



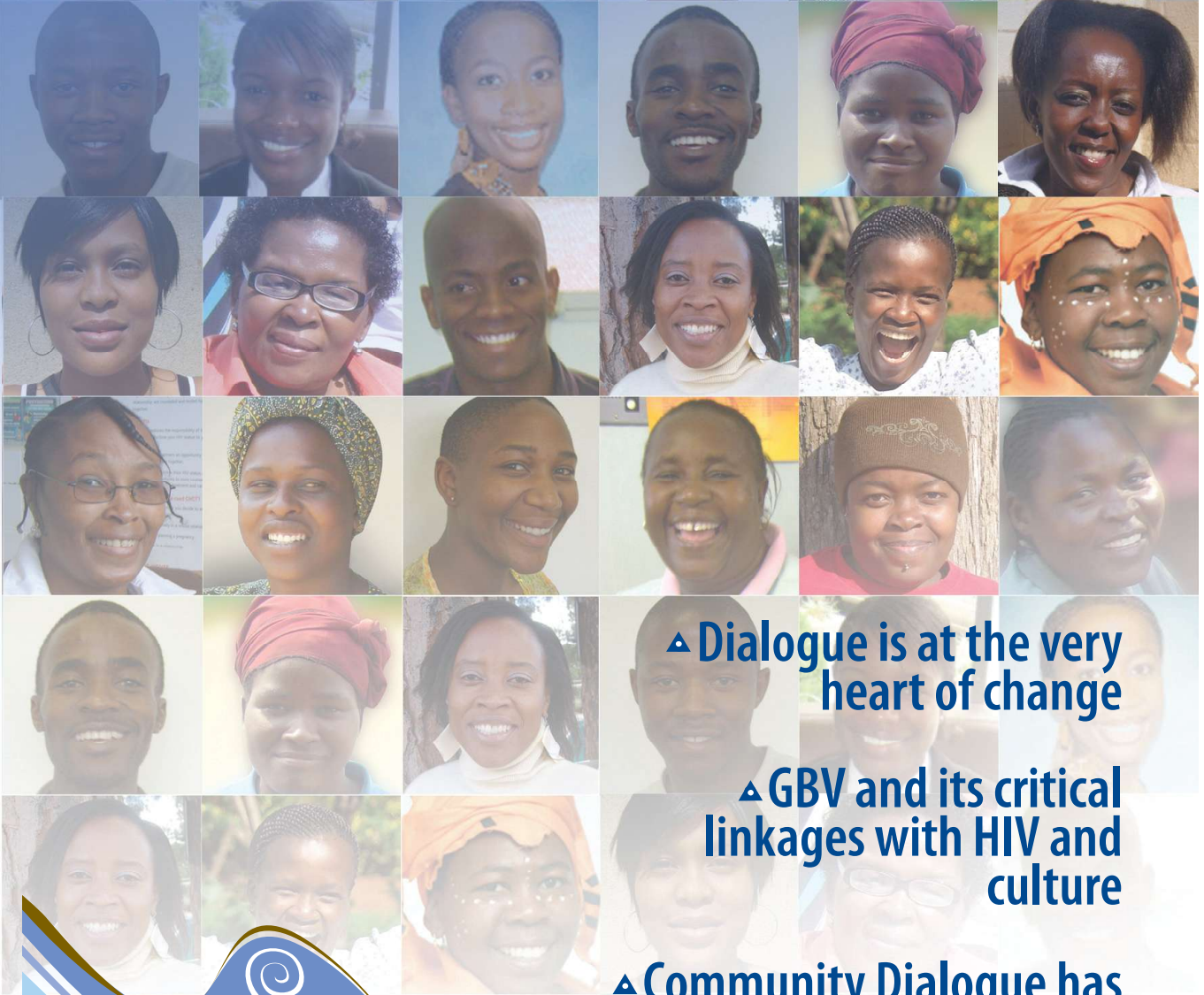
Changing the River's Flow Newsletter

Issue 01 / 2009

# The Umbrella



Safe from GBV and HIV



▲ Dialogue is at the very heart of change

▲ GBV and its critical linkages with HIV and culture

▲ Community Dialogue has the **POWER** to make a difference





# INSPIRATIONAL ROLE MODELS

## Big Sisters ... are doing it for themselves!

Refiloe Seseane and Amelia Vukeya-Motsepe are the co-founders of a mentorship and empowerment initiative called 18twenty8 that provides role models and mentors for young girls and facilitates constructive conversations with young women through their "Big Sister" network. They also provide general support to young women of school leaving age as they enter university or prepare for their first jobs, and assist young women in developing career plans and life goals.

