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Caring for Families Affected by HIV and AIDS in Southern Africa

A SPECIAL REPORT

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**CARING FOR
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*A higher standard.
A higher purpose.*



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Families of orphans and vulnerable children were supplied with ewes and rams, which will be a source of increased income.

** The United Nations defines an orphan as a child younger than 18 who has lost one or both parents. Children who have lost one parent are called orphans because even the loss of one parent, especially if that parent is the mother, often leads to the breakup of the family and a change in living situation for the child.*

World Vision deeply appreciates the faithful partnership of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in caring for children and families impacted by AIDS in southern Africa. Your gift of \$11,000 to the Umzimvubu community in South Africa is helping provide some of life's basic necessities—food and shelter—to children whose parents have died due to AIDS. The gift of your congregation's time to assemble Caregiver Kits and your \$19,000 financial gift for these kits is encouraging local caregivers ministering to those with AIDS and other chronic illnesses.

The Impact of HIV and AIDS in South Africa

The 2010 UNAIDS report shows that 5.6 million South Africans are HIV-positive, the highest number of any country in the world. Over the past decade, life expectancy in South Africa has declined by nearly 20 years and the number of men and women in their 30s and 40s has decreased, creating a sharp increase in the number of children left without one or both parents. South Africa is estimated to have 1.9 million children orphaned* due to AIDS-related causes.

As AIDS steals the lives of more and more adults, many children are forced to live with elderly relatives who lack the means to care for them or with guardians who abuse them physically or sexually. Older children may be left to care for their younger siblings without any adults to provide support. These children usually have insufficient food, little opportunity to attend school as they work to support their families, and little hope of breaking out of this cycle.

While government agencies in South Africa have established policies to support people living with HIV and AIDS, few government services are actually available. Those that exist are slow and difficult to access. Practically, rural residents mostly depend on local organizations, like World Vision, for support.

Itumeleng's Story

Itumeleng's life began a downward spiral following the death of her mother. Her father neglected her, her siblings, and their home, even though the walls of their single-room house in Umzimvubu were crumbling and run-down. Unable to cope with the situation at home, one of Itumeleng's brothers went to live with friends and he has lost contact with his family. "I just hope he is still alive," said Itumeleng.

Itumeleng realized she had to leave school to care for her younger siblings. "I was in grade four when I decided to drop out," she said. "Other students used to laugh at us because we did not have uniforms and shoes. So I had no choice but to look for a job."

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Itumeleng carries her infant on her back as she points to her old home (above) and stands in the doorway of her new home (below). Thanks to generous donors, five families of orphans and vulnerable children received new homes to replace their dilapidated former houses.



When she was abandoned by the father of her newborn baby, Itumeleng's life became even more difficult. With the added responsibility of an infant and without a job, Itumeleng is grateful for practical support from World Vision, including seeds to start a backyard garden where she grows food for the family. She and her siblings have also received a solid and well-constructed new home with toilet facilities, which is unusual in this area. As the mother of the family, Itumeleng cares for her infant and the house so her younger siblings can continue attending school. World Vision is also assisting them in obtaining identity documents to gain access to government assistance services.

The Umzimvubu HIV and AIDS Community Partnership Project

The Umzimvubu community development area, located in the northeastern corner of the Eastern Cape of South Africa, is typical of communities struggling with the problems caused by HIV and AIDS. The unstable economy dependent upon agriculture and the annual famines caused by the cold, dry winters that yield few crops have resulted in most able-bodied men seeking employment away from their families, in gold mines and fruit farms in other regions. The growing practice of migrant labor has escalated the HIV prevalence rate, which in turn has caused the number of orphans and vulnerable children in the area to skyrocket.

Since 2008, World Vision's Umzimvubu HIV and AIDS Community Partnership Project has focused on significantly reducing the impact of the AIDS pandemic. One of the ways the project has tackled these challenges is by mobilizing community members to form community care coalitions that advocate for, care for, and support orphans and vulnerable children. Because these groups are community-based, they create a sustainable way to provide ongoing care for children whose lives have been affected by HIV and AIDS. The project seeks to help 250 households of vulnerable children, including 50 child-headed households, and 100 farming households, including 60 lead farmers.

