



the Stephen Lewis
FOUNDATION

Easing the pain of HIV/AIDS in Africa

Grandmothers' Bulletin October 2006

Chiedza Child Care Centre (CCCC), Zimbabwe



Stella Masikan, Executive Director, CCCC

The Chiedza Child Care Centre assists orphans and other vulnerable children and their caregivers in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The CCCC runs after-school programmes, nursery schools, women's support groups, wage-earning activities, community gardening and training for community caregivers. They provide immeasurable support to the grandmothers who work so hard every day to care for their grandchildren and other loved ones affected by HIV/AIDS. A recent update from the Centre's Executive Director, Stella Masikan, describes how the grandmothers and the children in their care continue to struggle with extraordinary challenges and hardship:

One of the Grannies was locked up in prison to serve 90 days for failing to vacate her late mother's house where she and her husband were caring for an orphan left by her late sister. Her husband was terminally ill. We got to know about all this through the ill husband who was asking us as an organization to take this orphan to our centre. As you know we are a community-based organization, although we have few buildings, we encourage children to stay within the community.

We visited the sick husband as a team from the centre and, hey, the man was in so much pain, without food and nobody to really care for him since the wife is in prison.

When we left the house, which is 20 kilometres from where the family used to live, and this is in a different town from Harare, we thought of alternatives to keep the child in school.

The child had missed lessons for a whole week because he could not afford bus fare. We then visited the Grannie in Prison and asked if she was comfortable with the idea of having the orphan placed with Grannie Dorcas who attended the workshop in Toronto, she agreed happily. We were not sure if Grannie Dorcas would accommodate this extra child as she already has 23 people in her household, but because of her outgoing personality and kind heart, we thought we should give it a try. It was only one word and she accepted. This was the best place for the child to be because its in the same neighborhood and the child is friends with some of the children within the household already. When Grannie Dorcas accepted this request, I couldn't hold back my tears. Meanwhile the husband of this granny in prison got worse. We went and removed the child from that household and the child resumed lessons at school. Most importantly, he has settled down very well.

Sadly, the sick husband passed away on Wednesday 27 September. Since there is a problem of fuel shortage we could not attend the funeral but we only manage to provide bus fare for Brian, the 13 year old orphan. He has since gone back to Grannie Dorcas. The Grannie in prison could not even attend her husband's funeral. She, herself looks ill.

What it means is that we are going to have additional children to look after. I thought I should share this with you.

*Kindest Regards
Stella*

We wrote back to Stella, asking her to let us know what kind of funds the grannies need to get them through this hard time - the group as a whole and individuals in dire straits in particular. Stella wrote back:

Hi Ilana

Many thanks for your email. I feel so much relieved to know that other people care. Thank you so much Illana. Just hearing from you has made such a big difference. Yesterday I went to the prison to visit Mary Makoni as we had not seen her since the husband died. She only knew about the husband's death three days after the burial. I went with two of my staff members and it was such a moving occasion to all of us. The reason why we also wanted to see her was to prepare her for the future: to find out what she was going to do after serving the sentence, what her plans are for the children and where she would go upon release. She asked me to ask Grandmother Dorcas to look for a two roomed accommodation so that she can reunite with her two children and Brian. Definitely she would need the basics like accommodation, food and toiletries. Granny Dorcas was even prepared to let Brian stay until end of next year when he completes his O Levels.

Illana, we will put up a proposal soonest for the two households. Thank you so much.

*Kindest regards
Stella*

MORCAO (Mothers Rural Care for AIDS Orphans), Kenya



**Jenipher Otieno,
Executive Director
of MORCAO**

Jenipher Otieno, Executive Director of MORCAO, has made presentations to the National Steering Committee on Orphans and Vulnerable Children in Kenya since her return home from the Gathering. When she gets the chance, she shares the Toronto Statement, further increasing awareness of the kind of contribution small organisations like MORCAO can make, and giving voice to the grandmothers with whom they work. Mary Agwa and Martha Owino Onditi are two grandmothers who were at the Grandmothers Gathering in August. Jenipher reports that the attention her group has received as a result of the Gathering has spread the word of grandmothers' groups – and the importance of their work - beyond the borders of the district in which they work.

