

Rapcan



Going above and beyond legislation

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Laws are not enough to protect children and should not be used as a primary barometer of how effective a country is in securing the rights of its most vulnerable citizens.

Samantha Waterhouse, the advocacy manager at Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN), says one should turn to grassroots evidence to verify whether children are protected.

"We do not measure success by the number of laws passed alone but rather when all South African children have equal access to the protections and services contained within the legislation," says Waterhouse.

"In spite of significant improvements in policy and legislation, access to justice or even basic protection continues to be a lottery for South African children. Some children receive effective services while the rights of many others are unprotected or further violated."

Waterhouse says that government officials have a "poor understanding of the particular needs and experiences of children in these contexts".

"Government funding to imple-

ment appropriate programmes is insufficient and poorly prioritised and the workforce to enable the legislation is overburdened. RAPCAN continues to invest in research and advocacy to strengthen the implementation of policy and legislation," she says.

"Investment in prevention will have long-term impact on the realisation of children's rights and on building a safer society for children and adults. It is crucial to us to seek to shift policy and spending away from reaction alone, towards broad-scale programmes that promote pro-



Supporting a child during a court case

tection and resilience in society."

RAPCAN has been involved in law reform in relation to the Children's Act, Sexual Offences legislation, the Child Justice Act, Education Laws amendments and the Films and Publications legislation.

Waterhouse says its efforts were evidenced in legislative provisions "such as increased access to protective measures for children in court and prevention provisions in the Children's Act".

"At a policy level, research and advocacy has resulted in a strategic shift in government towards special-

ised policing services and co-ordinated action to prevent children's involvement in gangs and violence. We also promote a child rights focus in any policy or legislation that affects the lives of children," she says.

Waterhouse says RAPCAN's advocacy programme focuses on:

- Children's rights to be free from all forms of violence including sexual, physical and emotional abuse linked to their right to child protection; and

- Children's rights to citizenship and participation in all matters affecting them and addresses these

rights within the socio-economic context.

"Our advocacy is largely in alliances, coalitions and networks to extend our impact. We take a research-based approach to ensure that our position is grounded in the reality of children's experiences and that solutions recommended are evidence-based," adds Waterhouse.

"We seek to strengthen children's rights in general and specifically child protection and access to justice at local level through engagement with various branches and levels of government."