

Ukuthasa Newsletter

Encouraging local communities in Africa



Issue 23

June 2009

Hope makes an impact



Nicky Welsh, co-founder of Ukuthasa, reports on her work in the vital area of HIV education, training and counselling – a project we have named Ukuthasa Hope...

I recently led a three-day HIV training course in the Free State of South Africa and neighbouring Lesotho, several hours' drive from Durban. At the end, I left behind some basic first aid kits and copies of the *Threads* book, *Nosipho Comes To Stay*, along with some Siphosenkosi dolls (featured in our March 2008 newsletter), which Ukuthasa produced to help children come to terms with the loss of family members through Aids. Last week I received the following email from one of the project leaders in Lesotho – an email that underlines how the Ukuthasa-sponsored training is having a very real effect on communities affected by HIV and Aids...



'Thank you so much. The home-based care training was excellent, as was the workshop on first aid kits and the equipment you left with us. We often have two or three teams going out into the rural areas in different directions, but I think two kits will be enough for now, as long as we plan visits carefully. The rucksacks will be a good solution for carers to carry water to patients where supplies are limited or access is difficult for those who aren't fit and healthy. Dehydration is a huge issue here. We visited a badly dehydrated man today who uses plastic bottles and bags for a toilet. This is common here, so commodes would be a great improvement.

We've started meeting one day a week and using stories to discuss HIV with a group of children aged six to 10. We're using the *Threads* book you left with us, and we've found the story connects so well with many of them.

We've turned a corner over the past few weeks. The feel of what we're doing has changed. As we did our regular visits today, for example, people were chatting openly in the streets about their HIV treatment programmes.

A visiting GP asked a lady what medication she'd been given, and her neighbour, whom we've never visited, brought out her medication to show us and joined in the conversation – a sign that we seem to be overcoming, at last, the fear and secrecy surrounding HIV status.

We've been asked by several HIV-positive mums if we will test their children, and we're working with four families where children have recently been tested, supporting them and teaching them to support one another. I think this is going to be a big part of what we do here.

The training has worked well for us because team members are now able to explain things to patients in ways they can understand. Because of the knowledge they now have, the team are asking people more questions and advising them on what questions to ask when they go to the clinic. It has given the team a greater confidence and will help to enable better HIV education and treatment.'

How you can help

First aid kits, *Threads* books and dolls, water carriers, latex gloves and commodes are essential elements of home care delivery in rural areas. You can sponsor these through Ukuthasa... Why not fill one of our money boxes with your loose change and help fund the purchase of the items listed below? Contact Sue Whittaker (details over) for more information.

First aid kits:	£10 (small box); £25 (rucksack).
Latex gloves:	£5 for a box of 100
Water carriers:	£32 each
Commodos:	£10 (plastic chair with bucket) £75 (proper surgical commode chair)
Threads book:	£5.50 per copy
Siphosenkosi dolls:	£5 each

Training the doctors of the future



Nicky Welsh continues...

I've been administering an adult HIV distance learning course run by the University of Cape Town Medical School and funded by the Desmond Tutu HIV foundation. I received the following email from a doctor called Sibanda, who's just completed the course. He worked in Harare's largest teaching hospital before it was forced to close because medical staff weren't being paid and supplies of drugs and equipment had run out. He's now living in South Africa and, under a new commitment made by the SA government, will be encouraged to become part of the state health system here.

'This is some of the best practical teaching I've received in HIV management. It was concise, yet with sufficient detail for one to make the necessary clinical judgements in the field. I would highly recommend it to all medical interns on completion of their medical degrees (or before).

Although at medical school we go deeper, especially into the nature of the virus, the studies are academic and in my opinion only necessary if one is going to specialise in HIV management. Having worked in paediatric and adult infection clinics as an intern in Zimbabwe, this course almost made me want to go back and be an intern again, so I could apply my new-found skills... I say 'almost' because internship isn't easy!

If I were still based in Zimbabwe I'd offer to lead a group to study the course. I'm far from an expert in HIV management, but the course has been so helpful in consolidating my knowledge. I think the course should award diplomas to those who pass! The more of us who know how to manage HIV and care for patients, the better. Thank you so much, Ukuthasa, for sponsoring the course and giving me the opportunity to complete it.'



Project leaders find the Threads book is a vital tool in helping children come to terms with loss through HIV/Aids

At the forefront of HIV research



I was privileged to attend the fourth South African bi-annual Aids conference in Durban, reports Nicky Welsh. With 4,500 delegates from 52 nations, 662 scholarship places and 96 journalists reporting on the findings, the conference is fast becoming one of the world windows on the responses to the Aids pandemic. (Information can be found on the conference website: www.saaid.com).

