



No burn survivor should stand alone

We read about fires in newspapers — but do we ever wonder what happens to those who have suffered serious burn injuries in the flames? Do we ever stop to think about those who are burnt by scalding liquids?

The number of burn injuries in the Western Cape, especially among children, is distressing. Tragically, society often discriminates against these children, through prejudice or ignorance.

About 1 000 children are treated in the Burns Unit of the Red Cross Children's Hospital *alone* every year. In South Africa, burn-related injuries are the third-most common cause of death in children under 14, and in Cape Town, most burn injuries occur in little children between 1-2 years of age.

Children are severely affected by burn injuries. Child burn survivors suffer not only physical, but also emotional and mental trauma. Having undergone medical treatment, they are often ostracised in their community, causing them to withdraw as active members of society. How often do you see a burn survivor in a public place?

A great number of child burn survivors fail to obtain employment in later life because the social consequences of their injuries affected their schooling or because of prejudices about their physical appearance. Those burn survivors who have grown up to lead a fulfilling and productive life usually could rely on a strong support system within their environment. Most children who suffer serious burn injuries do not have such social back-up — and many fall through the cracks.

They become the invisible members of society, left to their own devices by state or society. ✖



Photo: Lee Ryan Miller

The invisible crisis: what does Phoenix do?

The Phoenix Burns Project serves burn survivors by helping to facilitate their physical and social rehabilitation, by advocacy on their behalf, and by raising awareness of the challenges they face. Phoenix is also contributing to burn prevention initiatives.

We have a team of highly specialised volunteers, drawing from fields as diverse as medicine, public health, business, media, marketing, academia and youth work. They are backed up by a Board of Advisors comprising eminent persons whose broad experience and expertise Phoenix can draw from.

Many young burn survivors are lost to follow-up treatment for a variety of reasons, and this compromises their recovery process. We aim to support the follow-up care of child burn survivors and their reintegration into normal life, a process that can take years, through close cooperation with the Burns Unit at Red Cross Children's Hospital, where most serious paediatric burns in Western Cape are treated.

In order to deliver the full spectrum of support services to burn survivors we have identified an urgent need to establish a dedicated Burn Rehabilitation Centre for

children. This centre will cooperate closely with the burns units in local hospitals to provide a stepping stone between hospital and the community for child burn survivors and their care givers.

Social reintegration is vital, especially at school. We will prepare schools to receive a burnt child, and facilitate events aimed at increasing the social confidence of the child burn survivor.

We have compiled a booklet containing information for parents of burnt children. Together with partner NGOs we plan to establish a programme to train volunteers from the communities most at risk on issues of fire safety and burn injury prevention. Phoenix is also participating in the development of a new national burn prevention curriculum for primary school learners.

In conjunction with other relevant NGOs, we seek to engage with policy makers on matters pertaining to burns prevention and the rights of burn survivors. Through our round-table events, called the Phoenix Forum, we bring together stakeholders in the burns environment to discuss pressing issues and to facilitate a common purpose within the burns community. ✖

BEAR WITH YOUR REHAB



Rehabilitation is a long and painful process for young burn survivors, who often have to return to hospital for a series of follow-up treatments. Sadly, a very high proportion of patients are lost to follow-up after they are discharged from hospital. This leads to numerous complications that require subsequent hospitalisation of the child. Phoenix strives to improve patient compliance with the prescribed follow-up regimen. To reward the courage of children who come to Red Cross Children's Hospital for their follow-up, and also to comfort them, we give a soft toy to every child on discharge and also on each subsequent follow-up visit. The toy is accompanied by a message to the parent or caregiver, encouraging them to bring the child back for follow-up treatment. Since the inception of this programme in early August 2007, more than 150 soft toys have been distributed to children. We are grateful to our many anonymous donors for their gift of a soft toy and to Reberve and IDial for organising several toy collections to support this project. You can support this programme by donating your unused soft toys, by collecting soft toys on our behalf, or by helping to clean and repair used soft toys. Please contact us if you wish to make a donation or get involved. ✘

Fill a tin for change



Your small change can make a big change in a burn survivor's life.

Through the generosity of DivPack, a division of Nampak, we have introduced collection tins as one of our fundraising activities.

Please consider keeping a collection tin in your home to put all the small change cluttering up your purse or wallet. Every cent helps, and it all adds up!

Better still, why not support Phoenix by taking a carton of

collection tins to distribute in your school, your office or among your friends?

A very big "thank you!" to Divpack for their kind donation of these collection tins.

