VOICES

OF HOPE AND CHANGE

Stories from across Africa, celebrating ten years of social and emotional support for children, their families and communities.
TO OUR IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS
This publication would not have been possible without our dedicated partners from all across East and Southern Africa, who have shared their challenges and successes with us, so that others might learn from them.
They, and the communities and families they work with, gave their time, energy and commitment to the process of collecting these stories. We thank them deeply for this.

TO OUR FUNDING PARTNERS
Ten years ago, an extraordinary group of government and corporate funders came together to do something about the social and emotional wellbeing of children affected by HIV and AIDs in Africa. They believed in REPSSI and the vision behind us, and it is because of their belief that we are here ten years later. To the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), and the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD), we offer our sincere thanks.

Cover photo: Children at a partner’s community-based centre © REPSSI, 2011.
All photos in used in this publication have followed ethical written consent procedures.

info@repssi.org | www.repssi.org | +27 11 988 5820 | PO Box 1669, Randburg, 2125, Johannesburg, South Africa
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHAT WE STAND FOR ................................................................. 2
A SMALL DEDICATION ............................................................ 3
OUR JOURNEY: 2002-2012 .......................................................... 4
CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF:
  Igniting Hope ................................................................. 6
  Changing Behaviour ........................................................ 12
  Building Communities ...................................................... 20
  Combating HIV and AIDS ............................................... 26
  Skilling Those On The Ground ......................................... 32
  Working With Governments ............................................. 38
EXPERTISE: TOOLS AND TRAINING ...................................... 44
REPSI PARTNERS ACROSS THE REGION .............................. 46
WHAT WE STAND FOR

LOVE. CARE. PROTECTION.
All children have the right to be cared for, loved, encouraged and protected from harm.

Children and youth exposed to the devastating effects of poverty, conflict, HIV and AIDS are especially in need of care for their emotional and social (psychosocial) wellbeing. Many have lost parents and family, experienced deprivation and abuse, been stigmatised, witnessed atrocity and suffered overwhelming grief.

If we wish to realise the potential of these children, if we wish to build strong and productive communities, if we wish to prevent HIV infections and promote healthy behaviour, if we wish to change attitudes and reduce discrimination... then we need to provide love, care and protection for all children.

We need to provide strong systems around children and youth to build their resilience and help them thrive.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT?
Psychosocial support is love, care and protection. It is support for the emotional and social aspects of a child’s life, so that they can live with hope and dignity.

All services for children can and should be delivered in a way that takes account of their psychosocial wellbeing.

Psychosocial support includes:
• ensuring the participation of children
• listening and responding to children’s problems
• allowing children to express their feelings and needs
• helping children to appreciate their identity
• encouraging children to set goals and reach their potential
• ensuring children have positive, nurturing relationships
• providing life skills for children and youth

Psychosocial support is best provided by families and communities.

LOVE. CARE. PROTECTION.
At REPSSI, it is our privilege to work with a range of outstanding organisations across the region. Whether they are well-known international NGOs or small, community-driven initiatives, our partners are all concerned with the wellbeing of vulnerable children and youth.

Throughout the decade since our foundation, we have been inspired by the successes of our partners in improving the social and emotional wellbeing of the people they work with. Despite distressing circumstances, poverty, legacies of conflict, and the devastation of HIV and AIDS, ordinary men, women, boys and girls across Africa are being supported and empowered to help one another live with hope and dignity. We are proud to have been part of that work.

In these pages, we have collected together stories of change, inspiration and encouragement from our partners. These stories show us that change is possible, and that situations of despair can be transformed by hope. We dedicate this collection to our partners.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT?
Psychosocial support is love, care and protection. It is support for the emotional and social aspects of a child’s life, so that they can live with hope and dignity.

All services for children can and should be delivered in a way that takes account of their psychosocial wellbeing.

Psychosocial support includes:
• ensuring the participation of children
• listening and responding to children’s problems
• allowing children to express their feelings and needs
• helping children to appreciate their identity
• encouraging children to set goals and reach their potential
• ensuring children have positive, nurturing relationships
• providing life skills for children and youth

Psychosocial support is best provided by families and communities.
It has been ten years since REPSSI was founded. These ten years have seen REPSSI move from strength to strength, becoming a leader in psychosocial support for the region.

Together with our partners, we have placed psychosocial support on the national, regional and international agenda; become SADC’s technical partner; set regional standards; trained a pool of regional expertise; created an innovative new distance-learning course; and developed a comprehensive body of knowledge which can be applied at community level.

In 2001, a meeting was convened at Masiye Camp, Zimbabwe. This “think tank” was attended by a concerned group of practitioners, children, youth, partners, managers, and academics, from organisations responding to the crisis of orphaned and vulnerable children in the region due to HIV and AIDS.

They met to discuss the social and emotional needs of these children, and how best to address them. The four lead partners were terre des hommes, Salvation Army, SAT and International HIV/AIDS Alliance. Supported by a trio of funding partners (the Swiss agency for Development and Cooperation, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development) this group established the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI).

