



# JAKES JACOBS

## Child and Youth Care Worker, South Africa



*"Every small step  
in the right direction  
is a success."*



### Overview

Jakes Jacobs is a child and youth care worker (CYCW) in Cape Town. Child and youth care workers provide developmental and therapeutic care to vulnerable and at-risk children and youth. Jakes has been working with boys on the streets for 15 years. His passion for his work has only grown stronger over the years, and he cannot imagine doing anything else. He has passed up supervisory "desk jobs" because he says that he can only see to boys' welfare if he has regular contact with them and knows what is going on in their lives. Jakes observes, "It takes time to win their trust, and a person has to come alongside them in order to establish this."

### Typical tasks and responsibilities

Jakes and his colleagues provide day programs at a drop-in center in Cite B, Khayelitsha, where topics focus on street life, careers, families, drugs, and gangsterism. Jakes' day starts well before 8:00 a.m., when he prepares breakfast for the children who will arrive at 9:00 a.m. Together with his three Xhosa-speaking colleagues, he also sits down and organizes the day's program. Jakes comments, "Most of the time, we provide a cooked breakfast, sometimes sandwiches. The kids are hungry, and the meals they get at the center may be their only food for the day. It also gets them here—we know they often start to attend only because of the food."

The team makes home visits to corroborate information gathered from children about their families of origin. Generally, the families are happy to receive them. The child and youth care workers assess the family's situation and, in cases of dire need, provide food and school uniforms. "The children often feel embarrassed to go to school if their clothes are torn or they have no shoes," says Jakes. During the home visits, the team also ascertains whether reunification is possible, although it may take a number of mediation sessions and careful reintegration opportunities before a child returns home.

Linking with community resources is vital, and child and youth care workers also observe, record, and report on trends. "We know what goes on in the community and can refer families where there are problems such as alcohol abuse to the social worker of the area," says Jakes. Drinking is one of the biggest problems that child and youth care workers encounter. Sometimes the parents don't drink but others in the household do, exposing the children to danger. Other times, children may be locked out of the house with no one to look after them because the adults are working, looking for work, or are out drinking.

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## Training and skills

"I have learnt the importance of being a good listener," Jakes admits. "One must never make promises and not give advice too quickly. You need to have patience, tolerance, and educate yourself." Jakes is doing just that—he has completed the Basic Qualification in Child and Youth Care and is busy with his Further Education and Training Certificate in child and youth care work. This accredited course allows learners to access tertiary education opportunities. Jakes also has completed three leadership courses as well as courses in consultative supervision, home visiting, and counseling for children.

## Story

A group of children "hang out" in the city center of Cape Town and in Observatory, two of the city's more affluent and touristy areas. The children come from Valhalla Park, a gang-ridden, poverty-stricken suburb. Jakes' team started another early intervention center in Valhalla Park, housed in a church building made available by local residents. The center's aim is to prevent children from leaving home and help those on the streets to return home.

According to Jakes, the Valhalla Park center is starting to make a huge difference in the community, especially as a "preventative" measure. "Our success rate is high," says Jakes. "In Valhalla Park alone, we saw 40 kids on the streets per day at the beginning of 2012 and 150 different kids altogether in the space of a year. Now we see 13 children from Valhalla Park on the streets a day." Because of their success in helping so many Valhalla Park children leave the streets, Jakes' team closed the morning program there and instead opened an afternoon program to help children with formal and informal schooling and family issues. "This could be done because trust had been built with the children and their families already," notes Jakes. The afternoon program also provides a meal, and up to 50 kids attend a given session. The child and youth care workers also visit a child's school—this is a program rule—and every child must produce his school books for inspection and assistance.

## Why he loves his job

When asked to define success, Jakes says that every small step in the right direction is a success. In his experience, it can take two to three years of hard work to persuade a child who has been on the streets for some time to begin to risk change. If there are tantrums and crying along the way, these signal success because they show engagement. These signs of engagement are markers in the progression from street life to shelter to a children's home to the family home of origin.

*The Global Social Service Workforce Alliance would like to thank NACCW for contributing this profile to the "I am a Social Service Worker" series.*

## "Improving the workforce. Improving lives"

### Who is the social service workforce?

While capturing any one definition of the social service workforce is challenging, it can be broadly defined to describe a variety of workers – paid and unpaid, governmental and nongovernmental – who staff the social service system and contribute to the care of vulnerable populations. The social service system is comprised of a set of interventions, programs and benefits that are provided by governmental, civil society and community actors to ensure the welfare and protection of socially or economically disadvantaged individuals and families.

### What is Social Service Workforce Week?

During this week, advocates will bring attention to and build support for the social service workforce as well as raise awareness about promising workforce strengthening efforts supported by stakeholders around the world. Organized around daily themes focused on areas of practice, the week will allow Alliance members and the public to engage in a dynamic platform of information exchange and advocacy through various forms of social media.

### What is ISIBINDI?

Designed by South Africa's National Association of Child Care Workers, the ISIBINDI model "responds holistically to the needs of children, youth and families who are vulnerable and at-risk." The program screens unemployed community members and selects, trains, and deploys them as child and youth care workers serving families in their own communities. Working under the mentorship of experienced social service professionals, the child and youth care workers blend practical household support tasks with care and development opportunities. Each project using the ISIBINDI model is part of a wider network of community-based programs.

### Learn More:

Learn more about Jakes and other social service workers! Join the conversation on Twitter using the hashtag #SSWWeek and online at [www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek](http://www.socialserviceworkforce.org/SSWWeek).