

Kids barricade place of safety

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CHILDREN from Lerato Place of Safety yesterday embarked on a protest, demanding better care from the Northern Cape Department of Social Development after the centre, which is equipped to accommodate between 60 and 70 vulnerable children, was left without electricity after emergency generators ran out of diesel.

While the department issued a statement saying that the situation had been resolved, teachers at the centre said that they had arrived at work yesterday morning to find that the main entrance to the centre had been barricaded by the children.

"When we arrived here this morning, we thought the whole building was on fire," said a group of teachers, speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Damage to the electricity cables has meant that the centre has been reliant on diesel generators for power since December last year. The diesel ran out yesterday (Monday) morning and without it, the children are unable to do many of their regular tasks and chores.

"They can't wash their clothes or watch TV, while it also has a major impact on the food they are provided.

"Eventually, Social Development did arrive with diesel for the generators, once the protest had already started, but by that stage the children had already gone nearly 24 hours without electricity and viewed this delivery as something of an empty gesture."

While the shortage of diesel proved to be the catalyst for yesterday's protest, the teachers added that this was just the most recent incident in a series of incidents where the quality of care and the service provided by the Department of Social Development to



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: Children from the Lerato Place of Safety in Galeshewe yesterday barricaded themselves inside the premises and set tyres alight in protest of electrical problems at the centre.

Picture: **Danie van der Lith**

the vulnerable children has been brought into question.

"Going without electricity since Monday morning was the final straw for the children, who have many complaints about the way they are looked after.

"If you could actually get inside, you would be shocked by the conditions that they are expected to live under.

"Social Development keeps letting them down and the children have had enough."

Despite a strong police presence at the centre yesterday, SAPS provincial head of communication, Lieutenant-Colonel Dimakatso Mooi, said that no crimes were reported during the protest.

"No cases were opened with us," Mooi confirmed, before referring additional enquiries to the Department of Social Development.

The spokesman for the Department of Social Development, Gamien Abrahams, said late yesterday afternoon that the matter had been contained and calm had been restored at the centre.

"The institution has been experiencing electrical problems since early January. This is due to a cable fault in the electrical network of the building," Abrahams explained.

"As an emergency back-up, the department made use of a diesel generator, mainly for food preparation, lighting and warm water.

"The reason for the faulty cable

is being investigated and it is suspected that it was damaged by lightning or normal wear and tear. Vandalism, at this stage, is not suspected."

Abrahams added that the delay in the cable being repaired was mainly due to the fact that Public Works could not find a local service provider to source the specific cable.

"Another reason was that builders were on holiday in early January. However, the services of a contractor have been secured and they are on site at the institution.

"What further aggravated the matter was that the emergency diesel generator could not run on a 24-hour basis as it overheated and

required time to cool down before it could run again. This caused the children to become frustrated.

"A high-level delegation from the department met with the children and officials and explained about the repairs. The situation is currently calm and normal.

"The department apologised to the children for the inconvenience caused. The contractor on site is working towards restoring the electricity supply by Wednesday evening (tonight)."

Abrahams emphasised that it was only the lack of electricity that had caused the unhappiness. "Food preparation and other essential services carried on without any interruptions."