



Karen Doralingo (39 years)

“My husband gives me hope”

I grew up in Retreat. My mother moved with us to Lavender Hill when I was ten or twelve. We are five sisters. I was well behaved but naughty as a child, I liked to go places. I liked the outdoor life - discos and places like that. I dropped out in grade 10. I started working in Steenberg, in a factory. I liked to go to work, it was nice for me to go to work, because I know I would help with the income in the house, there was no father in the house.

I've got a good relationship with my mother. We are actually like sisters. We can talk about anything. I can say I have a happy marriage. But how can I say... Maybe it's because both of us is at home and there is no income. But we are fifteen years married now. Last year I did contract work for the counsel. I'm going to sign my new contract next month. I'm also working when there's elections. Whenever there's elections they appoint me as the deputy presiding officer.

I like to take on challenges, it doesn't matter what, I'm always available to take on that challenge. If I take something on I never leave it. The most challenging thing was when my husband asked me to marry him. As a young girl I never wanted to get married. But when he asked me, I thought, there is at least one man that wants me. I wasn't marriage material. I was a person that likes to do stuff, go out. My heart wasn't into men. My first child I got when I was twenty-seven. I was staying in Stellenbosh at the time. I came home to my mother for a weekend with two friends. He used to come in by my mother's but he didn't know me. Then he saw me and that's how it started. I'm very much in love with him.

“They put *tik* in their wine”

It affected me when my friend got raped. I was so shocked. She was gone for a day and then her mother went looking for her. When they brought her home she was in a car and we thought it was gangsters but actually it was the police. They told us what happened to her. She was abducted. She was twenty. It did affect her a great deal because she was so afraid to get out of the house and didn't want to talk after that. I had to get help for her. It traumatized her mother as well. It's not something that you expect will happen to you and your family. She went to a friend that day, together with another girl. They passed some gangsters that were sitting there, but they didn't know it was gangsters. These guys took them to a place there at the back of the area and drugged them. They put *tik* in their wine. The girl wanted to go to the toilet and they kept my friend in case she didn't get back. But she didn't get back. They took my friend to a

bush and they raped her. The one guy left and she walked passed my house but she couldn't scream because he had a gun and told her he would kill her. He walked with her the whole night, they got on a train, she couldn't even ask the people in the train for help because she was so scared for her and these people's life. She said she wanted to go to the toilet when they were at Sea Point. There was a lady in the toilet, she told her what happened. That lady took her to a *bakkie* (four-wheel-drive) and asked to take her to Woodstock police station.

It affected me a great deal, because wherever help was needed I needed to be there, to relieve my friend's mother. I'm the only one that is taking them to go places and doing things for them. I had to go to Woodstock to take my friend for counseling. I had to leave my family behind to be with her.

She's got a boyfriend now. She had a boyfriend first but every time she comes to him she cries. He came to me and her mother and asked us what is going on with her, but we felt it was her responsibility to tell him. Eventually she talked to him, he's still by her and supports her. I think it's best for her to get a job. Since that time she was also on *tik*. She's finished now with it. I think she could have done something to prevent it, her mother told her so often she mustn't walk with that girl. I didn't even know she went for a walk and normally she doesn't go to that side of the field. It was just so sad that her friend didn't come and tell us when she escaped. They are still friends today...

The guy who raped her, he did get arrested. They finally arrested him; they actually were looking for him for a murder case. But some time ago the inspector came to our house and he said he's out on bail. Every time there's a knock on the door my friend thinks it's him and she locks herself in the toilet. She thinks he's coming after her. I don't understand how they can let him out on bail without him even appearing in court.

"I'm a women's group on my own"

I'm doing community work; I'm helping people that's got the same problem as hers. Taking them for counseling. There's a lot of people who come to me with problems. It's for eight or nine years that I'm doing that. Actually I'm a women's group on my own. I got a lot of stuff that I'm doing. I don't get paid for it, that's the saddest part of it. Everywhere I must go, I must lend or somebody must give some money. Every year I give a small party for some children but this year it's a bit difficult because there is no money from my side.

I like helping other people. It's very nice that the people in the community look up to me as a community worker. Actually I was just sitting at home one day, I used to live in the squatter camp and one lady came up to me and asked me why are you sitting like that you can start something. We started a women's group, but that didn't work out for them. Since then I'm doing it all on my own. Then I decided I wanted to do all the courses at New World Foundation. I want to open a crèche next year. I got my constitution and I registered for my crèche. Next year I want to open.

I never lose hope. My husband gives me hope. He's always supporting me in what I do although he knows I don't get a wage for it. He's a great inspiration for me. He lets me actually go on, when I feel so tired, the people that come to our door, he still says, no, come in, she's inside. Whenever I come home the place is clean. The only thing that he won't do is wash up. He irons his own clothes. He's doing his needlework. His mother says when he was in her house he also used to do all of that. He sees to the children and makes sure that they eat. When I'm sick I've got no problem. He will take care of it. That is actually the one thing that I like. This morning also, when I came home my place was clean so I just have to make the food. I do think some women are jealous. I can't lie about what my husband do or don't do so you can see some of them are jealous.

I do feel lonely with no colleagues, but actually I love working on my own. Sometimes people come to you and they trust you, that's why I like to be alone. It's mostly about the children that don't want to go to school and housing that they come to me. Then there's some people that come to me because of violence. The gang violence and house breaking is the biggest problem in the community. And drugs. Drugs is the most important thing that is so high in this place.

My point is don't let people get you down. If you have a goal in life, go for it. Don't let other people get you down and try to work as a community. Stay together, stick together. If we don't stand together there's not a positive future. I don't see a lot of people standing together. It's no use we go march together against gangsterism for example and after that we don't stand together.

Karen Doralingo is a community worker (voluntary). She's also involved in the Women's League of Cuba Heights and would like to be monitoring women's issues in parliament some day. Karen is planning to open up a crèche for community children in 2012.