

947 Breakfast Club Father's Day

The most recent statistics in South Africa show that 67% of children are growing up in single-parent homes.

What we don't factor into this number is that for the other 30% of the children we think are growing up in homes where dads are present, some of these fathers are actually not available to their children.

This Father's Day, 947's Breakfast Club and LeadSA decided to give a gift of a different kind - committing to assisting The Character Company, a non-profit organisation that works with communities through its long-term mentorship and self-development programmes for boys from as young as five.

The Breakfast Club host, Anele Mdoda, asked listeners to assist in The Character Company's Only 150 Campaign. It aims to get 150 people to contribute R250 a month for 12 months so it can place additional mentors in communities.

The organisation teaches boys its five core values - courage, kindness, honesty, respect, and self-discipline.

Jaco van Schalkwyk, founder and mentor of The Character Company said: "When a father is absent from his son's life, it is a constant reminder for a boy that he is not good enough for his dad to want to spend time with him. The long-term effects are devastating. It leads to many young men suffering from an identity crisis and believing that something is wrong with them."

Van Schalkwyk started The Character Company because he wanted to contribute to fixing what is wrong in our society.



MENTORS

From left: Jaco van Schalkwyk, founder and mentor at The Character Company, 947's Anele Mdoda, Troy Thabethe, Thando Malepe and Frankie du Toit

"We need to change the hearts of boys to want something different. They need to have their own positive identity and realise that their value system is strong enough. Boys, currently, are frustrated and become easily influenced. We, as a society, are leaving our male youth to walk alone, blaming and judging them for not doing the right thing," he said.

One of the mentors, Thando Malepe, who has mentored 16 boys over two years, says he grew up in a similar situation and does not know his biological dad.

"I grew up very confused and had nobody to turn to. Being a mentor allows me

to learn as well as create a circle of mentorship that's about paying it forward. It was difficult growing up without a father. You learn from other people and you don't know whether it is right or wrong. You have no direction. You lack social skills."

The organisation provides support for mothers as well. They can call a social worker and get advice, get mentors to assist their sons in specific areas or help them address a particular problem.

The Character Company relies on public contributions to train and hire mentors. These mentors remain part of the



boys' lives through their school days and careers. The mentees in turn become mentors, while they continue to be mentored in the programme, creating a culture of mentorship.

Troy Thabethe (11), who was interviewed on the 947 Breakfast Club about his experience in the mentorship programme, said he has learnt a lot from his mentor, who has contributed to his confidence and also allows him to speak to a male figure about issues he can't address with his mother.

Mdoda said: "As mothers we cannot do everything, as a result we do not realise that a male figure plays an important role in our son's lives. Boys at the ages of three to four start wanting a male figure around to emulate.

"I look at my son and he is three years old, I split up with his dad when he was three months old. I thought everything was fine until I started dating again. He comes to me for certain things like food or a hug but when he wants someone to be adventurous [with], which contributes to his identity as a boy child, he goes to my boyfriend," she said.

There was a phenomenal response from 947 listeners who not only helped the organisation exceed its target but female listeners opened up about their own struggles as single parents to boy children.

Station manager Thando Makhunga, said that 947 is a brand that is fun, entertaining and engaging - and simultaneously one that uses its platform to have a positive and lasting impact in the community.

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