we can rise above our circumstances. We can inspire our children.

I'm a survivor of cancer. Last year March I found out, when I was doing my computer course at

New World Foundation. The doctors diagnosed me with breast cancer. It was hectic. But I stay positive. Breast cancer is not a death sentence. There is hope. Women are strong. After my operation, when they took my breast, I was thinking, now I'm gonna stop working in the community. But this is my passion, just to reach out to the people in our community.

### *"Three times they tried to kill him"*

My son was a very positive person. His dream was to go study further. When I started with the community work, he told me that one day we are gonna open up a children's home. Every year I give the children out of my pocket, I give them a party, we have a jumping castle and they play. Before he died, he had that dream of opening up a children's home.

It was mainly the drugs that affected him. The fact that he grew up without a father too. So he had low self-esteem. In our community, the gangsters, they call it tax. He worked in Cape Town in a hotel, but in our community the youngsters who do not work are very jealous. They taxed him, he must pay them. They take his clothes and his *takkies* (sneakers). They like the brand, the names. He said to me, there's no use to live anymore, because every time they hit me. Three times they tried to kill him.

I know who these gangsters were, because some of his friends they wanted to take revenge. But I said no, you are not gonna bring my son back by doing that. I forgave them. I made peace with it. I still show my love to them, some of them are also on drugs. God healed me from all that pain. There's times I miss him. My son always encouraged me to go on with the community work, to reach out for other people.

I knew it was gonna happen, I got dreams about his funeral. He also dreamt that he stood on his own grave. He warned us he was not going to be with us at Christmas... It happened to him, I think there was nothing to prevent it. If he didn't commit suicide they would have killed him. I really don't understand this, but there is jealousy. If he got a job, he gave it his all. He liked to work. The other youngsters don't like to work. They called him names. His friends were also not working. He was different. Still, his friends are on drugs. Some say to me, there's no future for them. Some of them in their houses there's no food. They think to join a gang is the right thing because the gang leaders make a lot of promises to them. They promise *takkies* and Billabong t-shirts. They said they feel good with their gang friends doing drugs. Some of their mothers and fathers is on *tik*. Even some of the grannies is on drugs. It's very bad in our communities.

The gang violence and drugs are the biggest challenges in the community. But if we can reach out to the community we can make a difference. We need to tell the youth there is hope and there is a future for them.

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**Anna Baron** works as a volunteer at the Village Care Centre where she is a HIV/Aids facilitator ("Storyteller") and a child care worker (after-care). The HIV/Aids facilitation consists of health talks, craft work and sowing workshops, accessible for both women and men.