

Firelight Newsflash! 15 June 2009

Dear partners, colleagues, and friends,

At the start of 2009, Firelight was engaged in a Strategic Planning Process. One of the most important aspects of this was to hear from our grantee-partners, both past and present. The Regional Capacity Building Partners (RECABIP) in Nairobi gathered information directly from a sample of about 70 of our grantee-partners in Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe between August and October 2008.

This is the last in a series of communications that contain a summary of the key findings from the grantee-partner survey. In it, we asked, ***"What are your main lessons learnt since you started your work? What advice would you give to another organization that is just starting to serve children and families in their community?"***

We are sharing our grantees' advice as part of Firelight's Newsflash today because the wisdom shared is relevant for any and all organizations working with vulnerable children and families at the community-level.

As we celebrate the Day of the African Child on 16 June, we stand in solidarity with our grantee-partners in southern and east Africa who are working tirelessly to improve the well-being of children. On this day, let's cultivate the energy, hope, encouragement, and resilience that is so important to working with children and families - we're doing it all for them!

Our best,

The Firelight Team

What advice do Firelight partners give to other organizations working with vulnerable children and families at the community-level?

Vision/Mission

- Have a clear vision.
- Identify clear strategies with children at the centre.
- Remain focused on your mission.
- Develop values that can assist your organization in achieving its goals.

Community Mobilization & Participation

- Use structures already in the community.
- Build capacity of communities to address their own problems.
- Cultivate strong community bonds.

- Work hand in hand with the community so as to identify their needs.
- Do not bring your own ideas, but these must be from the community.
- Involve the community in the planning and implementation right from the start.
- Involvement of the community itself in all programming stages is crucial, otherwise you may end up treating symptoms and not root causes.
- Have a good relationship with the community so that they trust you.
- Ensure transparency to the community so that they gain confidence.

Working with Children

- Children should be advised that they are like any other person and they can make it in life.
- Children are resilient and have strength.
- Children have special rights and need care in order to realize their potential and wellbeing.
- Children are silent sufferers of the community and by working with volunteers, you can identify those who are most vulnerable.
- Children's needs are very diverse - adjust to help each child.
- Include children and youth from the very beginning.
- Be transparent and accountable to all, especially to children, and involve them in decision-making.
- If working with children, give them leadership - let them form committees to lead their own activities.
- Children have solutions to most of their problems if at all they are involved in solving them.
- Children have good ideas and know what they want.

Programs for Families

- Integrate children and family programmes.
- Establish relationships with the extended families of the children.
- Families with orphans should be well-educated on orphan care.
- Provide services that will empower families and enable them to support children and other family members.
- Put confidence in the capacities of grandmothers and their grandchildren.

Needs Assessment

- Identify major problems of children.
- Identify those who are most vulnerable.
- Carry out a baseline survey.
- The problem is so much big and resources are not sufficient.

Types of Programs

- Promote child education as the basis of development.

- School fees support is not the only strategy towards educational support. Others like sanitation, school desks, etc. also prevents a lot of girls from dropping down.
- Always think of the health of the children in every activity planned.
- Include a component of psychosocial support.
- Pay more attention to counselling because most of orphans are still traumatized.
- Consider providing legal support.
- Support children and families to implement income-generating activities.
- Provide life skills to young people so that they can get jobs or become self-employed to be able to provide for their needs.
- Provide material support to children who are living with HIV.
- Take into cognizance of human rights and most importantly child rights in programming.
- Provide as many services as possible.

Networking

- Make linkages with other organizations.
- Form partnerships with other organisation to better address issues in the community.
- It is very important to involve various stakeholders when implementing activities.
- It is vital to involve all partners (both govt. departments and NGOs) if you activities would be sustainable enough. Government is making a lot of commitment towards alleviating the impact of HIV and in the end you may caught up duplicating efforts.
- Strengthen advocacy for government inputs in community-initiated projects.
- Lobby strongly with key stakeholders to ensure maximum support.
- Collaboration is essential.

Other Advice

- Work with heart and commitment.
- Be patient and listen.
- Be available.
- Everyone's contribution is important and should be recognised.
- Teamwork and communication is very important for the success of our organization.
- Take one step at a time and be committed and be ready to assume multi-roles.
- Start slowly, on a pilot base. Keep in close touch with the beneficiaries. And analyze and document the processes.
- Be patient because development is complex and takes very long before things are in place.
- You cannot achieve objectives at once. There are several interrelated

- activities that help to achieve organisational objectives.
- Register as an organization.
 - Look into national policy concerning with children rights.
 - Development work is slow, very slow, often too demanding, and sometimes seems over-burdensome. But do not give up.
 - Maintain courage.

As part of the Firelight Foundation's Monitoring, Evaluation and Technical Assistance (META) Program, Firelight provides "Newsflashes" to share relevant resources and information with our active grantee-partners via weekly emails and via post on a monthly basis. We hope that by facilitating access to information for grassroots, community-focused organizations, programming for children and families, as well as organizational development, is enhanced. Past editions of the Firelight Newsflash can be found on our website: <http://www.firelightfoundation.org/newsflash.htm>.

We welcome your comments, feedback and ideas for upcoming Newsflashes at newsletter@firelightfoundation.org.