If you would like to take a tin, please contact Patricia Waight on 072 261 1885. ✘

IN BRIEF

PARTNERSHIP WITH PASASA

The Phoenix Burns Project and the Paraffin Safety Association of Southern Africa (PASASA) have entered into a three-year cooperation agreement in the domains of burn injury prevention and issues facing burn survivors. In the context of this agreement, the two organisations are planning to conduct workshops to train community-based trainers in issues of fire and burn injury prevention. Other joint projects are also in the pipeline. ✘

PHOENIX MEDIA EXPOSURE

Phoenix representatives have been interviewed on several radio stations over the past couple of months, including Cape Talk, FMR and Bush Radio.

Meanwhile, a sponsor has bought a weekly advertising space for Phoenix in the national Catholic newspaper The Southern Cross. The advertisements are aimed at introducing Phoenix to the wider public, and to raise awareness of a problem few people know about. ✘

Focus on burn prevention

The first Phoenix Forum of 2007 brought together stakeholders from across the safety and burns environment, at the Astronomical Observatory in Cape Town on June 23, to discuss the risks of burn injuries and prevention strategies.

Speakers at the well-attended event stressed that public awareness on burns issues must be raised.

Dr Ashley van Niekerk, a specialist in paediatric burn injuries from the Medical Research Council, told the forum that burn injuries occur mostly in low income settings and typically in and around the home. While scald injuries from hot liquids account for 70% of burn injuries, the 20% of injuries from open flames are more severe and produce higher rates of fatalities.

Noting that many paediatric burn injuries occur in single-parent households, he called for greater access to child-care facilities.



He stressed the need for burn prevention to be included in school curricula. He also called for awareness campaigns addressed especially at communities at risk of burns, and on members of such communities to "take action". Likewise, policy makers and decision makers need to be educated and

lobbied on burn issues.

Terri Kruger of the Paraffin Safety Association showed the meeting a short film of the interior of a shack catching fire after a paraffin stove overturned. Within just over a minute, the shack was completely engulfed in flames. If such a fire breaks out, "get out quickly," she advised.

Another common danger is the accidental consumption of paraffin, Kruger said, adding that about 80 000 children ingest paraffin every year.

Although paraffin is dangerous, she said, it cannot be eradicated for several reasons, including affordability and habits, nor will electricity or alternative fuels "be accessed by all to eliminate paraffin usage".

"While paraffin is the most affordable, accessible and widely used energy source, there lacks consumer focus in the system of fuel delivery and package design," Kruger said. She said the hazards of paraffin should be reduced through knowledge and education, and through safer appliances and packaging.

New advisors on board

Our Board of Advisors, an informal group of people willing to assist Phoenix when needed, already includes eminent persons with a wide range of expertise and contacts. We welcome two new members to this body:

Carolyn Cripps OBE, founder of the British Children's Fire and Burn Trust (CF&BT) whose objectives are very sim-

ilar to those of the Phoenix in that it was established to support child burn survivors and to provide fire and burn prevention training programmes.

Fr Konstantin Spiegelfeld of the Catholic parish of St John Nepomuk in Vienna has been priest for 15 years, and a member of the Austrian relief organisation Malteser Hospitaldienst for the past 30 years. ✧

The Phoenix Forum

The Phoenix Burns Project hosted its first "Phoenix Forum", a round-table that brings together stakeholders in the field of burns in the Cape Town area, in October 2006.

The first Forum looked at what was being done in the arena of burns, and sought to identify where needs resided. This meeting was enormously helpful to Phoenix in charting its mission, even after the months of consultation with a wide range of experts.

At the same time, participants in the inaugural Forum expressed their gratification that at last various organisations and individuals engaged in burn issues had an opportunity to meet around a table to share their ideas, concerns and even frustrations.

The next Forum, on the Rights of the Burn Survivor, will take place on January 26, 2008.

If you would like to attend future Phoenix Forums, please contact Michèle Twomey at 082 470 0046 or e-mail mtwomey@pbp.org.za ✧

Dr Attila Szabo, project manager of the Khayelitsha Gel Fuel Programme, said that more than 2 500 people die in 40 000 fires a year in South Africa, costing the country an annual R100 billion.

Szabo told the meeting that he would like to see paraffin replaced by ethanol gel fuel as a safer alternative. Gel fuels do not spill and run and thereby cause fires, cannot be ingested, and emit no toxic fumes, he said.



He also pointed out that the Kyoto Protocol encouraged the use of alternative fuels — including ethanol gel fuel whose source is renewable — for a cleaner environment.

