

Mervyn Serebro of Reach for a Dream Foundation

By  Ilse van den Berg

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Mervyn Serebro has been involved with the Reach for a Dream Foundation for 22 years. "It's my soul food," he says.



Mervyn Serebro, chairman, Reach for a Dream

The organisation's core purpose is fulfilling the dreams of children with life-threatening diseases. Having been around for about 32 years, it now impacts the lives of 30,000 children every year.

"On average, we fulfil six dreams a day. And we have never not fulfilled one of our children's dreams," says Serebro. "Every child can write down three dreams on their list and we generally fulfil their first wish. In some cases, we are not able to fulfil their first choice and then we fulfil their second choice," he explains.



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A treasure trove of stories

Having seen so many dreams fulfilled, you can imagine the treasure trove of stories this man carries in his heart.

“Each and every child is so special, it’s difficult to single out stories because they’re all amazing! One year we had a child in the Free State who dreamt of having a swimming pool. Now, you can imagine how challenging it would be to make that happen for a kid who lives in a shack with no running water, in the middle of a drought. However, the manager at our Bloemfontein office arranged with a local farmer to draw water from a dam on his farm, to drive that water truck to this child’s home and erect a temporary pool. It was the most beautiful experience watching that child splash around with his inflatable toys,” recalls Serebro.

“Another story that always makes me emotional,” he says, “is one of a young man who had stage four cancer. His dream was to meet Lewis Hamilton. We flew him and his father to the UK to go watch a race, and Hamilton’s interaction with this young man was astonishing. Hamilton told the young man before the race that he was going to win the race for him. And he did win. But before getting on the podium and holding the cup himself, he invited the young man onto the podium and gave him the cup to hold it up first.

“Those are some of the more exotic dreams, but I also remember one child who simply wanted a pop-up toaster,” he says.



(L) Mkatoko Ngubani (5 years old) dreamed of owning new toys that she could love. The Reach for a Dream Foundation made her dreams come true – she received a selection of new toys.

(R) Mthokozisi Ngwenya (3 years old) dreamed of having his own toys. The Reach for a Dream Foundation gifted him a selection of new toys. Mthokozisi loves the big bear, which was fluffy and soft.

Turning heartbreak into purpose

For someone to faithfully serve an organisation for 22 years like Serebro has, there must be a deep motivation.

“I lost two of my own children... the most horrific experiences of my life. It’s impossible to contextualise if you have never gone through it. Though I was always a sensitive people’s person, the experience of losing children enhanced my awareness of how vulnerable we humans are,” shares Serebro.

“I joined Reach for a Dream because I recognised that by getting involved with people in pain and those less fortunate is firstly healing at a personal level, and secondly, allows me to impart life experience and knowledge of what we’ve encountered in order to further enrich the lives of others,” he says.



One life lost, many lives saved

“My son was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia (AML), was ill for two years, and in hospital for 16 months before he passed away. During this time I discovered that South Africa didn’t have a bone marrow registry. So I embarked on a journey with some beautiful human beings to make it happen. I’m proud to say that our country now has a registry of substance and it’s linked to registries around the globe. We save lives because of it. It really is one thing that gives me a sense of comfort in memory of my son.”

Rotary International awarded Serebro with the Rotary Foundation Paul Harris Award for him and his team’s success in founding the South African Bone Marrow Registry.

Serebro took over as the chairman of Reach for a Dream after his dear friend, Brian Miller (who was the previous chairman), also died of cancer.

“I see it as a privilege to work with people who’ve lost children, who’ve suffered personal pain, and those who just need to vent, share feelings, or need to develop coping skills. It’s fulfilling because my own journey enables me to comprehend pain and suffering - sadly at a very personal level,” he says.



Thari Mpala dreamed of being a policeman. The Reach for a Dream Foundation collected him from his home and took him to the Rosebank Police Station, where he assisted the captain with all sorts of important police duties for the day. To make his day extra special, the foundation also gifted Thari with a tablet (an item that was also on wish list!).

Smiles through the pain and suffering

I love being able to make children know they are special. What astonishes me, if you look at any of our photographic material, is that every child is smiling. Despite enormous difficulty, needles, infusions, transfusions, and procedures, they find an inner strength to confront it. I learn from them every day and they are the ones who give me courage.

“My belief is that every human being should find it within themselves to appreciate what they have and then give back. There are so many ways to give back,” he says.

“My life is enriched constantly. It’s been an exciting and fulfilling journey, but it isn’t over yet.”

Serebro says volunteers are so essential in the world: “Regardless of the cause, if whatever we are doing is benefitting or

adding value to the life of simply one other human being who is feeling helpless, without purpose, or anxious, how privileged we would be.”

For more, go to [Reachforadream.org.za](https://reachforadream.org.za) or email info@reachforadream.org.

ABOUT ILSE VAN DEN BERG

Ilse is a freelance journalist and editor with a passion for people & their stories (check out Passing Stories). She is also the editor of Go & Travel, a platform connecting all the stakeholders in the travel & tourism industry. You can check out her work [here](#) and [here](#). Contact Ilse through her website [here](#).

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