**OUR JOURNEY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>EVENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002-2012</td>
<td>It is officially registered as a non-profit initiative, and the vision of its founders is put into action. REPSSI begins to expand, create partnerships and develop knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>Finalisation of 8 mainstreaming guidelines and 14 other manuals. REPSSI officially established within the field. Begin to invest in training regional facilitators. Study initiated with the Swiss Academy for Development and Cooperation and ChildFund Zambia to develop a successful minimal Psychosocial Support package. Partnership initiated with the University of KwaZulu-Natal to develop a distance-learning Certificate Course in psychosocial support. First partnership consultative forum held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>REPSSI firmly established within the field, begin to invest in training regional facilitators. Study initiated with the Swiss Academy for Development and Cooperation and ChildFund Zambia to develop a successful minimal Psychosocial Support package. Partnership initiated with the University of KwaZulu-Natal to develop a distance-learning Certificate Course in psychosocial support. First partnership consultative forum held.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>REPSSI ensuring children and PSS are on the agenda at national, regional and international fora. 8 countries piloting the Certificate course, supported by UNICEF and AusAID. REPSSI and UNICEF support SADC to develop a “Minimum package of services for orphans, vulnerable children and youth”, to provide a framework for govemments in reports. 8088 students enrolled in Certificate Course across 10 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>Finalisation of 8 mainstreaming guidelines and 14 other manuals. REPSSI ensuring children and PSS are on the agenda at national, regional and international fora. 8 countries piloting the Certificate course, supported by UNICEF and AusAID. REPSSI and UNICEF support SADC to develop a “Minimum package of services for orphans, vulnerable children and youth”, to provide a framework for governments in reports. 8088 students enrolled in Certificate Course across 10 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>Finalisation of 8 mainstreaming guidelines and 14 other manuals. REPSSI ensuring children and PSS are on the agenda at national, regional and international fora. 8 countries piloting the Certificate course, supported by UNICEF and AusAID. REPSSI and UNICEF support SADC to develop a “Minimum package of services for orphans, vulnerable children and youth”, to provide a framework for governments in reports. 8088 students enrolled in Certificate Course across 10 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2011</td>
<td>Finalisation of 8 mainstreaming guidelines and 14 other manuals. REPSSI ensuring children and PSS are on the agenda at national, regional and international fora. 8 countries piloting the Certificate course, supported by UNICEF and AusAID. REPSSI and UNICEF support SADC to develop a “Minimum package of services for orphans, vulnerable children and youth”, to provide a framework for governments in reports. 8088 students enrolled in Certificate Course across 10 countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>Finalisation of 8 mainstreaming guidelines and 14 other manuals. REPSSI ensuring children and PSS are on the agenda at national, regional and international fora. 8 countries piloting the Certificate course, supported by UNICEF and AusAID. REPSSI and UNICEF support SADC to develop a “Minimum package of services for orphans, vulnerable children and youth”, to provide a framework for governments in reports. 8088 students enrolled in Certificate Course across 10 countries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**IN THE BEGINNING**

REPSSI is officially registered as a non-profit initiative, and the vision of its founders is put into action. REPSSI begins to expand, create partnerships and develop knowledge.
Hope is the wellspring of all dreams, ambitions and change. Hope can be fostered through kids’ clubs and caregiver support groups; home visits to show care and attention; and training for members of the community who interact with children every day.

“We are dealing with a situation of despair and we need to restore confidence, give hope for the future... psychosocial support does that.”

—Willard Manjolo, Government of Malawi
Often, the most valuable things cost nothing at all, such as encouragement, love, trust, or a listening ear. This has been a revelation for our partners, and the communities they work with.

Peter Aduda, Kisumu Area Manager with ChildFund Kenya, says that through the partnership with REPSSI, “We realised that there are crucial things in people’s lives that do not necessarily cost money... like attention, like love, like care.”

ChildFund has now changed its approach to take into account psychosocial as well as physical or material needs. “Psychosocial support has transformed that attitude that ‘we don’t have money’, and therefore there is nothing we can do,” says Peter.

Likewise, Nancy Chidzankufa, Director of Programmes with the Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA), has used REPSSI tools to add value to her work. She tells us that “the community has come to realise that ... they can help a child to develop holistically without money.”

In Botswana, Project Concern International has found participants were similarly transformed through REPSSI’s Journey of Life workshops. “I used to think I was poor and believed that I could not give, but now I realise that I can give back in other ways that do not require money, by giving love and encouragement,” a caregiver said after the workshops.

Three years ago, Tshikukulume was a teenager in rural Limpopo, South Africa, who was struggling to cope with the death of his parents.

“I used to think I had no future and no hope, I felt alone,” says the 22-year-old, reflecting back. That was before being invited to the Far North Drop-In Centre, supported by the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund.

“The thing that encouraged me at first was being told that I could get some food there”, Tshikukulume says. “But after a while I realised that what I was learning there was important. They were telling me I could do something with my life.”

“To help me see that I could become somebody they started with the Tree of Life... It made me realise that even the tiniest, biggest small can grow big. Growing is a process. As you grow you always face challenges but you don’t have to move backwards, or turn to crime or become negative. You must encourage yourself; tell yourself that one day you’ll be up there, just like a big tree and bearing good fruit.”

