

## A fake idea with real change

Bulletproof Park is a story about a “fake idea” that led to real change. The campaign sparked outrage by publicising a concept about what was needed to protect the most vulnerable from the outrageous reality of stray bullets in the country—without ever having the intention of actually building the park.



M&C Saatchi Abel's Bulletproof Park campaign for Gun Free SA is a story about a “fake idea” that led to real change (Image supplied)

M&C Saatchi Abel executive creative director Jake Bester says the campaign highlighted the power of creativity to find solutions—and drive real activism and change—for the world's problems, no matter how big they are.

“Many people who reacted agreed that the park should never exist! That's precisely the point.”

### Gun violence in the Western Cape

In a country known for its violent crime, where more than 34 people are killed nationally every single day by firearms, Cape Town is not exempt.

Gang wars rage through the suburbs and communities of the Cape Flats, with stray bullets killing and maiming the innocent, including children.

To address this shockingly atrocious problem, Gun Free SA worked with M&C Saatchi Abel to find a solution: Bullet Proof Park.

Gun violence in South Africa, especially in areas like the Western Cape, is a major crisis fueled by gang activity, illegal firearms and inadequate gun control enforcement.

Communities are trapped in a cycle of violence, with shootings becoming a daily reality, even in spaces meant for children.

Stray bullets frequently injure or kill, making simple, normal, activities like playing outside life-threatening.

## **A shock out of the *status quo***

Sadly, the problem has become so entrenched that it barely makes the news in a country with one of the highest crime rates in the world.

Bullet Proof Park shocked the country out of that *status quo*.

“When Gun Free SA approached us, we knew we needed to bring attention to the deadly issue of gun violence, showing South Africans what the future may hold if gun violence isn’t addressed, by proposing an outrageous solution to an even more outrageous problem,” explains Bester.

Gun Free South Africa works to reduce gun violence by advocating for stricter firearm regulations, removing illegal guns from circulation and promoting safer communities.

Bullet Proof Park, says Bester, highlights the urgency of this crisis and forces the conversation into the public domain, directly confronting how unsafe areas – that should be places of laughter and recreation – have become.

Bester says, “Gun violence is bringing this country to its knees, but it is also a global problem. Globally, more than 600 people die due to gun violence every day.

“Our brief was to find a creative solution to the problem. How could we drive important and complex conversations around the topic, while landing Gun Free SA’s message in a simple, precise manner?”

## **The concept**

Bullet Proof Park is the only play area anywhere in the world fully encased in level eight bulletproof glass, offering all the fun of a regular play park, but with the added benefit of protecting children inside from any stray bullets.

Designed by experts, the park also includes state of the art preventative measures such as secure entrances with biometric access control, panic buttons and 24/7 camera surveillance, giving parents and caregivers extra peace of mind that every effort has been made to keep the country’s gun problem, and its stray bullets, from entering the play area.

“Bullet Proof Park is a world first, says JP Le Riche, creative director at M&C Saatchi Abel.

“The concept shines a stark light on the seriousness of the problem, and what the future might hold if gun violence is not stopped.

“The idea is shocking in its stark honesty – how would children feel having to play within the confines of this bullet proof play park?

“If that question feels uncomfortable, let’s consider how children feel now with no protection?

But drawing attention to the problem was not enough.

“We needed to drive an important and emotive conversation that would be distinctive in a news cycle increasingly focused on the upcoming national elections.

“This issue absolutely had to be on the election agenda for residents living in fear in these areas,” explains Le Riche

## **A symbol highlighting gun violence**

“By proposing an outrageous park as a symbol highlighting gun violence, it captured media attention and public sentiment.

The campaign successfully blended experiential storytelling with compelling visuals. Le Riche says this made the issue impossible to ignore.

“By evoking strong emotions and sparking conversations, it not only raised awareness but also drove action proving that creativity is most effective when it connects deeply with people’s values and everyday realities

## **Strategic shock value for impact**

Creative director at M&C Saatchi Abel Delano Chengan, who was also part of the team that saw the concept come to life, explains that to maximise impact, strategic shock value was employed.

“This provoked outrage, disbelief, and urgency to move the conversation beyond passive concern to active demand for change.

“The campaign leveraged earned media, social media, and PR to extend reach, ensuring a national presence.”

## **Conversations worldwide ignited**

The campaign started on April 4, 2024, and is an ongoing effort.

The campaign, as audacious as it is, is powered by a creative solution that brings to life Gun Free SA’s mission of advocating for systemic change, ensuring children can grow up without the constant threat and fear of gunfire.

The campaign ignited conversations worldwide, across both traditional and social media platforms.

“The suggestion of an idea this audacious and expensive stoked several conversations, giving room for Gun Free South Africa to re-emphasise its key messaging on policy reform, community action and practical behavioural change,” explains Chengan.

“We created a moment of reflection for the national consciousness, not only competing with a flood of other stories, but ensuring that the most powerful one emerged at the top.”

## **Responses to the campaign**

The campaign provoked responses from key figures, including the Provincial Minister of Community Safety and the South African National Police Commissioner, and even influenced President Ramaphosa’s State of the Nation Address, where he addressed gun violence directly, many of these reactions using language from the campaign itself.

The effort produced 105 individual pieces of media coverage, reaching almost 100-million people nationally which equates to roughly reaching every South African twice.

The campaign achieved R13m in earned media, with public interest surging 700%, while engagement with news articles averaged at around 4,600 for each story.

Most importantly, though, the campaign led to real change on the ground, with communities and Gun Free South Africa establishing 60 new gun-free zones across the country.

## **Credits**

### **M&C Saatchi Abel**

JP Le Riche, creative director  
Delano Chengan, creative director  
Jake Bester, ECD  
Neo Mashigo, CCO  
Illé Potgieter, managing director  
Landi Jonck, business unit director  
Joshua Francis, group account director  
Antonio Druchen, agency art director  
Graham Arendse, agency art director  
Nick Pollet Agency, art director  
Ayesha Jardine, copywriter  
Kyle Lawrence, Social Media Director  
Martine Levy, producer  
Nicole Mohamed, agency producer

Razor PR

Samantha Robinson, account director  
David Gyampo, account manager

## **Freelance**

Bronwyn Henry, producer  
Merle Bennett, producer

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