

KHULULEKA GRIEF SUPPORT: the story about two young heroes

(From Khu support group at Zimasa Community School 2014 (1))

Anita and Thembela are a brother and sister who came to the support group last term. Anita is 12 and Thembela 11. They lost their mother a few years ago after she got sick and died in hospital. They live with a non-biological 'grandmother' who was also referred to as an aunt. They have an older brother and sister who do not live with them. Anita was referred to the support group because she is very quiet and reserved in class, so her teacher is concerned about her. Thembela is the opposite; his teacher says that he is a very talkative child and lacks focus in his school work.



I wanted to write a story about Anita and Thembela because they are both doing so well. They have been through so much but are well adjusted and achieving good grades at school. So it is a great testament to their granny who took them in after their mother died, and the school is also so supportive. It also highlights the wonderful way in which many orphaned children in South Africa are helped by extended community. Many of the kids in our groups refer to their new primary caregivers as their moms, because the concept of family is much broader.

In the Khululeka support group we do lots of activities that provide grief counselling and life skills. Thembela loved all the art and play; while Anita favoured reading and drawing. In one of the sessions we do a 'Whirlpool of grief' story and ask the kids to draw pictures of what life was like before their loss and then after the loss. Thembela's after picture is himself wearing an 'I love my mom' shirt. He is standing next to his sister and they are both crying by their mother's grave.

In another session the children are asked to write poetry. This is part of Anita's poem: "I lost my mother and friend. I feel very very bad, confused, and angry. When you died the earth changed into dark. The clouds get dark too. I did not feel happy. I did not want to have fun. There is no one in my life. I felt very sad and alone. When you died." It is a difficult session so after the poem they do a stripy painting about being whole and unique people. Here is Anita's picture:



In the next session they write a letter to the person they lost. This shows they both still really miss their mother. And yet, as Anita says, life goes on. Outside of the group, their favourite thing is to play Marimba, which they do both at school and out of school. The thing that makes Anita happy is playing with her friends; and Thembela loves singing and running races.



In the last session of the group the kids do a collage about what they want in life and envisioning a positive future. Anita chose pictures that showed her dreams of travel and success: herself in a flat in London, herself and work colleagues by a plane, and her car. Thembela's pictures include: himself and girlfriend singing, himself boxing, himself as a doctor, himself and girlfriend kissing and their child, a nice car, a big house with a pool, and himself playing rugby.

I have no doubt that they will both work hard and achieve at least some of these dreams. They are lovely children and I'm so glad to have met them and had them in our group. Both of them said that the group helped them to feel stronger and more confident.



Here they are pictured with their classmates after the last session of the group, with their Khululeka journal and pencil-cases.



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