



# HEROES OF OUR TIME: Health workers helping children

## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is based on research into the experiences of children in communities heavily affected by HIV/AIDS.

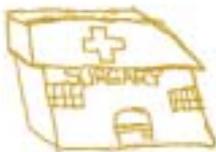
It presents findings useful for health workers who want to help children in the time of HIV and AIDS.



# Many children need help

Many health workers are very concerned about the growing number of children in need. These are just some of the things that, as a health worker, you might see or hear about every day:

- Children caring for sick siblings and parents
- Children grieving
- Children having to get money and food for their families
- Children coming alone to the clinic
- Children doing all the chores at home
- Children infected with HIV or sick with AIDS
- Children not able to go to school
- Children not able to access grants
- Children who don't have food



Many health workers have pointed to the fact that children cannot stop growing up while they wait until all the necessary programmes and policies are put in place. They are growing up now and they must have their needs met now!

Health workers stress that in this time of HIV and AIDS, even under challenging working conditions, it is important to make the most of opportunities to help children in need. Some ideas about how to help children at health facilities, and how to help children by working together with others, are described on the next pages.





# Heroes of our time

As a health worker, you play a very important role in the community. You are often the first to help people with a range of problems, and you are expected to lead the response to HIV and AIDS. But there are thousands of health workers across South Africa who are not acknowledged or noticed for the work they are doing. These are the unsung "heroes" of our time. Often these are health workers who see opportunities to work with others and make a difference in the lives of their patients.

You will see more of these "heroes" profiled in the coloured boxes in this booklet. We know every working situation is different, so we are not suggesting that you do the same as they have done. But we hope these stories might inspire you with some new ideas of your own.

## **HERO OF OUR TIME: MRS BONTLE**

*After seeing many children with malnutrition, Mrs Bontle, a community health worker, has started a food garden on the clinic premises with the help of a local NGO. "Now I can help the families who need it most with a little food," she says.*

# How health workers can help children

## HERO OF OUR TIME: SISTER HLAGANE MALAPANE

*Sister Hlagane Malapane from a hospital in Mpumalanga has a good relationship with the local social workers. She makes sure that she knows what her patients' problems are and that the social workers help them when she can't.*

## Make the most of contact time with patients

In your time with a patient, be alert to a situation where there may be children in need. Many sick adults will have children depending on them.

- When seeing a sick adult, ask about the children they care for, or help to care for. Find out whether any of these children need support. For example, some may be hungry or not attending school.
- The family might be eligible for a grant, school fee exemptions or other help available in the area.
- Home-based care organisations might be able to help the family.
- Help with information about the safe preparation of food, nutrition, sanitation and avoiding HIV-infection.



# Make the clinic child-friendly

A friendly, open atmosphere at the clinic will help children to ask for what they need. Many children are frightened to return to the clinic after just one bad experience. Talk with other health workers about ways to make children feel comfortable at the clinic.

- Work out ways to help children who come alone to the clinic. Make sure these children get attended to as quickly as possible.
- Make information which could be useful to children available at the clinic. For example, place lists of helpful organisations and services on a notice board.
- Make it easy for children to get condoms, contraception and information about HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

## **HERO OF OUR TIME: SISTER MSELEKU**

*Sister Mseleku is a nurse at a clinic in a rural village in the Eastern Cape. She became concerned about the many children who arrived alone at her clinic after walking up to 15km from their homes. She started selling fruit to pay for the children's transport home and to give them something to eat before leaving.*

# Fight stigma and discrimination around HIV and AIDS

## HERO OF OUR TIME: MISS SWART

*Miss Swart, who works as a community health-worker near Zeerust in the North West Province, has made a big difference to her HIV-positive patients through her attitude alone. Says one of her patients: "She is always willing to listen and when she touches my baby you can see that she is not scared, she shows love and care. That means a lot to me."*

Many children and adults are hurt by discrimination. Children sometimes avoid getting help for fear of stigma.

- Give people the facts about HIV and AIDS and make sure they don't have the wrong information.
- Be a role model in your community and in your work. For example, go for a voluntary HIV test and be open and accepting toward those living and affected by HIV and AIDS.





# Make a difference by working together

## HEROES OF OUR TIME:

### DOCTORS AND NURSES AT A KWAZULU-NATAL HOSPITAL

*A group of doctors and nurses in a rural area in KwaZulu-Natal approached local services in the area including the Departments of Social Development, Agriculture, Education and Health. The result was the establishment of a community-based organisation which helps needy children in the area to get food, go to school and get the grants they are eligible for.*

The more people work together, the easier it is to help children in need.