“After being assisted myself I realised that there are so many people who also need help... So... my friends and I formed a group... We fight substance abuse. We teach people about HIV and AIDS. We’re encouraging school drop-outs to go back to school...”

“I’m really thinking about being a social worker... I want to be remembered for getting street kids back to school, for playing a role in stopping alcohol and substance abuse. I want to be remembered for bringing hope.”

“A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

“A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

Read more about REPSSI’s Tree of Life and Journey of Life manuals mentioned here on page 44.

REPSSI has a range of quality manuals, training and tools developed over years of working with partners.

A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

“A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

Read more about REPSSI’s Tree of Life and Journey of Life manuals mentioned here on page 44.

REPSSI has a range of quality manuals, training and tools developed over years of working with partners.

A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

“A girl in another far north drop-in centre told us about how the support she received helped her cope with the experience of losing her mother last year: “I didn’t think that I’d ever find someone to talk to, until I came here and I was told not to give up and lose hope.”

“After being assisted myself I realised that there are so many people who also need help... I want to be remembered for bringing hope.”

~ youth, Limpopo
It may seem such a small act, but two REPSSI partners in Tanzania show that just being visited is of great importance.

Africare, Tanzania

Sheikh Mahamed, the regional manager of Africare’s project in Zanzibar, explained to REPSSI that the volunteers on his programme use to feel they could not go on a home visit without bringing something with them, such as food or clothes. But, triggered by REPSSI’s training, Africare taught the volunteers to add value in other ways, such as listening, and equipping the caregivers to better care for their children.

The reports they are receiving demonstrate that while caregivers appreciated the material support, they value the social and emotional (psychosocial) support more. One elderly man caring for a grandchild by himself, and living in extreme poverty, told Africare “This is the most important thing: knowing how to care for my grandchild.”

Some years ago Zainabu’s brother and two sisters died, leaving behind six children. She now cares for them as well as her own three children and her grandmother.

St. Lucia Hospice, Arusha

Zainabu is HIV+, and recently found herself bed-ridden. She was so ill. But members of St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage’s outreach team visited her. They cared for her clothing and food, and encouraged her to take ARVs, until she could get out of bed again.

Emotionally, she says she has changed: “I am now thinking HIV is not the end of my life.” She is also able to take care of three of her children who are HIV+ to the clinic to get them treatment. She has gone on, in fact, to become the chairperson of her local Most Vulnerable Children Committee, a voluntary government structure trained and supported by St. Lucia. She now gives of her time to visit other families, to provide them with the same emotional and social support that she herself received.

“Visiting families gives them hope, and respect... it promotes their hope and they thinking that, okay, we are still of worth in this community.”

– Winfrida Mwashala, Director of St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage

BRINGING HOPE, ONE VISIT AT A TIME

Zimbabwe: Looking out for one other

In Zimbabwe, a teacher with Midlands AIDS Services Organisation (MASO) has set up a journey of life club for children at a local school. The members tell us that through the activities in the club, they were taught to be helpful, kind, to work together as a group, and to look out for others.

One member gave an example of seeing a child crying one day, saying “I was able to approach the child and asked out what was wrong.” Another member told us how they noticed that a classmate had no shoes. They put up a notice asking for donations, and enlisted the help of a teacher to pass on the donated shoes anonymously.

“We really helped me personally were the sessions we had on coping mechanisms. How does one cope when you’ve lost a loved one? I shared my own story with them. Six children in two years! All these children to look after. Support is important... I’m hoping that since I’m doing my best to bring these children up right, to put into practice all the parenting tips I’ve learned, they will grow to be upright, honest, hardworking people.”

South Africa: Adults also need support

It is not only children who gain confidence and hope from their peers. Virginia Mbaimbai is 68 years old, and lives in Soweto, South Africa. She lost six children to AIDS within a period of two years, and now cares for 8 grandchildren.

She told us how a peer support group run by REPSSI’s partner, the Olive Leaf Foundation, helped her cope with these extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

“What really helped me personally were the sessions we had on coping mechanisms. How does one cope when you’ve lost a loved one? I shared my own story with them. Six children in two years! All these children to look after. Support is important... I’m hoping that since I’m doing my best to bring these children up right, to put into practice all the parenting tips I’ve learned, they will grow to be upright, honest, hardworking people.”

St. Lucia staff members on visits to families. Photo © REPSSI

Children experiencing difficulties and feeling isolated can find support and comfort from their peers, in structures such as kids’ clubs.

St. Lucia Hospice, Arusha

Some years ago Zainabu’s brother and two sisters died, leaving behind six children. She now cares for them as well as her own three children and her grandmother.

Africare’s outreach team visited her. They cared for her clothing and food, and encouraged her to take ARVs, until she could get out of bed again.

Emotionally, she says she has changed: “I am now thinking HIV is not the end of my life.” She is also able to take care of three of her children who are HIV+ to the clinic to get them treatment. She has gone on, in fact, to become the chairperson of her local Most Vulnerable Children Committee, a voluntary government structure trained and supported by St. Lucia. She now gives of her time to visit other families, to provide them with the same emotional and social support that she herself received.

“Visiting families gives them hope, and respect... it promotes their hope and they thinking that, okay, we are still of worth in this community.”

