



## **What is the idea behind child justice courts and one-stop centres? Do we have any at present?**

### **Child Justice Courts**

The Child Justice Bill provides for specialised child justice courts and one-stop child justice centres, for all cases involving children. The aim of such courts is to ensure an appropriate environment for child offenders and to facilitate the child justice provisions of the Bill.

This does not require the building of new courts. Instead, a specific court in every magisterial district will be designated a child justice court.

The Bill provides that the location and design of the courtroom of a child justice court as well as the proceedings must be conducive to the dignity and well being of children: proceedings will be conducted in a language that the child understands; questions and responses will be framed in a way appropriate to the child's developmental level; and the proceedings will be informal to encourage the maximum participation of the child. No leg irons will be permitted, and handcuffs allowed only in exceptional circumstances.

### **One-stop centres**

The Child Justice Bill envisages that one-stop centres will be established to streamline the whole process from arrest to the formal court process. All the major services will be in one building – holding cells, assessment rooms, police services, probation services, a courtroom and rooms for presenting diversion programmes, so that parents and children will not need to travel.

The Bill provides that the jurisdictional boundaries of these one-stop centres do not have to correspond with the boundaries of existing magistrates' courts. The Mangaung One-Stop Child Justice Centre in Bloemfontein and Nerina One-Stop Child Justice Centre in Port Elizabeth are examples of centres that already exist.

The Bill provides that the ministries of Justice, Social Development, Safety and Security and Correctional Services will all be responsible for the provision of resources and services for the one-stop centres.

Children consulted in the drafting process who had been to court said the experience was scary and that they felt nervous, embarrassed and disappointed. Some 40% felt they were not given a chance to tell their story, and the majority were transported or held with adults. However, children who had been through the Port Elizabeth Centre (previously known as Stepping Stone One-Stop-Child Justice Centre) said this:

- Stepping Stones made me and my family feel understood
- Being there taught me about the law
- It gave me a second chance
- It prevented me from being sent to prison