Jenipher writes: *I have made presentations at the National Steering Committee on OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children), a Government coordinating body on issues around orphans in the country. In my report, I read the Toronto Statement to them as well. I believe we will move with grandmothers' network in country.*

We have managed to have Mary and Martha, the two grandmothers of MORCAO, hold meetings with over 100 grandmothers to share their experiences at the gathering.

Last Sunday, October 1st, was the International Day for the Elderly, we used this time to reach people in the Province with information about the Grandmothers Gathering through a local radio station broadcasting in vernacular. There was an introduction, then Mary and Martha made presentations in vernacular, thereafter the lines were open for discussion, people were calling in with questions. This has helped the whole of Nyanza Province with 12 Districts get details about the Grandmothers Gathering. MORCAO works in only one District, Rachuony District in Nyanza Province.

We will present the next proposal soon. We have collected details from the grandmothers on what they want done to move them from the poverty level to a manageable level. I have to put the details together and send to you soon.

Reach Out Mbuya, Uganda



Karmela Kasule (orange-yellow t-shirt, back row) and the 28 children and adults in her care.

Reach Out Mbuya is an outstanding organisation, with several projects supported by the Foundation, including; providing voluntary testing for and counselling around HIV and AIDS; provision of home based care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and orphans; and amongst many other terrifically community-based activities - caregiver training and microfinance for the grandmothers groups. Two grandmothers involved in the microfinance project “Bread of Life” which helps them start their own businesses with a small, manageable loan, participated in the Grandmothers’ Gathering.

Nkoruniziza Ntale Jospeh, was with the grannies from Reach Out at the Gathering, and writes with updates on their experiences and the transformation he sees in Esther Wamala Nabachwa and Karmela Kasule since their visit to Toronto:

No words can describe how wonderful it was for the few days we spent in Toronto.

*Our main Task now is to strengthen our different Networks in order to give the needed support/interventions for these **World Mothers**.*

We highly appreciate the foundation's continuous support for the needy people in Africa... [we] send our great love to all the people who made our stay in Toronto an Historical event in our lives and thanks for creating hope in the hearts of the African Grannies-It's always good to know that someone out there cares about their needs and challenges.

We have held group discussions with some grannies in all our five villages of operation and the results are wonderful. Part of the purpose of these discussions is to give feedback to the community of what [trans]pired in our workshops while in Toronto. The content of the discussions includes idea-sharing, sustainability, forming support groups, and the involvement of the grandmothers in the planning process. We want to create a sense of ownership among the grannies.

All the discussions are facilitated by the two grannies—Esther and Karmela—using the experiences they got from the interactions with grannies from other countries. My presence is to jot down the key issues from all these discussion and guide them.

Karmela has been very instrumental in consoling other grannies in the community, assuring them that it's not only them facing the challenges that they have. She encourages them to form groups and consolidate themselves into functional units for self-help.

Karmela moves with her shoulders high because she is now a role model in her community. I have heard stories that every Sunday she goes to her local church and the congregation welcomes her with loud cheers ever since she came back from Toronto. Talk about 45 minutes of fame every Sunday morning!

Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust, South Africa

Two grandmothers from the Centre, Cwengkile Nikiwe Myeni and Lindeni Mbotho visited Toronto as part of the Grandmothers Gathering. They are members of the support groups at the Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust. The Hillcrest AIDS Centre Trust prides itself on being a community-focused centre of training and care, its efforts helping the entire urban community affected by HIV and AIDS. The Centre has realized that expertise is initiating and supporting wage-earning activities for grandmothers and community care, including voluntary counselling and testing and palliative care.

Julie, a nurse at the Centre, emphasizes the fact that it's the women who are core to the work the Centre does: *"Older women are the ones mobilizing, mothers and grandmothers. We have two men carers who are brilliant – but we have only two."*

Because the death tolls are rising, Julie explains that the centre is a place people can look to for hope and support: *"How do you put on paper quality of life? People come in here looking down, depressed, and in time show up chirpy and ready to work. Funders ask for measurement, but how do you measure this?"*

Indeed, it is the intangible psychological and social effects of the Centre that Julie emphasizes. *"The income generation projects are about a lot more than money. They are also about self-esteem... and you can see that when people start to feel good about themselves, it boosts their immune systems. They are healthier."*



Hillcrest grannies at the Grandmothers Gathering, Toronto: Princess Ntombenhle Mkhize and Lindeni Mbotho