

Hardwick launches world-first app to combat child abuse

While former Child Protection Unit officer Marc Hardwick may have dreamed of being a chef as a child, his career as a police officer has meant the development of technology to help children report abuse safely and anonymously.

In a world first, Hardwick will launch his internationally patented smartphone application called Guardian Schools.

The app is specifically designed for use by secondary/high schools. Schools who sign up pay approximately R500 a month and are required to appoint staff members as first responders to any reports.

Once the staff have investigated the report, the school can close the report unless it is an investigation that requires forensic speciality, then the school could either engage the services of The Guardian or the police who could be called in to investigate further.

Hardwick, who left the South African Police Service in 2002, now heads up The Guardian, an anonymous incident report and investigation company specialising in child abuse investigation.

While Hardwick had cracked many cases and seen to

the prosecution of the perpetrators, he was not satisfied that he was making a significant enough difference in what he called a scourge in the country.

“In the last year or so I have had many requests from adults to investigate abuse cases which occurred during their childhood.

“Who did these people try to report the incidents to at the time? The truth is that they reported to no one for fear of reprisal or victimisation,” he said.

In a bid to get the answer, the father of four sat down with his teenage son.

“I discovered there is this unwritten rule among children and teenagers that adults are on the other team and not to be trusted. This includes parents, teachers, counsellors, etc. I then asked my son if he knew that his friend was being physically or sexually abused, would he report it?”

“He said only if he could remain anonymous. I then started giving some thought to creating a vehicle that would give children the ability to report on what they know anonymously. From there the idea of the app was born.”

Leaving a corporate sales position in 2007, Hardwick began to realise the need for a business such as The Guardian.

“My first case was from a friend of mine at Childline who asked if I could help investigate this horrible case of rape and incest in Hillcrest.

“During the investigation, I had the idea that if I could offer a professional child protection service in South Africa we may be able to impact the significant number of crimes against children.”

Now Hardwick also trains teachers on what to look for when they suspect a child is being abused and schools procure his services to screen their staff against the Sexual Offences Register. His presentations for parents wanting to know how to protect their children are in demand.

“But it’s not enough. I can’t get my head around the fact that we have so many broken people among us. We have to safeguard our children. I believe the app will help us reduce abuse against children through increasing the number of crimes reported.”

The app will help us reduce child abuse



WORLD FIRST. Marc Hardwick, The Guardian of child abuse.