– Winfrida Mwashala, Director of St. Lucia Hospice and Orphanage

BRINGING HOPE, ONE VISIT AT A TIME

Zimbabwe: Looking out for one other

In Zimbabwe, a teacher with Midlands AIDS Services Organisation (MASO) has set up a journey of life club for children at a local school. The members tell us that through the activities in the club, they were taught to be helpful, kind, to work together as a group, and to look out for others.

One member gave an example of seeing a child crying one day, saying “I was able to approach the child and asked out what was wrong.” Another member told us how they noticed that a classmate had no shoes. They put up a notice asking for donations, and enlisted the help of a teacher to pass on the donated shoes anonymously.

“We really helped me personally were the sessions we had on coping mechanisms. How does one cope when you’ve lost a loved one? I shared my own story with them. Six children in two years! All these children to look after. Support is important... I’m hoping that since I’m doing my best to bring these children up right, to put into practice all the parenting tips I’ve learned, they will grow to be upright, honest, hardworking people.”

South Africa: Adults also need support

It is not only children who gain confidence and hope from their peers. Virginia Mbaimbai is 68 years old, and lives in Soweto, South Africa. She lost six children to AIDS within a period of two years, and now cares for 8 grandchildren.

She told us how a peer support group run by REPSSI’s partner, the Olive Leaf Foundation, helped her cope with these extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

“What really helped me personally were the sessions we had on coping mechanisms. How does one cope when you’ve lost a loved one? I shared my own story with them. Six children in two years! All these children to look after. Support is important... I’m hoping that since I’m doing my best to bring these children up right, to put into practice all the parenting tips I’ve learned, they will grow to be upright, honest, hardworking people.”

St. Lucia staff members on visits to families. Photo © REPSSI
Again and again, we hear from our partners that psychosocial support activities and tools have been effective in shifting deep-rooted cultural or community practices harmful to children’s wellbeing.

Whether these are practices surrounding parental death, child abuse, or the role of the girl-child, communities across the region have come to identify the impact of certain behaviours on children. Not only that, but they have then taken steps to alter this behaviour, in order to better support the vulnerable children amongst them.
Traditionally, many practices surrounding death can overlook children and their rights. Psychosocial support activities can help communities see the affect on children, and change their behaviour.

**Speaking about Death**

In many communities across the region, children are not involved in activities surrounding the death of their parents. They are not brought to the funeral, nor are they told that the parent is dead. “In the past we were hiding the death,” explains a caregiver with ZAMWASO. “When a parent passed away we told the child they were away travelling.”

However, when encouraged to think about issues from the child’s perspective, our partners report that communities realise children need the opportunity to grieve, and begin to change their approach. “Now, children take part in the process and that is a remarkable change,” says Association Vute, an affiliate with our partner Save the Children in Mozambique.

**Inheritance Rights**

Despite laws protecting children’s inheritance, relatives of the dead parent often appropriate land or possessions belonging to the child. Our partners have related many cases of this practice being reversed. In Zimbabwe, a grandmother in MASO’s support group explained to us that she had taken property from orphaned children. The discussion in the Journey of Life had reduced her to tears when she understood how her behaviour had affected her nieces and nephews. “It helped me to realise that if anyone dies in the family, the property must be used for the good of the children,” she said.

**Treatment of Orphaned Children**

Children can also be treated badly when adopted by another family after the death of their parents. This discrimination can take many forms, such as being forced to eat separately, given fewer possessions, or being made to feel unwanted.

Thankfully, behaviour like this can be changed through careful awareness-raising activities, as partners from across the region attest. A traditional leader in Malawi, trained by CONSOL Homes, told us: “Before we did not treat orphaned children in the community well… But after the journey of life and other training, that cruel behaviour has been reduced. We know now that an orphaned child is a child like any other.”

**Our partners’ experiences show that effective community mobilisation can help shift problems from the responsibility of an individual to the responsibility of the whole community.**

**Zimbabwe**

Using a network of volunteers, Bethany Project works with Child Protection Committees, a local government structure. They have been using the Journey of Life to outline the responsibilities of the committees, and engage the wider community.

As a result of the Journey of Life training, they have seen a fundamental shift in the sense of responsibility for children. “Before, if a child had no school fees, the community would say this is not our problem. They would wait for a donor to come in. But now they are owning it… saying these are our children.”

**Malawi**

A similar shift has been seen in Malawi, as a result of Journey of Life training. “In the past, if a child had a problem, we assumed that it had to be tackled by the child’s family alone,” a staff member at CONSOL Homes in Malawi explains. After undergoing the Journey of Life training, there is a collective sense of responsibility for children. The training has also led to a system for referring children’s problems to government structures for further specialised support.

“Our partners’ experiences show that effective community mobilisation can help shift problems from the responsibility of an individual to the responsibility of the whole community.”

**WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS**

“Before, the community would say this is not our problem... But now they are owning it, and saying these are our children.”