- Develop referral lists and share them with other service providers in your area and with your clients.
- Talk to organisations and people in your community who are trying to help children. Find ways to work together.
- Encourage other people in the community to help children. Get community leaders involved in helping children.
- Invite other service providers and local organisations to the clinic to talk to patients while they are waiting.

# Work with home-based carers

There are many different kinds of organisations doing home-based care work. Home-based carers are able to follow up on children in need, and also refer children to the clinic. They are often available after the clinic has closed.

- Build a good relationship with home-based carers in your area, listen to their stories, and find ways to support each other in your work.
- Offer support, supplies and equipment to home-based carers so they can support patients who cannot get to the clinic.

## HERO OF OUR TIME: SISTER NHLAPO

*Sister Nhlapo at a clinic in Mmabatho, North West Province, works closely with Memory Ndlovu, the co-ordinator of a local home-based care association. Sister Nhlapo says, "When I find that a mother is very sick, I ask Memory and her team to follow up at the house to see if the children are okay."*





# Work with schools

## **HERO OF OUR TIME: SISTER MOROJELE**

*Sister Morojele from Gauteng visits the local schools in the area to talk about HIV and AIDS and check up on the children who are on antiretrovirals.*

Building relationships with local schools can be a good way to reach children.

- Find out from teachers what the children need. Encourage teachers to refer sick children to the clinic.
- Teach learners how to protect themselves from HIV when they are caring for sick friends and family members.
- Support schools to get basic first aid kits and teach educators how to provide first aid and apply universal precautions.
- Think of other ways to work with schools. For example, supporting a feeding scheme or a vegetable garden to feed hungry children.

# Times are tough

Research has confirmed what health workers all over South Africa experience every day – being a health worker can be very hard: There are many patients to see; some patients are too sick to come to the clinic; many people cannot afford the food they need to eat when taking their medication; it can be very difficult to talk about HIV and AIDS; often your environment does not support the work you need to do.

## HERO OF OUR TIME: SISTER NTSHONA

*Sister Ntshona, the manager of a clinic in Gugulethu in the Western Cape, has a suggestion box at the clinic so that health workers can get feedback from patients. "I do a high tea when staff get positive feedback. If a person is mentioned by name, we acknowledge that. We share things, talk about things..."*

More than ever, the skills and expertise of your profession are needed. You are working in a challenging time in challenging circumstances.

## Many health workers say that it helps to focus on the things you can do:

- Take care of yourself by getting rest, exercise and healthy food. Talk with someone regularly about what makes you happy, sad, worried or angry.
- Value and respect each other for the important work that you do.

## About the research

*The information and recommendations in this pamphlet come from an in-depth multi-site qualitative research study\* conducted by the Children's Institute between 2001 and 2003.*

*The research explored the life experiences of children in communities heavily affected by AIDS. It also looked at the experiences of their caregivers and service providers.*

*The Children's Institute, University of Cape Town, aims to contribute to policies, laws and interventions that promote equity and realise the rights and improve the conditions of all children in South Africa, through research, advocacy, education and technical support.*

\* Health and Social Services to Address the Needs of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in the context of HIV/AIDS – research report and recommendations. Giese S, Meintjes H, Croke R, Chamberlain R, 2003. CI and National Department of Health

## Places to help

*The contact organisations on this page will be able to direct you to locally-based services.*

### AIDS CONSORTIUM

For information on different organisations working with children in the context of HIV and AIDS in the Gauteng Province.  
(011) 403 0265

### AIDS HELPLINE

(24 hours, 7 days a week)  
For telephone counselling and information about HIV and AIDS.  
0800 012 322

### CHAIN

For information on different organisations working with children in the context of HIV and AIDS in the Western Cape Province.  
(021) 418 4929

### CHILDREN IN DISTRESS NETWORK (CINDI)

For information on different organisations working with children in the context of HIV and AIDS in the KwaZulu-Natal Province.  
(033) 345 7994

### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS CENTRE

For information, services and organisations working for child rights.  
(031) 307 6075

### CHILDLINE TOLL FREE

(24 hours, 7 days a week)

For telephone counselling and help around physical and sexual abuse of children, neglect and behavioural problems.  
0800 055 555

### NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

For information about getting different government grants.  
(012) 312 7500

### NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For information on getting school fees exempted and contact details for your provincial or local education offices.  
(012) 312 5911

### NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

For information on basic health care services and contact details for your provincial or local health department.  
(012) 312 0000

### RED RIBBON RESOURCE CENTRE

To order and find out about books and booklets on grants, HIV, AIDS, healthy eating and lots more.  
(011) 880 0405

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