

Championing for the lives of our future - children like Iyazi Ngwendu.

By Chireez Fredericks-Salie.

In the last few months, particularly in the Western Cape, we have seen an alarming increase in gang-related violence. The violence continues to have a devastating impact on children as they are often caught in the crossfire when the conflict between rival gangs ensues. Iyazi Ngwendu from Site B, Khayelitsha, is another victim added to the ever-growing gang-related crimes statistics in South Africa. On the 2nd October 2021, Iyazi Ngwendu and his friends were playing in the street when a group of gangsters began shooting, and six-year-old Iyazi was shot in the back by a stray bullet.

This isn't a new story, in many areas traditionally affected by gang violence, we've heard Iyazi's story and stories like this told in our offices, around our family gathering, and our shocked expressions are shared when news-outlet covers another innocent victim falling at the hands of criminals. But Iyazi is not another statistic to his four older siblings and attentive father. He isn't another story to share in his community. He is a young, vibrant boy with hopes for the future.

After being hit by the stray bullet, Iyazi's father took him to the day hospital in Khayelitsha, Site B, where the staff quickly realised that the bullet had punctured his lungs and they were bleeding. Once the bullet was removed, Iyazi was transferred to Red Cross Children's Hospital. Arriving at Red Cross Iyazi was in a terrible condition. His lungs were still bleeding and the bottom half of his body was paralysed.

The Red Cross team fixed the wound in his lungs and although the bottom half of his body was still paralysed, the right side body was responding. An MRI scan revealed that his spine wasn't broken, but the bullet had injured his muscle - meaning Iyazi will be able to walk again, but it will take some time.

His recovery was slow, but Iyazi is a strong, brave child with a determination greater than most adults. His ongoing treatment will include physio at the Western Cape rehab centre. Iyazi's dad expressed his gratitude to the Red Cross staff who he said; "has a lot of love for children", this love is shown in the care they provide, not only to the children but to their families, showing them how to manage and handle their sick and injured children.

The Red Cross children's hospital provides help and care to suffering children and aims to provide guidance and advice to the struggling

parents and guardians of these children. The staff at Red Cross understand that children need special care along with compassion and understanding to overcome their illnesses. At the Red Cross children's Hospital, the main priority is not only the recovery of children but putting their loved ones at ease.

The Red Cross Children's Hospital is dedicated entirely to children, all our children is an institution fundamentally important to this country. Untainted by injustice and corruption, it remains the bedrock of equality in healthcare for children. It needs a champion to make sure that it can continue its phenomenal work.

You can be this champion, by joining our Trust and helping to change the lives of kids like lyazi.