~ Staff member, Bethany, Zimbabwe

**Voices Changing Behaviour**

Children at an Early Childhood Development Centre with CONSOL Homes, Malawi. Photo © REPSSI
In Tanzania, caregivers in groups supported by Zanzibar Muslim Women’s AIDS Support Organisation (ZAMWASO) say they now listen to children at a younger age, and ensure the greater participation of children in decision-making. The director of Fanang Diatla, an organisation supported by REPSSI’s partner, the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, told us: “It is not our culture to consult children. It is something that was lacking, but psychosocial support has opened our eyes that a child’s suggestion is very important.”

“Increasing Child Participation”

INCREASING CHILD PARTICIPATION

Children’s voices are not usually solicited, or listened to, in families or communities. Many parents, staff members, community caregivers and traditional leaders have told us that psychosocial support training from our partners has helped them listen to children and include them in decision-making.

The director of Fanang Diatla, an organisation supported by REPSSI’s partner, the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund, told us: “It is not our culture to consult children. It is something that was lacking, but psychosocial support has opened our eyes that a child’s suggestion is very important.”

One caregiver, Moskes Omar, explained the changes she had witnessed. “Before we could not talk. When children came with questions we would not in a position to receive, give answers or understand them. We could not understand them.”

The training helped parents to listen, and see about things from the child’s perspective. “We have noticed positive changes in the children. They can now approach us and we can have a discussion. We can now exchange and share ideas.”

Francisco Carvete, a director of a REPSSI partner in Angola, Association Elavoko Lyomala, has noticed similar changes after training in psychosocial support. “I have seen that as a result of workers being trained on psychosocial support, children are now happy and both children and the workers know how to interact with each other. Attitudes and behaviour are transformed and children are now feeling at ease to communicate.”

“In It is our culture to consult children, it is something that was lacking, but psychosocial support has opened our eyes that a child’s suggestion is very important.”

“IT IS NOT OUR CULTURE TO CONSULT CHILDREN…”

Laurence is the chair of the Nangala Community Psychosocial Support Network. The network is supported by REPSSI’s partner, ChildFund Kenya, who run a sponsorship programme in the area. Laurence’s network realised that some parents only chose the most healthy or non-disabled child for this programme.

“They went as far as taking children with disability into a hidden room so that they are not seen, even in the picture,” he recalls. The course gave him ideas about how address the situation, through home visits and community discussion forums.

“What has changed the attitude of parents is the dialogue sessions between the community and the parents on the equality of human beings,” he says. He reports that, as a result, many children with disabilities are now being put forward for sponsorship.

Returning from Conflict

In Katine, Uganda, REPSSI’s partner organisation Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) has learned a lot from the community to act as prey educators. They have been trained in REPSSI’s Journey of Life, and apply what they have learned with vulnerable children in weekly sessions. They use simple activities to facilitate discussions, games, and planning.

“Journey of Life helps everyone understand the importance of community building and how to identify children in need and help them,” says one prey educator. “When we started working with the children they could not talk and they were very fearful. But now they are happy and most hopeful, and they are so free to talk,” adds another.

Elsewhere in Uganda, TPO has used the Journey of Life along with counselling and other support, with communities to help them care for children who were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army. One parent’s group formed told us just how valuable the training and support has been.

“When the children returned they were stigmatised and called names,” one parent recalled. “But we have sensitised the community and this has now stopped.”

“When my child came back he wouldn’t respect anyone,” said another. “He would say ‘I don’t care what you want, I can kill you anytime’.” But now he is back in school and peaceful and we are happy together.”

Sex workers

Psychosocial support training emphasises resilience, and assisting people to build their capacity to overcome the difficulties in their lives. Julius of Hope worldwide Kenya explains how this helped him in his work.

“We have done work with sex workers who have reached a point where they feel they can’t do anything except sex work and they have no abilities,” he says. “They say they had always thought they can’t do this. But now they realise they have all these resources in themselves, they can do it.”

INCLUDING THE MARGINALISED

Children with disabilities

REPSSI’s Certificate course (see page 32) encourages students to become more aware of children who are excluded or discriminated against. One student in Kenya, Laurence Dchieng Idipo, demonstrates how small actions can do a great deal to address discrimination against children with disabilities.

Laurence is the chair of the Nangala Community Psychosocial Support Network. The network is supported by REPSSI’s partner, ChildFund Kenya, who run a sponsorship programme in the area. Laurence’s network realised that some parents only chose the most healthy or non-disabled child for this programme.

“They went as far as taking children with disability into a hidden room so that they are not seen, even in the picture,” he recalls. The course gave him ideas about how address the situation, through home visits and community discussion forums.

“What has changed the attitude of parents is the dialogue sessions between the community and the parents on the equality of human beings,” he says. He reports that, as a result, many children with disabilities are now being put forward for sponsorship.

Sex workers

Psychosocial support training emphasises resilience, and assisting people to build their capacity to overcome the difficulties in their lives. Julius of Hope worldwide Kenya explains how this helped him in his work.

“We have done work with sex workers who have reached a point where they feel they can’t do anything except sex work and they have no abilities,” he says. “They say they had always thought they can’t do this. But now they realise they have all these resources in themselves, they can do it.”

