

# Teen starts anti-abuse initiative

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WHEN 16-year-old Kara van der Merwe found out that two of every five South African children were subject to molestation and abuse, and more were victims of human trafficking, she decided to do something about it.

The teen from Greyton in the Overberg started the Put Your Foot Down initiative last year in the hopes of bringing about child abuse awareness.

"It is very hard to do a workshop at a school and have pupils in Grade 1 and Grade 2 coming to me to say 'it happened to me'. Sometimes I think why didn't I just do something for dogs, something happier, but this is needed," Kara said.

She said the topic was not something that came to mind until she played a small part in the movie, *Dis Ek Anna*, which was about a girl who was abused.

"So many children don't have a voice, so I decided to put my foot down and be their voice.

"It is like a full-time job and I still have to study, but it is for a good cause.

"I think what we are doing is so important and giving children courage to say 'stop' and say 'no' and know they have rights to their bodies."

With Kara's campaign, Activists Networking Against the Exploitation of Children (Anex), an organisation that works tirelessly to prevent trafficking in children and child labour, and other organisations have joined to raise awareness about the situation.

They want to help young people caught in molestation and human trafficking.

In recent years, details have emerged about the increase in the number of children being abused and trafficked from towns such as Beaufort West, Leeu Gamka and Laingsburg.

The organisers will work closely with truck and transport companies to help address the issue of human trafficking and encourage truck drivers to make the N1 safe.

Anex will open a much-needed child and youth centre in Murraysburg next year.

The Anex house will serve as a safe haven for 40 youth who need temporary care in the Karoo.

Claudia Burger, programme director of Anex, said the closest centre for such children from the central Karoo was in George.

"There is a great need for alternative care for children whose home circumstances have deteriorated to a point where a court orders them to be taken into care."

Reporter: Yolisa Tswana

Picture: Bongwiwe Mchunu

Article obtained from Facebook page Cape Argus