The concept and idea for the name "18twenty8" arose from their realization that this is the tender age-group - and time in a young girls life (18 - 28) - when she is faced with many modern-life challenges as she sets off onto her path into the future: from completing her schooling and the simple practicalities of getting a drivers licence - to the real difficulties she has to face in negotiating romantic and intimate relationships, safe from violence and coercion.

18twenty8 aims to reach as many young women from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa as possible and to help them to become qualified and competent professionals in all sectors of the economy.

Their mission is to provide financial assistance to deserving young women, including financial assistance to young women throughout their undergraduate studies.

Refiloe and Amelia are truly inspiring, positive role models who are working selflessly to create healthy possibilities for youth in South Africa today. We will be on sharing their successes with their 'girls' in a follow-up article in the next issue of "Changing the River's Flow".

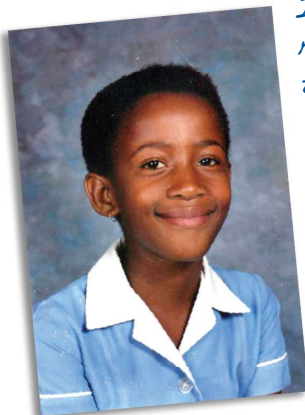
To give our readers some perspective on how far these two accomplished young ladies have come in their own lives, I asked these two 'Big Sisters' to please "Write a letter to yourself - when you were 18."



- Yngve Sjolund, Editor

## Refiloe, write a letter to yourself - when you were 18!

*Dear Refiloe*



*It's not the end of the world. I know that it seems really tough and really bad right now but it really isn't the end of the world.*

*I know that you are under a lot of pressure at home and that you are having a hard time coping with your parents' divorce and that you have had to find part time jobs since you were 15 to ease the financial strain. I know that you aren't doing as well as you used to at school and that you have been feeling unmotivated and uncertain about your future. I know that you*

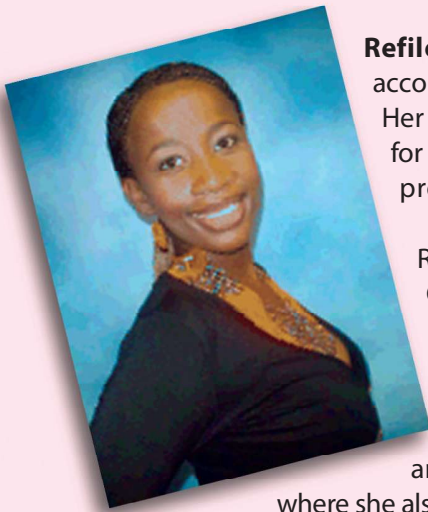


*have started smoking and that you've thought about suicide a few times. I know that you thought that he was "the one" but he turned out to be an idiot and so not worth your time. And don't worry that you only realised how not worth it he was - only after you slept with him! At least now you know not to make the same mistake again.*

*Don't worry. Everything will be ok. Boys will be boys and they will always be around. And you will find jobs here and there. The only thing that will help get you out of this situation and boost your development is your health and your education. So stop smoking. Go for a jog. Go to school and read as much as you can. Listen to your heart and believe in yourself and make sure to save as much of your money as you can.*

*And believe Mrs De Lange when she says that you have a bright light within you. Don't let anyone put it out. Least of all yourself.*

*Love always  
Refiloe*



**Refiloe Seseane** (29) is not only a diligent scholar but also an accomplished TV actress, presenter and eloquent voice over artist. Her most recent on-screen appearances include lead acting roles for the country's top soaps - Generations and Rhythm City - and presenting the popular family game show Out of the Box.

Refiloe completed both primary and high school at St Dominic's Convent in Boksburg (1986 to 1998) where she excelled at Drama and Public Speaking - and was awarded full colours for both - and a distinction in English when she matriculated.

Refiloe graduated with a distinction and an Honours degree in Economics from the University of South Africa (UNISA) and started her corporate career at Allan Gray in Cape Town, where she also volunteered as a mentor and tutor at TSiBA - an independent institution that provides free tertiary education for previously disadvantaged students to study a Bachelor of Business Administration degree. She will be starting her Masters mid-2009, and her ultimate academic goal is to have a Ph.D. in Economics.

