

## ■ SOCIAL ILLS

# We need to change how we spend free time

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FROM THE West Coast to the central Karoo, from Cape Town to the Garden Route, the Western Cape experiences social ills which result from how we spend our recreational time.

These social ills include foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), tuberculosis (TB) and substance abuse. Each constitute a part of a vicious cycle, reproducing the other.

When pregnant women abuse substances such as alcohol, their unborn children are put at risk of developing FASD. Similarly, when individuals abuse drugs and alcohol, they diminish their immune systems, making them more vulnerable to TB.

The Western Cape Department of Social Development is challenging these persistent social ills and breaking these vicious cycles.

On Saturday, the department, with Landbou Gemeenskap Ontwikkeling, hosted the annual Agri-Workers' Sport Day in Vredendal.

The idea behind the day was to challenge unhealthy recreational activities and instead instil healthier alternatives such as sport and cultural activities.

Hundreds of farmworkers, farmers and residents from Vredendal and nearby communities took part in a full day of sport and cultural activities.

In turn, the event raised awareness of social issues which affect rural communities, such as substance abuse and FASD.

This year alone, the Western Cape Social Development Department has provided 20 interns with a post in the Expanded Public Works Programme.

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Healthier ways to pass the time will ultimately rid communities on the West Coast of their social ills such as substance abuse

The interns will assist in school holiday programmes, leadership development, public education, anti-teenage substance abuse, early-childhood development centres and foster awareness of the dangers of FASD in West Coast communities.

A recent study funded by the department indicated that the prevalence of FASD on the West Coast was found to be 64 children per 1 000 affected (6.42%).

The West Coast prevalence rate can be compared with the findings in the most recent studies conducted in Kimberley (60/1 000) and the Witzenberg area (96/1 000).

The West Coast's FASD prevalence rate indicates a serious problem in this region, which is attributed to the persistence of recreational activities which promote substance abuse, rather than promoting the development of skills or practising of talents.

This year, the Social Development Department will be donating bicycles and laptops to residents so that rather than using substances to unwind and pass the time, residents can study, read, watch movies, and exercise outdoors.

These pragmatic steps will introduce healthier alternatives to substance abuse; ultimately ridding the community of its persisting social ills.

As the Minister of Social Development in the Western Cape, I remain committed to providing opportunities for young people and eradicating FASD from all affected communities.

We will continue the fight against FASD and all other forms of substance abuse.

Empowering young people to take the lead is central in this objective. The department jointly contributes R311.1 million towards FASD awareness through child care and protection Services, and to substance abuse initiatives to create positive socio-economic opportunities for young people.

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