By establishing and equipping community care coalitions in three local communities, the food security and stability of households with vulnerable children will be improved through providing seed and livestock, such as sheep or goats. In Umzimvubu, as in other areas, the program has also included the creation of youth clubs and training of peer educators, which continue to distribute information about the transmission and prevention of HIV and AIDS.

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World Vision is partnering with local churches in the Mapoteng community that are taking the lead in caring for people living with AIDS. Seventeen local churches each have a Church Hope Action Team (CHAT) whose members receive training on HIV prevention, providing basic care, and children's rights. Once trained, they receive their Caregiver Kits. These caregivers provide physical and emotional support, but are also a model of a loving Christian response and care for those living with AIDS.

Recent Project Accomplishments

In fiscal year 2010 (October 2009 through September 2010), Umzimvubu's HIV and AIDS Community Partnership Project accomplished the following:

- Constructed new homes for five child-headed families, allowing them to escape abusive living situations and giving them the opportunity to return to school
- Provided temporary employment for 28 community members to construct homes for orphans and vulnerable children
- Advocated for 43 orphans and vulnerable children to obtain identity documents, resulting in government assistance for 30 of these individuals
- Conducted training on crop production for 50 farmers from eight villages who supervise the backyard garden project that helps ensure food security for vulnerable children in child-headed households
- Furnished gardening tools for establishing backyard gardens to 178 households with orphans and vulnerable children
- Provided 300 orphans and vulnerable children with breeding sheep (ewes) in conjunction with the department of agriculture, which will be supplying breeding rams to the same people
- Assisted 21 households of vulnerable children in selling produce in the local market and assisted 130 households with selling wool from their sheep to the local wool growers association to earn income for basic necessities
- Trained 32 people from 17 communities (including six pastors from separate churches) on forming community care coalitions; addressing the emotional, spiritual, and physical needs of vulnerable children; and equipping the children for the future through education and life skills training

Caring for the Sick in Lesotho

The country of Lesotho, like the country of South Africa that surrounds it, has been heavily impacted by the AIDS pandemic. Though small in size, the country has the third-highest HIV prevalence rate in the world (23.6 percent) and the second-highest rate of new HIV infections (2.58 percent). With almost 300,000 people in the country living with HIV or AIDS, caregivers are a critical component for providing basic nursing care.

Your church has encouraged local community members through the Caregiver Kits your congregation has assembled. Each kit of these essential supplies—soap, pain killers, latex gloves—enable caregivers to provide home-based care for those with serious illnesses, especially AIDS. Last November, we were pleased to be able to furnish 150 kits in addition to the 350 you donated. In

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Providing tools to vulnerable children for backyard gardens and training for community farmers that supervise these gardens helps ensure these children have enough food to eat.

total, your church built 500 kits that are now being used in the Mapoteng community development area of Lesotho. We also very much appreciate your gift of 350 kits in 2009, which were used in other areas during 2010.

World Vision's goal in the Mapoteng community development area is to care for 5,000 orphans and vulnerable children and for 300 people who are chronically ill. Each caregiver regularly visits from eight to 10 patients, depending on the person's needs. By modeling safe practices and training others about HIV transmission, caregivers have been able to reduce the rate of new infections. Caregivers also support child-headed households with help on other important life skills, such as household management, nutrition, and basic agricultural practices. These compassionate volunteers often use their own money to help with financial burdens (such as school fees and uniforms) to ensure the children are able to go to school.

Recent Project Accomplishments and Plans

In fiscal year 2010, the following accomplishments occurred in Lesotho's Mapoteng community:

- Provided care and support to 15 percent of the orphans, vulnerable children, and chronically ill in the community, with plans to increase support to 20 percent during fiscal year 2011
- Trained 37 community members to provide home-based care
- Facilitated training and group discussions for 100 children, youth, and adults to provide education on HIV prevention, with plans to train another 150 during fiscal year 2011

“My role as a caregiver is to visit chronically ill patients, clean them, and look if they have eaten,” said Ms. Nyane, a caregiver in Lesotho. “I also offer spiritual words of encouragement in order to provide [emotional] support and give them hope.”

You Are Making a Difference

The congregation of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is changing lives in southern Africa. Your encouragement of local caregivers and support of those impacted by HIV and AIDS provides these families with some of life's most basic necessities—food, shelter, and care in sickness. Children whose lives once seemed bleak now can look to the future with the hope of living life to the fullest.



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