“IT IS NOT OUR CULTURE TO CONSULT CHILDREN…”

Laurence is the chair of the Nangala Community Psychosocial Support Network. The network is supported by REPSSI’s partner, ChildFund Kenya, who run a sponsorship programme in the area. Laurence’s network realised that some parents only chose the most healthy or non-disabled child for this programme.

“They went as far as taking children with disability into a hidden room so that they are not seen, even in the picture,” he recalls. The course gave him ideas about how address the situation, through home visits and community discussion forums.

“What has changed the attitude of parents is the dialogue sessions between the community and the parents on the equality of human beings,” he says. He reports that, as a result, many children with disabilities are now being put forward for sponsorship.

Sex workers

Psychosocial support training emphasises resilience, and assisting people to build their capacity to overcome the difficulties in their lives. Julius of Hope worldwide Kenya explains how this helped him in his work.

“We have done work with sex workers who have reached a point where they feel they can’t do anything except sex work and they have no abilities,” he says. “They say they had always thought they can’t do this. But now they realise they have all these resources in themselves, they can do it.”
Malawi Girl Guides Association (MAGGA), has seen psychosocial support enhance their mission of promoting the girl-child. As a result of REPSSI’s Tree of Life, Nancy Chidzankufa, Director of Programmes, told us, “the girls are able to discover their abilities … and they are given that assurance to say they can make it in life despite challenges.” Early marriages still occur in many districts in Malawi, as a perceived way out of poverty for families. Nancy has been using the pictures from the journey of life to stimulate discussion with community leaders. Through this, community leaders recognised their role in resolving issues, and developed community codes of conduct. These have proven very useful in cases of early marriage, sexual abuse and discrimination. “We had one girl who was 13 years old,” says Nancy. “She was being forced into marriage by her parents.” The local traditional authority had participated in the MAGGA workshops, and as a result had set out procedures for such situations. He summoned the parents, and helped them understand that the proposed marriage was wrong. The parents subsequently supported the girl to return to school. She is now 15, in secondary school, and still unmarried.

Camfed (the Campaign for Female Education) in Zambia has been a REPSSI partner since 2009. Teachers, resource teams, support groups, district committees and others have been trained in psychosocial support using REPSSI tools such as the Tree of Life, Hero Book, the Tree of Life and Journeying Towards Our Dreams. As a result, Camfed reports increased awareness of, and commitment to fulfilling, the needs of girl children. After going through the training workshop, teacher Libertino Pekelisi said, “I have gained a lot of knowledge on how to face challenges… I will ensure that the children and the community are sensitised on child abuse, gender and the importance of girl education. As a mentor, I will be a mother to the girls and visit their homes to encourage and support them.”

Children in Africa is still predominantly seen as a woman’s role, and as a result is often undervalued. However, the awareness-raising and personal reflection that psychosocial support activities promote often help challenge these gender roles, and encourage men to care about vulnerable children in their communities. Zephania Anyango is the only male member of his support group in the rural area of Naivasha, Kenya supported by Hope Worldwide Kenya. His group runs income-generating activities to support women to work, and holds weekly kids’ clubs. Wearing a knitted cap and a permanent smile, he encourages other men to follow his example. “African old men, like me, I give them a message,” he says. “Men like me should volunteer and come together to do the kind of work I am involved in so that the country develops.”

Simbarashe, a staff member with Batani HIV/ AIDS Services Organisation (BHADO), found that psychosocial support activities changed attitudes to educating girls. This was previously considered a bad investment, as girls would marry and leave the family. “Our elders used to believe that there is no reason to send girl-children to school,” he says. “They have now realised its importance to local work and every child equally. Now girls are having the opportunity to go to school.”
Communities and extended families are our most valuable resource in providing social and emotional support for children and youth. No institutional centre or outside group can hope to replace the daily, consistent care that the people in everyday contact with vulnerable children can provide.

Effective community mobilization is therefore crucial for ensuring that this care and support is provided. Here, we look at testimonies of how communities can be brought through a journey of awareness, to become sensitized to the needs of the children in their midst, and aware of their own ability to work together to make a difference.
**TAKING JOINT ACTION**

Community-authored action plans are a highly effective way of catalysing joint care and support for children.

**Visits and care**

The Zambian Muslim Women’s AIDS Support Organization (ZAMWASO) used the journey of life with their community projects. As part of their action plan, one community established a fund. Each member contributes 500Tsh so that all vulnerable children in the community can be taken care of. They began monthly home visits and regular meetings with children, to check their progress and needs, and refer them to appropriate government services.

“The community as a whole has changed,” said one community member. “Before, everyone was looking after themselves, and, because of the stigma of HIV, sick parents have to care for them. Now they are saying this is the journey of life, and everyone will pass this way.”

**Kids’ clubs**

To mobilise communities.

“After training we realised that we were able to get together and do something to help the children.”

The T’sozane community in Lesotho has experienced great hardship due to the HIV and AIDS pandemic, including a dramatic increase in the number of orphaned and vulnerable children (OVC), and the number of elderly people who now have to care for their grandchildren.

In response, the Phomolong support group was formed to provide emotional, spiritual and financial support for children and their families. They decided to set up a “kids’ club”, to provide a safe place for children in the community to talk, and seek advice on life matters.

