



Best practices at the Mangaung One Stop Child Justice Centre

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South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in June 1995. After this ratification the South African Law Reform Commission (SALRC) undertook an investigation into child justice in South Africa to inform legislation and practice that would uphold the CRC as well as the Constitution of South Africa. The SALRC undertook the process of developing the Child Justice Bill for South Africa. This bill was introduced in parliament in August 2002 and in February 2003 the first public hearings took place. Many stakeholders from various departments presented their input into this Bill.

One of the provisions of the Child Justice Bill (section 89) is for the establishment and maintenance of “One-Stop Child Justice Centres”. The Mangaung One-Stop Child Justice Centre (from here on “the Centre”) was opened as a pilot project in May 2002. There are currently a number of One-Stop Child Justice Centres in South Africa.¹ The aim of the Centres is to have all the role players in the child justice system gathered together under one roof. It is envisaged that more of these Centres will be established once the new Child Justice Bill comes into operation in April 2010.

There are police, probation officers,² assistant probation officers, a legal adviser, a representative of a non-governmental organisation, and court personnel at the Mangaung One-Stop Child Justice Centre in Bloemfontein. There is office space for all the personnel, a reception area, a police station, holding facilities, consultation rooms, a conference room and a dedicated court room, all under one roof. There is also a secure-care facility on the same premises.

The Centre won a United Nations award for best practices in 2008. The Centre is also currently applying provisions of the new Child Justice Bill, as far as possible within the current legislation. However, the Centre is currently piloting the proposed preliminary inquiry process which is not contained in any current legislation. The piloting of the preliminary inquiry process is done with the permission of the Justice Parliamentary Portfolio Committee.

According to the chief probation officer, the main objectives of the Centre are (Du Plessis, 2009):

- Provision of a child-friendly and a rights-based service
- Prevent unnecessary detention
- Increase early intervention programs
- Involvement of parents
- Involvement of prevention services

¹ Mangaung One Stop in Bloemfontein in the Free State and Nerina in Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape.

² Registered Social workers



- Act as a training centre
- Provision of developmental programs

In this paper attention will be given to these objectives through the discussion of the processes followed, the role and tasks of the staff, and diversion programmes as the vehicle of the implementation of restorative processes. Consequently, the best practices applied at the Centre will also be discussed. Several reports on the Centre were studied and the Centre was visited for a few days. The activities at the Centre were observed and evaluated and all the different role players were interviewed to determine what the best practices followed at the Centre are.

