

Three letters can save many lives

HLENGIWE KWEYAMA

SEXUALLY abused women must lobby for the introduction of a DNA profiling database, to prevent women from being raped by serial offenders, says Carolyn Hancock, director of DNA Project.

Hancock was speaking at the Garden of Hope and Healing awareness campaign at the Botanic Gardens.

She said if a woman has been raped or had any physical contact with someone without their consent, the offender's DNA could be left behind and used as evidence.

"DNA evidence convicts," she said.

Hancock said DNA evidence has been helpful in solving sexual crimes that could have gone unnoticed or ended with people being wrongfully convicted.

"If DNA evidence was used properly during the serial rapist Moses Sithole's cases, 37 women's lives could have been saved."

The notorious Sithole was sentenced in 1997 to 2 410 years as he was convicted for 38 mur-



CRIME FIGHTER: Carolyn Hancock, director of DNA Project during the Garden of Hope and Healing awareness campaign at the Botanic Gardens.
PICTURE ZANELE ZULU

ders, 40 rapes and six robberies. He was a repeat offender, who had been in and out of prison since the early 1990s.

"When baby Tshepang was raped and six men were arrested, it was only later, after the semen from her body was analysed, that it revealed the

six men were innocent and that the semen was from her mother's boyfriend. Children cannot speak, so let DNA speak for them," said Hancock.

The nine-month-old baby made international headlines in 2002 when she was raped and attacked by her mother's

boyfriend, David Potse, who was later convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

Hancock said these cases had motivated her organisation to lobby the government for the introduction of a DNA database that could help with identifying repeat offenders.

"Given the extremely high rates of recidivism in South Africa, the potential for our DNA database to help solve and prevent crime is substantial. DNA analysis cannot stop the first crime from occurring, but it can provide investigators with the tools they need to identify a suspect and remove the threat to public safety before the same perpetrator can re-offend," she said.

Tuesday's forensic seminar featured a demonstration by the SAPS Search and Rescue dog unit.

Inspector Jack Haskins demonstrated how his Bio-dog Butcher is used by police to search for biological evidence such as blood to assist investigators with finding evidence at a crime scene.

hlengiwe.kweyama@inl.co.za