**Gardens**

A garden was included in their action plan, and proceeds from this garden were used to support vulnerable children. A garden was included in their action plan, and proceeds from this garden were used to support vulnerable children. It can help us connect, the old and the young...

Voices Building Communities

**Healing our community**

- Chair of Phomolong Support group, Lesotho

“Since trying to improve self-reporting, children are now reporting cases of abuse to the police as soon as it occurs, so they have been taught how to deal with such cases.”

- One graduate in Zimbabwe proudly informed us.

“Children are now doing much better, especially the OVC left behind in their lives, especially the OVC left behind by their parents.”

**Increasing reporting of abuse**

**REPSSI’s partner Touch Roots Africa (TRA) trained Phomolong members in child protection and psychosocial care, and in journey of life and Tree Of life. This provided them with skills to better engage the community, deal with stigma, and provide support to bereaved children in the kids’ club.

**LEADERS BUILD COMMUNITIES**

**REPSSI’s distance-learning Certificate (page 33) is also helping to improve self-reporting. Children are now reporting cases of abuse to the police as soon as it occurs, so they have been taught how to deal with such cases.”

“Now we can see that people are doing much better in their lives, especially the OVC left behind by their parents.”

- Chair of Phomolong Support group, Lesotho

“Children are now doing much better, especially the OVC left behind in their lives, especially the OVC left behind by their parents.”

- Chair of Phomolong Support group, Lesotho

“Since trying to improve self-reporting, children are now reporting cases of abuse to the police as soon as it occurs, so they have been taught how to deal with such cases.”

- One graduate in Zimbabwe proudly informed us.

**Healing our community**

- Chair of Phomolong Support group, Lesotho

“Children are now doing much better, especially the OVC left behind in their lives, especially the OVC left behind by their parents.”

- Chair of Phomolong Support group, Lesotho

“Since trying to improve self-reporting, children are now reporting cases of abuse to the police as soon as it occurs, so they have been taught how to deal with such cases.”

- One graduate in Zimbabwe proudly informed us.
One long-standing partner has rooted their work in community mobilisation, an approach which has brought them great success.

“Our organisation started in 1994 out of the need to see care and support for orphaned children,” explains Kathleen Okatcha, Director of the Kenyan Orphans Rural Development Programme (KORDP).

At the time, she says, the communal response was minimal due to fear of associating with HIV positive people. With no financial resources to invest, they began by holding community conversations to set priorities. Guided by the communities’ wishes, KORDP helped to establish Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres under trees.

Today, communities have organized themselves into 57 ECD committees, caring for 6,200 children in 5 districts. These centres are now housed in tin or mud-walled huts, built by the community. Children attending receive a meal, health care, literacy skills and psychosocial support. All of this is done by unpaid community care providers.

REPSSI’s Journey of Life has been the main tool used to engage communities in this approach.

“It facilitates community reflection, dialogue and action to support children,” Kathleen explains. Typically, community members gather weekly in the community building used as an ECD centre during the day. Community members take it in turn to present child wellbeing topics from the Journey of Life, and develop a shared action plan to resolve their problems.

She concludes: “One of the things that has made KORDP unique is the community based approach and the fact that the communities initiated the programme, they initiated the solutions, they initiated the strategy. We just helped them along.”

“Before the introduction of psychosocial support in our community we had a great number of problems that we were facing. Beer drinking, crime, prostitution, HIV and AIDS plagued us.…”

“When psychosocial support was introduced through a workshop it helped us better understand how to interact with our children and how to allow them to have a voice when household decisions were being made. So the first thing we did was go into the community to sensitize them of these things, explaining the dangers related to some of our traditional practices.

“This work began in 2005 and it’s pleasing to know that we no longer have cases of sexual cleansing or young girls being forced into early marriages. The community fully understands the dangers and how it violates the widow’s and children’s rights.…”

“The way I look at the future is this: if we, as a community, put all the training we’ve learned to good use then we should be able to shelter our children, educate our children, feed our children and give them a better future.

“I would love to build a place like a community hall where we can meet. I would like to see more of my community experience what PSS tools can do for them. I want people to be able to look back and see that we made a difference in the lives of our children. We created a good future for them. And we are already seeing the fruits. That’s why as community leaders we have embraced psychosocial support work.

“Psychosocial support is not just about workshops… It’s about changing our way of life in a positive way.”

- Kenneth Zulu, headman in a community supported by REPSSI’s partner, ChildFund Zambia.
Every minute, a child dies of an AIDS-related illness, and another child becomes infected with HIV.

We can make this shocking statistic a thing of the past. As the following stories from our partners show, social and emotional (psychosocial) support can help reduce new infections, reduce AIDS-related deaths, and reduce the crippling stigma and discrimination surrounding HIV.
Not so long ago, many children in Zanzibar who were HIV positive were afraid of attending school, for fear of discrimination.

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

Not so long ago, many children in Zanzibar who were HIV positive were afraid of attending school, for fear of discrimination.

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."

"Due to stigma, most of the children affected by HIV would stop going to school... they were chased out of school because of their status," explains Mussa Juma of the People Living with HIV and AIDS (ZAPHA+) - a REPSSI affiliate.

