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CAPE FLATS

Missing Shaskia's family still clinging to hope

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EVERY time news breaks that a body of a teenager has been found on the Cape Flats, a cold shiver runs down Anthea Michaels' spine.

Teenager Jehaan Petersen's body was found in an open field this week. A 33-year-old man has since been arrested.

The killing of the 17-year-old is a blight on the Cape Flats, where children and teenagers go missing or are found murdered on a terrifyingly regular basis.

Michaels' daughter Shaskia went missing nine years ago on September 5, and would be a 13-year-old now.

Michaels said: "It hasn't been easy. Your mind starts to play tricks on you. When I walk past a teenager with curly hair and chubby cheeks, I end up staring, because what if that is my Shaskia?"

SAPS' missing persons bureau last released stats in 2013 and revealed that a child goes missing every five hours in South Africa.

The figures also indicate that 77% of all children are found, with at least 23% found dead or the cases go cold.

But for the Michaels family giving up is not an option. Shaskia disappeared while playing outside her Tafelsig home when she was 4.

At the time, former mayor Patricia De Lille offered a R50 000 reward for any information on her disappearance.

Shaskia's grandmother Roslyn Faroa spoke to *Weekend Argus* about the family's unwavering hope.

"Since her disappearance, Shaskia's mother gave birth to two more children," said the 56-year-old.

"We always tell them about Shaskia, and every year on her birthday (April



THE scene on the Cape Flats where the body of slain Jehaan Petersen, (INSET) from Hanover Park, was found. | SUPPLIED

2), we light a candle and have a small party for the kids in the road. We haven't given up because we (don't feel like) she is no longer with us. We know she must be out there somewhere."

Faroa said their hope was also reignited when Zephany Nurse was discovered, 17 years after she was snatched from her hospital crib in 1997.

"Look at the Zephany case, they also knew she was still alive, and while people gave up, they still held on to that hope. So miracles can happen."

Michaels, the mom of four, said even though they had not heard anything from the police in about a year, they constantly followed up with the investigating officer.

"It's not easy to hear that there's no new developments, but we don't give

up," she said.

"She is an intelligent young girl, and I am sure she can read by now, so if she sees this article, I want her to know that we are waiting for her. I love her. I miss her and I pray for her every day."

A year before Shaskia's disappearance, Bayern Munich Street was rocked by the disappearance of 5-year-old Kauthar Bobbs in October 2012.

Michaels said she still kept in touch with Kauthar's mother, Lameez Bobbs, who still held on to hope for her daughter's return.

Police spokesperson Warrant Officer Joseph Swartbooi said the Mitchells Plain Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Unit was investigating the Michaels and



ROSLYN Faroa said while her heart was heartbroken at how time was going by without her granddaughter, she was still hopeful. | LEON LESTRADE African News Agency (ANA)



ANTHEA Michaels with her daughter Ruwayda, who was a year old when Shaskia disappeared. | FILE

Bobbs cases.

"Anyone with information is urged to call Crime Stop at 0860 010 111.

Missing Children South Africa's national co-ordinator Bianca van Aswegen said while SAPS had not released official missing children statistics for nine years, figures were an important aspect in determining the reality behind missing children.

"Many cases are not even reported due to lack of trust in SAPS. People that are in rural areas that are unable



SHASKIA Michaels has been missing for nine years. | FILE



KAUTHAR Bobbs, 5, of Tafelsig, disappeared in October 2012, and is also still missing. | SUPPLIED

to open cases, and illegal immigrants that are too scared to open cases.

"So, the severity of the problem is far worse if we take this into consideration. We, as an organisation, see an increase yearly in cases reported to us.

"Children going missing in South Africa has been a major problem for years and increasing daily."

Van Aswegen said they did not let go of "cold cases" and often recharged these cases to make sure that they still gained the attention needed.

"Someone somewhere knows something, so we hope that we might get some leads to give the families the closure they so desperately need."

Van Aswegen reminded parents and guardians that there is no waiting period to report a person or a child as missing as the first 24-48 hours were crucial.