

'The Guardian' app mobilises to fight the scourge of child abuse

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THE fight against child abuse may have found an ally in mobile phone technology.

A new app designed to let children anonymously report abuse was launched in Durban on Wednesday.

Developed by private child abuse investigation company The Guardian, the app is touted as the first of its kind in the

world and is free to children whose schools subscribe.

"Member schools appoint a staff 'ambassador' for the app. A team of staff members called 'investigators' then support the 'ambassador'," director of The Guardian and former police officer with the Child Protection Unit, Marc Hardwick, explained. "When a report is submitted, it arrives as an e-mail to the predefined

staff members informing them to login into the system to access the details of the report and take the necessary action to safeguard the child. The staff member can request further information from the reporter but will never know their identity."

He said anonymity is important because the power of the app lay in protecting the identities of its users. He said

figures suggested that in South Africa, only 1 in 10 cases of sexual abuse were reported.

The app aims to increase this number, allowing children to report abuse without fearing victimisation. But it is also for reporting physical abuse, bullying, drug use, self-harm, suicidal behaviour or any other challenges children might face.

Hardwick said they con-

ducted a survey to establish how children would engage with an app like this. He said: "It was based primarily on two questions. The first was, 'If you knew you could help a friend anonymously by giving information to the powers that be, would you do that?' and just over 65% said they would."

He said the survey also asked children if knowing that their friends could re-

port on them anonymously would make them less likely to "transgress".

"And more than 85% of them said it would," said Hardwick. Developers suggest it could even assist in successful prosecutions.

"Even if it helps just one child, it's done its job," said Hardwick.

For more information visit <http://www.theguardian.co.za>