South Africa still has the largest HIV infection rate in the world, carrying 17% of the global HIV burden but also the world's largest treatment programme. This enables ground-breaking vaccine and treatment research in the region. South Africa's statisticians, medical professionals and sociologists are working hard to exploit the experience gained here for the benefit of those living with the virus worldwide, always with an eye on prevention.

The theme of the conference was 'Scaling Up For Success', and suggested ways of achieving this included:

- a call for continued commitment to change sexual behaviour and thus reduce new infection rates
- an acknowledgment that the breakdown of the family unit, poverty and TB continue to drive the pandemic
- a renewed commitment to task sharing so we can win the battle together.

Other conference soundbites:

Research has shown there are people called 'HIV controllers' or 'elites' whose immune systems neutralise the virus and impair its ability to replicate. Their immune system seems to adapt itself to fight HIV. These people make the idea of an HIV vaccine a possibility.

The paradox of HIV remains that drugs and medical services are most available in countries where infections are least prevalent, so the global market must continue to support poorer nations to treat and research the virus.

Drug resistance is caused by poor clinical management and patient care more often than by patient adherence failure. This is important because in poorer countries the main reason for treatment inaccessibility is often the perception that patients cannot manage drug regimes.

MCPs (the practice of multiple concurrent sexual partnerships) is widespread. A campaign called One Love has been launched in Sub Saharan Africa to promote safer sexual relationships, encouraging communication, honesty, respect and faithfulness, while challenging cultural behaviours that support MCPs.

Ukuthasa on the move!

Charity founders Gary and Nicky Welsh are going back to live in the Western Cape in August 2009. Since moving to Durban, they've remained involved in a number of Cape-based projects. The move will open up a new base in Somerset West with access to the resources of a large church and local communities. Gary is planning to link these communities to Zambia, as has already happened in Kwazulu Natal and the Free State.

To all individuals, families, groups, schools, companies and churches who support us regularly in so many ways, we want to say a huge thank you. Without your support, our life-changing work would not be possible

Teenagers and the fight against HIV

*One of Ukuthasa's goals is to play a part in life-changing programmes that will help reduce the spread of HIV/Aids. Our **Peer Education Programme** is in its fifth year. Ukuthasa is continuing its partnership with the charity GoLD and Helderberg Christian Church, working with teenagers in secondary schools in The Western Cape. Charmaine Etson, project leader, reports...*

As always, we've had a hectic first term with our newly enrolled peer educators. We're very happy that we're now into our sixth school, Simanyene High School in Lwandle. Simanyene means 'We are united' or 'We are one'.

We've held our first community workshops of the year, where young people attend skills sessions presented by our peer educators. The sessions were a great success.

In another of the schools we're involved with the headmaster has given Ukuthasa an extra 45 minutes every Tuesday. This enables 500 pupils to get together in groups so the peer educators from our programme can deliver lessons to their fellow pupils. It's an exciting development.

So far, we've done three training workshops with peer educators from six different schools and our young people have chosen four projects to help within their communities. The Emyezweni pre-school is on the list, which means our peer educators will go into the school and do some gardening at some point during the term. It's great to be linking with another Ukuthasa project!

The GoLD Peer Education Programme is changing young people's lives, and we're looking to empower a generation of young people who'll impact their communities by reducing rates of HIV by making informed life choices.

Hope2educate: Peer Education reaches Kwazulu Natal

Following the success of the Peer Education Programme in the Western Cape, Ukuthasa is supporting a similar project called Hope2Educate, established by Hope Church Durban to implement the Peer Education Programme in four high schools. The schools are in Cato Manor, a previously disadvantaged area in Durban.



Helping the community: all part of the Peer Education Programme

The team held a community event at an orphanage that's struggling because it lost its registration and therefore some funding – but with such demand for homes for children, the police continue to place children in their care. Students training to be peer educators spring-cleaned the house, provided lunch for the children and left them with some toys donated by local stores, together with copies of the Threads book *Nosipho Comes To Stay* and the accompanying Siphosenkosi dolls

News from Emyezweni

Deb Gregory, Grade R teacher and manager at Emyezweni in the township of Lwandle, in the Western Cape of South Africa, gives an update on recent developments...

The first term of 2009 started on 21 January and we had a few frustrating weeks waiting for children to arrive back from extended summer holidays in the Eastern Cape. By the middle of February everyone had come back, and we had a total of 89 children on the register. Some of our teachers have swapped classes this year. The children are getting used to me teaching Grade R, and Mamma Vathi is now working with Ntombekaya in the nursery class.

