

Firelight Newsflash! 29 October 2007 - an article by Loving Hand in Zimbabwe

One of Firelight Foundation's grantee-partners in Zimbabwe, Loving Hand in Bulawayo, offered the following article in an email forum entitled Partners Zimbabwe (www.healthdev.org/partnerszimbabwe). In the month of October, the forum is hosting a focused discussion on the evolution, successes, challenges and lessons learnt from implementing home-based care.

This article really gets to the serious issues faced by not only the volunteer caregivers but in Zimbabwe overall. Loving Hand's effective words are an illustration of what so many Firelight grantee-partners are facing and it is a great example of what organizations can do to document and raise these issues more widely.

We encourage you to offer your comments and join and participate in the discussion.

HBC in Zimbabwe: Care facilitators need community support Loving Hand

The dwindling global support for HIV/AIDS programmes in Zimbabwe has seriously hampered the effective implementation of Home Based Care activities. Efforts by Community Based AIDS Service Organisations such as Loving Hand in Bulawayo are facing serious challenges.

Caregivers need support in terms of uniforms, food, transport allowances and Home Base Care Kits. When such support is not available, the morale of the Caregivers is put to a serious test.

Elizabeth Mloyi, a 58-year-old Caregiver in Luveve, Ward 16, who has been working as a Caregiver for the past 15 years, says that she has suffered emotional, psychological and social pressure as a community caregiver.

Mloyi has seen some of her clients suffer extreme pain, die and leave behind desperate children and disheartened widows or widowers.

In one incident that has left an indelible mark in her life, Mloyi says that she was invited one Saturday to attend to a male bedridden client. Some neighbours had noticed a pungent smell coming from one of the houses nearby. They asked the two young children staying at the house and got the information that there was a sick client. Mloyi was then called to render

her services.

'When we got into the room, we could not believe what we were seeing. The patient was all soiled. The rags that were being used as blankets were soaked with excretion. The client was literally decomposing alive. The skin was peeling off. The client could neither turn nor talk.'

Mloyi and her colleague quickly mobilized an ambulance to ferry the patient to Mpilo Central Hospital. Upon arrival, the patient was quickly admitted. Unfortunately the two caregivers had not taken money for the journey back to Luveve. They were told that the ambulance could not take them back to Luveve. The two literary begged from the nurses at the institution.

'This kind of situation has been experienced by many Caregivers in Luveve. At times we have to dig deep into our meager resources to help the clients. They have trust in us. They have faith in us and failing to deliver makes one feel guilty.' Said the emotionally charged, Mloyi.

She added that their clients are from across the board, orphans, patients, families headed by grandparents, child headed families, victims of abuse and any other community member.

But the greatest challenge faced by Mloyi and her colleagues is material resources to augment their efforts.

'We operate without protective clothing, without disinfectants and without wheel chairs to transport patients to the clinic. We also have our families to look after. We wear tennis shoes to walk around, we need decent uniforms and above all we also need to be looked after. When I go to the clinic I am asked to pay for the services yet I am a health worker.' She says.

These challenges have resulted in the mass withdrawal of trained caregivers. In 2003, Loving Hand trained over 400 Caregivers in Bulawayo's western suburbs. Currently there are less than sixty. The majority have abandoned their call citing lack of communal support and lack of recognition.

Councilor Israel Mabaleka for Ward fifteen in Luveve says that it is everyone's task to ensure that caregivers are well supported. He says that the work done by caregivers is even more important because they take care of patients who can no longer be assisted by hospitals.

Home Based Care Programmes are mainly funded by international donors. The Programmes mostly focus on training caregivers and coordinating their work. Home Based Kits are inadequately supplied. There is no support directed to the caregivers except maybe one pair of uniform. The Zimbabwean government has indicated the great value they put on the caregivers, yet there is nothing to show in terms of material support.

HIV Programmes in Zimbabwe have suffered excruciating donor fatigue. According to statistics, Zimbabwe is receiving US\$4 per patient per year in donor support compared to US\$362 per patient per year that Uganda is getting. This debilitating state of affairs has hampered efforts to support and care for people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

Home Based Caregivers in Zimbabwe have experienced a lot of emotional challenges in their humanitarian efforts and there is need to come up with programmes that support them.

To comment, please email: lovinghand@zol.co.zw

More information on the email forum, Partners Zimbabwe (www.healthdev.org/eforums/partnerszimbabwe)

Partners Zimbabwe eForum provides a virtual meeting place for organisations and people at the national, provincial and community levels to network, share experiences and ask for advice on issues related to HIV/AIDS in the Zimbabwean context.

The eForum facilitates linkages and information sharing between groups of people living with HIV/AIDS and organisations working in the area of HIV/AIDS and other health-related fields in a variety of sectors. It also provides searchable archives of postings, which include reports from international and regional AIDS conferences related to HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Partners Zimbabwe eForum has a diverse membership made up of:

- people living with HIV/AIDS (PWHAs)
- non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- community-based organisations (CBOs)
- faith-based organisations (FBOs)
- medical workers
- private sector organisations
- traditional healers
- young people

- research institutes and centres
- educational establishments
- provincial and district level administration
- journalist/media groups
- ...and many more.

Partners Zimbabwe is managed collaboratively by Zimbabwe AIDS Network (www.zan.org.zw), Health and Development Networks (HDN, www.hdnet.org), Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information and Dissemination Service (SAfAIDS, www.saf aids.org.zw), The Centre (www.kubatana.net/centre), Zimbabwe National Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (ZNNP+) and Women and AIDS Support Network (WASN, www.wasn.org.zw), with the support of Irish Aid (www.irishaid.gov.ie).