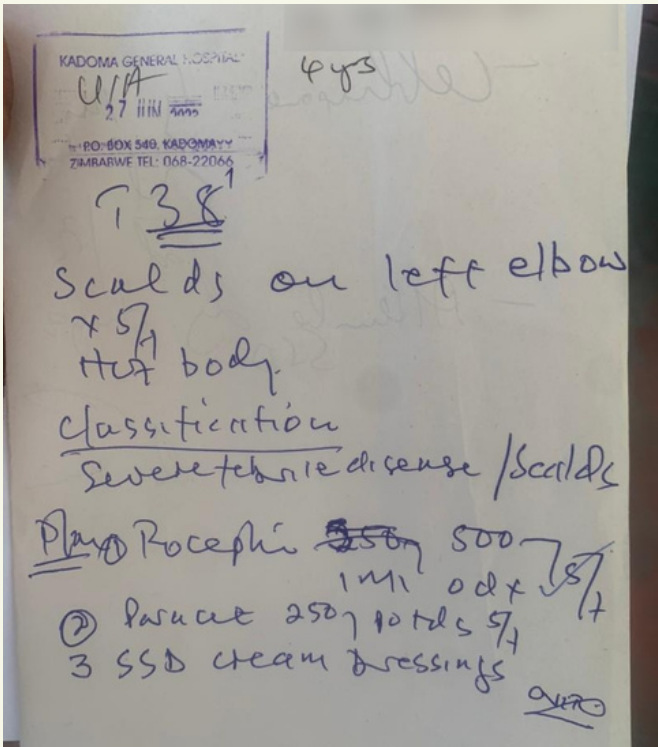


# STORIES FROM THE FIELD

*The vices within religion and their impact on child protection.*

JULY 2023



An array of tailor-made activities have been implemented to sensitize the community on issues to do with child protection. This has been achieved through community outreaches and utilizing a multi-collaborative approach working with other like-minded organizations to ensure that there is no duplication of roles as well as to expand the coverage of interventions as we strive to serve the community.

Religion is a vital cog of the community and is one of the socialization agencies within the community. This has been critical and has been evident within the communities that we are working. It is quite unfortunate that regardless of this vital role which religion plays there are some norms, values and traditions that are harmful to the well-being of the children. Sekai (not her real name), is a 4-year-old girl who stays in the Destiny location within Rimuka high density suburb. She is the second born within a family of 3. The family goes to one of the indigenous apostolic churches who don't ascribe to getting medical assistance and do not go to hospitals.

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As Abdullah Dzinamarira Foundation, we aim to share hope with underprivileged and vulnerable children through ensuring their access to education and basic social support services. To be able to effectively achieve this noble mission, the organization is domiciled within the community and has established its offices within these communities. This aspect of being within the community, and for the community has made it possible for the organization to have an appreciation of the community from the lenses of the community. Furthermore, this has made it possible to create rapport with the community members.

ADF's programming is hinged on crating an enabling environment for children to be able to realize their full potential. This vision is hinged on local, regional, and international legal statutes. In one of our field work areas in Sanyati District, situated in Kadoma under Mashonaland West Province, we have established offices in one of the sprawling high-density suburb of Kadoma.



In an unfortunate accident, Sekai suffered severe burns as she spilled boiling water while trying to retrieve the pot from a gas stove. Unfortunately, due to the belief system, Sekai was not linked to any medical assistance and the family would apply peanut-butter on the wound as home remedy to heal the wound.

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ADF positioning within the community allowed for this information to reach our office child protection team. A community member approached ADF's offices to express their concern on the situation that was prevailing to Sekai. Cognizant of the need for urgent intervention to the matter, ADF activated its standard operating procedure on interventions on issues affecting children. These include approaching the Department of Social Welfare and the Victim Friendly Unit for immediate assistance. Unfortunately, the Department of Social Welfare cited incapacitation as they had no transport to go to the house of the victim. As a mitigation measure ADF secured transportation and accompanied law enforcement officers to Sekai's place of residence. The tenants at the house, initially, feigned ignorance of the existence of this child nor knowledge of the accident and would only allow access to child after stern warning from law enforcement officers. This resistance by tenants shows the cancer within our communities that is emanating from religious circles which is perpetuating cases of child abuse and neglect within the community. Using the principle of "best interests of the child", through the law enforcement agencies Sekai was taken to the local clinic in Rimuka. Staff at the local clinic immediately referred her case to Kadoma General Hospital. What was disheartening was the health facility personnel had reservations on assisting Sekai when they knew of her parent's religious inclination. Upon probing further, it was realized that this was due to previous experiences treating children from the religious sect, the parents had given up the children who had been treated citing that it conflicted with their religious belief system. Sekai was successfully treated, and efforts are underway to ensure that the Department of Social Welfare visits the household to assess the living conditions of Sekai and proffer alternative child welfare solutions so as to ensure the ultimate protection of the child in the face of a threat emanating from the religious fraternity (their belief against medicine). Sekai's story is just one of the many children who are facing this existential threat which is facing children. 4/6

ADF utilizes an array of proven local, regional, and international initiatives to ensure that children are protected. One of the initiatives that was adapted and contextualized in this case was "Every Child Matters"

In this instance, the "stay safe" and "be healthy" themes were adopted. Religion plays a crucial role in our society, however there are certain norms and values that perpetuate abuse of children, and which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

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The need for effective capacitation of government departments which work to protect children cannot be over-emphasized. As ADF we remain committed to creating an enabling environment which promotes the well-being of all children 6/6