



MEC Faith Mazibuko warning children about substances and their negative impact in their lives

Reclaiming Freedom: Why Saying NO to Substance Abuse is a YES to Life

On a cold winter evening, scantily dressed, hungry, and sickly, Tumelo uses her last bit of money to buy drugs. With trembling hands, she receives the ‘stuff’ from a dealer and heads home to a place with no food, where her six-year-old daughter waits wrapped in a blanket, there is no electricity to power the heater because Tumelo did not buy any. School fees are gone, grocery money is gone, and along with them, her dignity. One fateful morning, staring at her reflec-

tion in a shattered mirror, she recalls the countless messages and advertisements urging her to stop substance abuse. In that moment, she decides: “Enough is enough.” Today, Tumelo is four years sober proof that breaking free from addiction is possible. The battle begins with a choice.

This is not an isolated story. Substance abuse affects many across our nation, trapping individuals in its relentless grip.

Unfortunately, South Africa faces a serious challenge with alcohol and drug

abuse. In 2022, Harm Reduction International’s Global State of Harm Reduction report identified South Africa as one of the world’s largest methamphetamine markets.

Substances Don’t Give, They Take Away

Addiction is a relentless adversary, affecting millions of lives worldwide. It does not discriminate, it can touch anyone, regardless of age, gender, or social standing. The consequences are devastating, not just for individuals but for the country as a whole.



Substance abuse places a significant financial strain on the South African economy. Nearly 20% of South Africans, or one in five adults, abuse mind-altering substances, with alcohol, painkillers (codeine), cocaine, and dagga being the most prevalent. A study published by the South African Medical Journal (SAMJ) in 2014 estimated that alcohol abuse alone costs the country up to 10% of its Gross

Domestic Product (GDP), as much as R37.9 billion annually, in lost productivity, healthcare expenses, and alcohol-related crime. Addressing substance abuse is not just about individual recovery; it is about reclaiming the economic and social well-being of our communities.

Looking at this background, it is clear that we have many likes of Tumelo in

our midst, who, if we turn the corner, not only will we change their lives for the better, but restore losses incurred through substance abuse

To combat this crisis, the Gauteng Department of Social Development (GDSD), along with its partners, has implemented a comprehensive approach that includes law enforcement, awareness campaigns, prevention efforts, early intervention, community-based in-patient and out-patient rehabilitation, aftercare services, skills development, and long-term recovery support.

Ke Moja – I Am Fine Without Drugs

MEC Faith Mazibuko is spearheading Ke Moja Fridays, a mass mobilisation campaign held weekly to combat substance abuse and provide hope, support, and strength to those battling addiction. Research suggests that courage plays a crucial role in overcoming addiction, and the Ke Moja campaign fosters this resilience by reaching communities consistently.



To further strengthen the fight against substance abuse, the Gauteng Department of Social Development is utilizing radio, print, and social media to engage the public. These efforts aim to reach more individuals like Tumelo, offering them a lifeline and an opportunity to escape addiction's grip.

Help Is at Hand

Gauteng is battling addiction to various substances, including crystal meth, nyaope, dagga, CAT, alcohol, heroin, mandrax, cocaine, methamphetamine, khat, and over-the-counter medications such as codeine. Despite the widespread prevalence, recovery is possible. Through GDSD-supported rehabilitation centres, individuals can access in-patient or out-patient ser-

vices, followed by aftercare and half-way house assistance.

In addition to treatment, GDSD offers free, accredited skills development training to help recovering substance users reintegrate into society and build sustainable futures. The holistic treatment services available include detoxification, occupational therapy, spiritual guidance, recreational activities, and therapeutic interventions such as individual therapy, family therapy, couples therapy, and in-patient group therapy.

Empowering Recovery Through Skills Development

To support long-term recovery, GDSD prioritises skills development programmes that empower youth and re-

habilitate individuals recovering from Substance Use Disorder (SUD). Key initiatives include:

- Accredited training programmes designed to equip beneficiaries with marketable skills and facilitate their reintegration into the economy through job placements or entrepreneurship.
- Accelerated skills development programmes in various trades, including bricklaying, electrical work, plumbing, carpentry, welding, water and waste management, ICT systems, hair and beauty, hotel and catering, food management, and waste management.
- There are 4 Centres of Excellence in Gauteng, focusing on skills development and social reintegration.



as a means of gaining social acceptance. GDSD is committed to educating youth that saying no to drugs is not only smart but empowering. It is cool to say no to substance, it is cool to avoid harming yourself, it is cool to choose freedom than addiction, it is cool to choose better future than tomorrows filled with shame, regrets, self-blame, hopelessness and dependence on others for survival. So, the first step of avoiding addiction, is not trying substances at all. Choosing freedom over addiction means choosing a future free from regret, dependence, and lost opportunities.

Adolescence is a crucial stage of brain development, and substance use can have long-term negative effects on cognitive function and decision-making. Government efforts are focused on prevention and education to ensure young people are equipped with the knowledge and resilience needed to resist substance use disorder.

Restoring Hope

Many individuals struggling with addiction also face underlying mental health issues. Substance abuse treatment centres offer dual-diagnosis care, addressing both addiction and co-occurring mental health conditions.

Recovery is not just about quitting drugs or alcohol it is about rediscovering life's beauty and purpose. Treatment centres provide skill-building, relapse prevention strategies, and long-term support to help individuals reintegrate into society as healthier, more fulfilled individuals.

When one person overcomes addiction, the benefits extend far beyond themselves. Families heal, relationships mend, and communities grow stronger. Tumelo's story is a testament to this: her bond with her daughter has been restored, and with new skills and opportunities, she is building a better future.

If you or someone you know is struggling with substance abuse, do not lose hope. A simple visit to any office of the Department of Social Development could be the first step toward transformation. Another option is to call the Gauteng Anti-Substance Abuse helpline at 0800 22 88 27. Help is available, and recovery is within reach.

Substance abuse steals potential, but through collective action, by individuals, families, and communities, we can rebuild lives and create a society free from addiction. With all hands on deck, we can overcome substance abuse together.