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volunteers is vital to the TygerBear unit, which deals with at least 37 000 consultations and telephone enquiries a year. Lizelle is living proof even children can help other trauma victims to heal. And there are many more young people like her.

WHEN the little girl arrived at Tygerberg Hospital her feet were so badly burnt she would never walk normally again. She'd been held in a boiling hot bath by her father.

Her mother vanished soon afterwards and relatives in whose care she was initially placed paraded her at traffic lights as they begged for money.

But after years of counselling by staff at the TygerBear unit she has risen above the dreadful circumstances of her first years. She's now in foster care and doing well in Grade 10 at a Cape Town school.

Recently when the time came for her to "graduate" from the unit she asked to stay on as a volunteer to help others like her.

Now she's involved in supporting and nurturing other abused children and her story serves as inspiration to those who've experienced severe trauma.

When a Grade 8 boy whose

brother had died of cancer came to TygerBear as a volunteer for a community school project he discovered he too had unresolved grief he needed to work through. He's doing it by talking to other children about his experience.

Twelve-year-old Chris* came to the unit a year ago after witnessing his father shoot his mother, sister and then himself. After intensive counselling Chris discovered if he reached out to others he felt less sad and alone. Now with the help of a therapist he leads a support group for

'Don't keep it to yourself or you'll be a victim'

traumatised boys.

"I know it hurts and that the pain doesn't go away but this lady (the therapist) will help you cope," Chris* tells other youngsters.

The 14-year-old girl who was held captive underground and sexually abused by serial rapist Johannes Mowers in the Hemel-en-Aarde valley near Hermanus was also treated at the unit.

Her mission now is to warn parents of what could happen to their children if they're not alert, and she wants to write about her nightmare.

"Like adults, children search for meaning and explanations for what has happened to them," says Marita Rademeyer, a clinical psychologist at the Child Trauma Clinic in Pretoria.

"It's important for parents and other adults to give children spiritual guidance and try to explain that criminals make wrong choices but children can make right choices even though it may not be easy."

Lizelle, Chris and others at the unit have decided to make the choice to live fully despite the traumatic experiences they've had

to endure.

"It isn't easy talking about what happened but it's necessary," Lizelle says. "The girls at my school who heard what happened to me came to me with their stories. All I could do was listen because I know how difficult it is.

"Parents, believe your children – especially about something such as rape. Why would I make up a story like that, dirty my own name?" Lizelle says.

"I had parents and friends who stood by me. At first I thought no one would believe me but I would never have

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FASHION PARADE AGAINST ABUSE

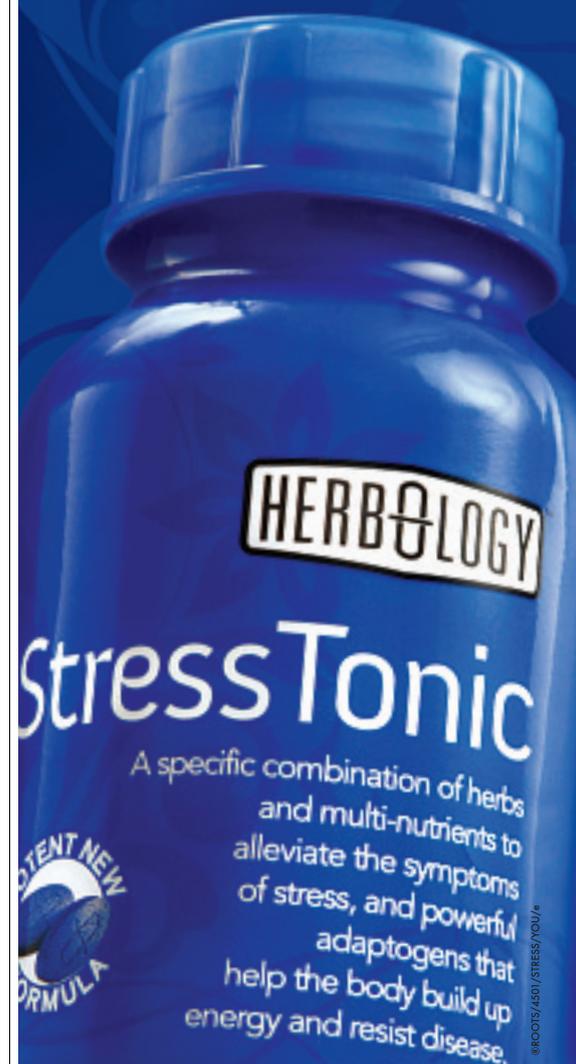
On 7 November a glittering fundraising event will be held in aid of the TygerBear unit. One of the celebrities participating in the fashion show is model and TV personality Minki Visser.

Leading Cape Town fashion designer Charlene Sauerman and several other well-known designers are involved in the event and YOU's sister magazine Huisgenoot is the media partner for this good cause.

The fashion show promises to be outstanding. On auction will be the dress Charlene designed for Minki to wear at the last J&B Met. The venue for the event had not been decided when we went to print. For more information call Anneke Putter on 084-673-0121 or e-mail info@ats-africa.co.za.

■ This article is part of the author's project for the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism.

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