

We need the right equipment'

NA profiling has proved to be an indispensable tool in fighting crime. The process offers a host of benefits, as quick identification of suspects and solid evidence for prosecution in court.

However, profiling is not some law-enforcement officials always effectively make use of it. Vanessa Lynch aims to change this.

A few years ago Lynch started an initiative called the "DNA Project" in response to her own experience of crime in Johannesburg.

She found out more: what prompted you to start the DNA Project? Vanessa Lynch (VL): The project started after my father was arrested on March 23 2004. I was responsible for the crime involving brandy and Coca-Cola in the garden, but the SAPS threw away the bottles. They said they didn't have the technology to lift samples from the bottles. The gang remains at large?

VL: Yes. (After the murder) I reached the Matthews family, my daughter, Leigh, was also arrested in 2004. Leigh's murder attracted a massive amount of publicity and both the Matthews family and I wanted to contribute meaningfully to alleviating crime. The Leigh Matthews Trust was generated to ensure achievement and tangible action.

First, we ruled out criticising (SAPS) Forensic Science

DNA profiling could be the key to solving crimes in SA, but we don't have the tools



THE KEY: DNA can provide clues – and seal the deal in a court of law.

quite intricate and lengthy. Are you entirely focused on purchasing equipment for the database or do you deal with training as well?

VL: We don't provide training; that is handled by the Forensic Science Laboratory. We assist with capital requirements. What has the project achieved to date?

VL: We have provided three image-capturing machines worth R80 000 to the Forensic Science Laboratory in Pretoria. From DNA collection to analysis, equipment worth R4-million is required. We rely on corporate sponsorship. We are raising hundreds of thousands of rands and would like to raise millions. Our target is never-ending: there's

always something the Forensic Science Laboratory needs. What does an image-capturing machine do? VL: It's a high-resolution digital camera used to capture the image of evidence. It photographs the evidence in its original state for use in a court of law. As important as the DNA profile is to secure a conviction, it is imperative to present irrefutable supporting evidence when having to testify in a court case. This is where this machine comes in: to indicate the original condition of an object from which a DNA profile was retrieved – or even to capture the condition of a package containing evidence submitted for forensic examination, to indicate that the package was sealed properly at the time it was received.

Can you point to instances where the project is already starting to have an effect?

VL: This is a difficult question. The value of the database is realised over time; it is not something that is immediate. As we go on, we will see progress. It is irrefutable that the use of DNA evidence holds promise for all aspects of the justice system.

How have the officials involved with forensic science in SA responded to your campaign?

VL: Very well. They have appreciated the fact that we are assisting them. They are doing a great job but they have limitations. – Sapa-IPS



SPARKED INTEREST: The highly publicised murder of Leigh Matthews drew much attention to the fight against violent crime in South Africa.