In early March, Grade R class enjoyed a school outing (funded by the Ukuthasa Child Sponsorship Programme) to Helderberg Nature Reserve, where they followed a picture treasure hunt and had a picnic – complete with chocolate doughnuts! The star guest, a large tortoise, consumed most of our healthy salad! After lunch everyone played games and drew pictures of the flowers and animals.



Who'd think a tortoise could provide so much entertainment?

In April, 10 handy members of Helderberg Christian Church worked at Emyezweni for a day doing everything from putting up heaters to fixing our leaking roof. We're now looking forward to a snug winter, thanks to their help.

As part of the medical provision for Emyezweni children, our school doctor, Susan Bingham, was able to arrange for a little girl in Grade R class to go to hospital for a much-needed operation to straighten her legs. Athandile had her operation on 23 April and is recovering well. After six weeks in plaster and in hospital, she'll be allowed home in a wheelchair. We've been able to arrange regular visits for her parents and staff members, and the visits will continue until Athandile is allowed home. Our school physiotherapist will work with her when she returns to school.

Trustee Trevor Blackmur talks about why Ukuthasa means so much to him...



I've been a trustee for Ukuthasa since its inception in August 1996. If truth be told, it wasn't something I was looking to get involved in, but I was happy to volunteer when the charity's founders, Gary and Nicky, asked if I'd be prepared to help. I've worked with numbers for most of my adult life, so it's no surprise that I've ended up looking after

Ukuthasa's money and accounting records.

It's a privilege to be able to look back over that period of time and realise we've managed to turn over more than half a million pounds, thanks to the generous support of so many individuals and organisations.

One of the first big tasks the charity got involved in was a housing project in the Lwandle Township on the Western Cape. From a financial point of view this was a dream. For the price of your average bedsit in London we were able to build 35 homes and in the process make 35 families or residents very happy. Talk about value for money – and the build quality was excellent.

That was more than enough excitement to make you want to stay involved. As most of you reading this will know, these days our focus has shifted towards working in the field of HIV/Aids education as well as our Child Sponsorship Programme.

The latter has obvious rewards because, relatively speaking, for a fairly small amount of money, we are able to transform the lives of individual children and their families, and you can see the effects. It's brilliant. As for HIV/Aids, it's still a subject many people believe is best left alone, and because of that it can suffer from a lack of interest when it comes to fundraising. In South Africa, however, this disease is a killer, thanks in part to ignorance and fear. Worse than that, those who suffer as a result, or are left behind to cope, are often the most vulnerable and powerless.

The work we perform in this area is probably the most difficult to measure in terms of financial value – yet in terms of the number of people affected, it's an area where our money is well spent. We may never know just what effect we've had on individuals, but we do know that what we deliver can mean the difference between life and death.

And that, financially speaking – or however else you choose to view it – is priceless.

FOCUS ON FUNDRAISING

The British 10K London Run Sunday 13 July 2009

The charity has six runners taking part in this event through central London. If you'd like to sponsor them, or support them on the day itself, email or call Sue Whittaker (see below) for information.

Take on the Dinner Party Challenge

How?

Invite a few people round to dinner (as many as you like) and make a small charge per head (perhaps £5).

Then ask your guests if they'd like to take on the challenge... And then pass it on to the guests they invite. In as little as one month, from just one original dinner party, enough money could be raised to, for example, sponsor a child's education for a year, or provide health care for someone living with HIV/Aids for a year.

Contact Sue Whittaker (details below) for an information pack which includes some tried and tested South African recipes for you to try



Ukuthasa has six gifts listed on this amazing website, which makes light work of shopping for gifts for friends, colleagues and family members. So don't spend time agonising over what to buy that special someone – simply take a look at the website www.livinggenerously.com



Please consider helping raise funds for us through JumbleAID.com JumbleAID lets individuals and businesses post unwanted stuff online and anyone can pledge a donation for an item. It's FREE, easy to use **and not a penny of the donation goes to JumbleAID!**



Search the web with Everyclick.com and generate cash for Ukuthasa. It's as easy as a click of the mouse...
www.everyclick.com/ukuthasa/309469/0

INFORMATION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

If you'd like to learn more about the work of Ukuthasa, any of the projects or events mentioned in this newsletter or would like to get involved in any way, please visit our website, www.ukuthasa.org

Alternatively, contact our fundraiser and administrator, Sue Whittaker by telephone on 01689 852345 or email: sue@ukuthasa.org