Refiloe is passionate about her role as Big Sister to girls in Vosloorus, Benoni and Daveyton. She runs workshops for Little Sisters in Grade 11 and Grade 12 in consultation with Life Orientation teachers at schools in the Ekurhuleni South District.



## Amelia, write a letter to yourself - when you were 18!

*Dear Amelia*

*Congratulations on your acceptance to study law at the University of Witwatersrand.*

*It's been a long road!*

*Your story is heartbreaking - so you should be commended for your hard work. Your two step mothers psychologically and sometimes physically abused and your step brother took advantage of you at age eight until eleven. Your uncle and family friend helped themselves too. You learned to take care of yourself at a very young age: washed, and cooked ... your innocence and your childhood gone. Your mother took over when you were eleven after all your struggles - and all you needed was to be loved and cared for. But the struggle for survival continued ... and somehow you ended up becoming self-destructive ... Who cared? You thought you were going to die soon anyway!*

*WITS, my dear is an opportunity of a life time, and it's daunting, I know. You will soon know what university means - you have always wanted to be a lawyer. Remember when you were ten years old? You wrote a letter in your diary because you were sick and tired of that man doing those things to you at night - and your step mothers making you feel like you do not belong in that house. You believed that as a lawyer you can protect others from being hurt like that! But because you wanted to die, you asked your sister to study law, but alas - now you will be doing it yourself. You are a very courageous young lady: you did not have R75 to process your application for registration ... on top of that you needed almost R20 000 for fees for the year, transport and boarding money ... but there was no turning back for you.*

*It's June now, you have one jersey, two jeans, flops - and you are braving the cold to Oliver Schreiner School of Law like nothing matters. In your mind you know that you just need to focus and study hard and all the suffering and struggles will soon be over. Three more years to go!*

*Yours truly,  
Amelia Vukeya*



**Amelia Vukeya-Motsepe** completed primary and high school in Soweto but she matriculated from Hluvuka – a rural high school in Limpopo.



Her graduation from The University of the Witwatersrand with an LLB degree made her the first graduate in her family and opened doors for an impressive career in the legal profession. She also holds an LLM degree from the prestigious G e o r g e t o w n University Law Centre

in Washington, D.C. in the United States of America. Amelia worked as a researcher under the auspices of Justice Kate O’ Regan at the Constitutional Court of South Africa.

She has also worked as an attorney at the Aids Law Project and currently holds office as Senior Associate at a highly-respected law firm, where, in addition to fulfilling the demands expected of one in her role, she continues to do pro bono work for people who cannot access legal resources especially those living with HIV/AIDS. Amelia was recently awarded a scholarship to attend the UNESCO Chair & Institute of Comparative Human Rights Annual International Leadership Training Program in the USA in August 2009. She is one of the 2009 Mail & Guardian ‘300 Young South Africans you have to take to lunch’.

Besides her academic and professional achievements, Amelia’s unwavering commitment to the youth of Soweto is her other impressive attribute. She volunteers as an HIV/AIDS counsellor and is very active in her role as Youth Co-ordinator at her Catholic church in Molapo in Soweto. Amelia’s dedication and unconditional support inspires young people to remain optimistic and goal-orientated despite their circumstances.

**18twenty8** is a Section 21 non-profit organisation that supports young women from previously disadvantaged backgrounds and develops strategies for their educational and personal development.

Lack of education and access to resources contribute to many of the social ills that poor communities experience - such as hunger, unemployment, poverty and HIV/AIDS - which is exacerbated by transactional sex. High and rising divorce rates are a contributing factor to the rise in female-headed households. A consequence of these female-headed households is the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibility that rests on the girls within them.

These responsibilities often include caring for younger siblings. These factors disrupt the schooling of many young women and stifle their personal development.

Furthermore, without an education, women’s career prospects and earning potential are limited. There is a strong need for an empowerment initiative like 18twenty8.

Although their main aim is to support young women between the ages of 18 and 28, those outside of this age bracket may also be considered. 18twenty8 provides young women with access to the resources that are necessary for them to be successful in their social, academic, emotional and professional lives. They encourage young women to value their education - because educated women are not only empowered - they are also more likely than their male counterparts - to confer the benefits of their education to others.

**Contact 18twenty8**

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