His organisation wants to replace paraffin appliances in every household with those that use gel fuel. He did, however, acknowledge that the higher price of gel fuels presents an obstacle in this aim.

Van Niekerk called for the "enforcement of specifications for portable paraffin stoves" and access to electrification in a bid to reduce open flame burn injuries.

Dr Peter Martinez, president of the Phoenix Burns Project, told a national newspaper that all stakeholders in burn issues have a role to play in burn prevention, and hoped that discussion forums such as the Phoenix Forum will help towards developing a joint strategy in finding solutions to the various challenges in the field. ✧



We wish all burn survivors, their care givers and their families, as well as all our generous supporters, friends and donors a blessed Christmas and a peaceful and safe holiday season. Thank you for all that you have done to support the Phoenix Burns Project during 2007. May 2008 be a prosperous year for you.

Be a Friend of Phoenix

The Phoenix Burns Project has launched the "Friends of Phoenix" campaign, by which members of the public and companies can support the organisation financially.

"At the moment, all work done by Phoenix is performed on a voluntary basis," said treasurer David Waight. "However, to accomplish our objectives and challenges, we are inviting the public to join our work not just as funders, but as part of Phoenix. This means that we will keep our Friends informed on new devel-

opments, showing them how their support has helped."

Friends can also assist us by raising awareness about Phoenix and recruiting more Friends.

To obtain copies of the "Friends of Phoenix" brochure, which explains why we exist and what we aim to accomplish, please phone David Waight at 083 3300016 or e-mail admin@pbp.org.za, or download it in PDF format at www.pbp.org.za/supportus.htm ✧



WINING, DINING, FUNDING

One might call it our "coming-out party": a fundraising dinner at Mamma Roma restaurant in Dean Street Arcade, Newlands, with fine wine, jazz, prizes, an auction and good company.

Organised by Sue Parker-Smith and Michelle Burger from our media partners Catalyst Publicity and Events and co-sponsored by Spire Properties, owners of the Dean Street Arcade, it was a pleasant evening of dining, socialising and entertainment, a successful fundraising event, and above all an occasion to raise awareness about the challenges faced by the burn survivor.

Keynote speaker Dr Jenny Thomas, of Red Cross Children's Hospital, spoke passionately and persuasively about the social problems faced by burn survivors. If the physical injuries do not cause death, the inner suffering might: the suicide rate among burn survivors exceeds the average profoundly.

Peter Martinez, president of Phoenix, asked the evening's most pertinent question: "When last have you seen a burn survivor in public?" As if to make the point about how unusual it is to see a burn survivor in public, the patrons were treated to a song by Lee-Anne Ohlson, who is a burn survivor. It was a poignant and inspiring moment.

The dinner, which was compèred by Rodney Trudgeon of Fine Music Radio, was also an opportunity to launch our "Friends of Phoenix" campaign, for which brochures, fresh from the printers, were distributed.

The first Friend of Phoenix was 9-year-old Matthew Brutus, who presented us with a cheque for R1 000. Matthew explained that he had been bitten by a dog, whose owner sought to make amends by offering to buy the boy a generous gift. Matthew decided that rather than a gift, he would like to make a donation to an important cause. Having heard of Phoenix's work, he decided that this would be the cause to support.

We thank the public and the media for supporting this event, Spire Properties, Mamma Roma restaurant and the tenants of Dean Street shopping centre for their generous support and sponsorship in the form of prizes and auction items for this event. Thanks also to Klein Constantia Wine Estate for sponsoring the wine for the evening, to Richard Gore of Auction Alliance for the auction, and to Catalyst for organising the evening. ✧



Above: Lee-Ann Ohlson and Rodney Trudgeon entertained the patrons at Phoenix's inaugural fundraising dinner, held at Mamma Roma restaurant in Newlands.

Below: Michelle Burger (Catalyst Publicity and Events), Mark Hibbert (TCI Group), Marc Edwards (Spire Properties), David Waight (Treasurer of the Phoenix Burns Project) and Sue Parker-Smith (Catalyst) after a presentation of a cheque for funds raised at the dinner.



Phoenix Update is a regular newsletter dedicated to highlight activities and news of the PBP, and burn survivor issues in general. Phoenix Update is circulated electronically free of charge to stakeholders in the burns prevention & rehabilitation community, Friends of Phoenix and other interested parties. If you would like to be placed on the mailing list, please contact the editor. We welcome submissions on burn issues for potential publication in Phoenix Update. Please e-mail the editor at admin@pbp.org.za

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