But things have begun to change now - for the better. ZAPHA+ volunteers conducted meetings with a thousand teachers from the madrassas (Islamic religious schools), as well as bringing Catholic, Anglican, Muslim and other religious leaders together to discuss issues facing HIV-positive children. "We've seen the impact of working with the teachers," says Mussa. "They are now united to support children in their school."

"Before the support I could not play with other children close to home or go to the school near home because in my area I was known as the boy whose family is sick," one child says. "I have since known my teachers, friends around the home and at school are not as harsh as they used to be with me, they now play with me, call me to join in activities and talk to me. My attendance in school has improved - I am now passing and my teachers pay attention to me."

"Stigma was one of the things that was almost breaking me down," Memory says. "I was almost reaching a point of giving up..."
Inside the mud walls of a small building in rural Kenya, a group of men and women are gathered on wooden benches. A local primary school teacher is on her feet, having volunteered to lead the Journey of Life discussion. Each week, different topics in relation to children’s wellbeing are discussed.

This building is a community centre, and it was built on land donated by the village headman, Eliud Ndeke Mukunga.

“I saw my people dying of HIV, and they had nowhere to go and learn,” says Eliud. “That moved me to give my piece of land to KORDP, so that the community can come and learn so that we fight this enemy.”

“My brother died of AIDS, and left very many children behind for me to care... it made me not to allow the same mistake to happen to our children again.”

With support from REPSSI’s partner, the Kenyan Orphans Rural Development Programme (KORDP), Eliud’s community shares information on child wellbeing, HIV prevention, the effects of discrimination, and the actions they can take to make a difference.

“The number of death caused by AIDS, it has really decreased,” continues Eliud. “People now can care for themselves. When you could use the word condom, people would run away. But nowadays, they do use it.”

“Discrimination and abuse, that was a normal thing that children experienced, children who were orphans in the community. Even things like you don’t have them eat with the rest of the family. But today it’s different. There is an awareness that orphaned children are children like the others.... We strongly make sure that any child we find along the way, whether well-dressed or naked, whether sick or not, is ours.”

Adherence for Children

REPSSI’s partner PASADA, in Tanzania, has used their training from REPSSI to initiate activities for HIV positive children. Children are brought together to play and take part in drama and art activities. These structured activities helped the children work through their emotions, disclose their status, and adhere to treatment.

“There is a time for them to feel happy, and a place where they make friends and learn how to interact with other groups,” says a staff member. “These groups have been assisting children who are reluctant to take [ARVs] as part of their daily routine... But these activities have enabled children to talk about their status very positively, and to express their emotions.”

Melania Chikurura is a nurse counsellor with Batanai HIV & AIDS Service Organisation in Zimbabwe. Her work encompasses post-test HIV support services, prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, and treatment adherence for HIV-positive families and children.

Despite a growing body of evidence showing that HIV-positive children who are aware of their HIV status show greater adherence to treatment and an improved sense of well-being, many children living with HIV are not aware of their status. This was true of most of the children Mercy was working with.

“Children were started on ARVs through their parents,” Mercy explains. “They were not told that they were HIV positive. You’d find that the parents get their children tested without their knowledge.”

In 2010, Mercy began REPSSI’s distance-learning Certificate course (page 33), which gave her a new insight into disclosure.

“With the certificate course, I realized the need to involve these children in their care. So I educated the parents who were coming to collect drugs for their children that it was necessary for them to bring the children for reviews so that we could counsel them, so that we could give them the information.”

“So far it has helped quite a lot. We actually now have new children coming to collect their own drugs... and they talk freely about their conditions. They even ask questions where they have problems... and they are also participating in decision making.”

“I think this programme is very important,” Mercy smiles. “I feel I’ve been given a tool box.”

With support from REPSSI’s partner, the Kenyan Orphans Rural Development Programme (KORDP), Eliud’s community shares information on child wellbeing, HIV prevention, the effects of discrimination, and the actions they can take to make a difference.

“The number of death caused by AIDS, it has really decreased,” continues Eliud. “People now can care for themselves. When you could use the word condom, people would run away. But nowadays, they do use it.”

“Discrimination and abuse, that was a normal thing that children experienced, children who were orphans in the community. Even things like you don’t have them eat with the rest of the family. But today it’s different. There is an awareness that orphaned children are children like the others... We strongly make sure that any child we find along the way, whether well-dressed or naked, whether sick or not, is ours.”

“Discrimination and abuse, that was a normal thing that orphans experienced... But today we make sure that any child we find, whether well-dressed or naked, whether sick or not, is ours.”

- Village headman, Kenya

“Adherence for Children”

- Village headman, Kenya

- Mercy Lucy Chikurura in the Batanai counselling office, Zimbabwe. Photo © REPSSI

- People from Eliud’s village at a discussion in the Community centre © REPSSI

- Inside the mud walls of a small building in rural Kenya, a group of men and women are gathered on wooden benches. A local primary school teacher is on her feet, having volunteered to lead the Journey of Life discussion. Each week, different topics in relation to children’s wellbeing are discussed.

- This building is a community centre, and it was built on land donated by the village headman, Eliud Ndeke Mukunga.

- "I saw my people dying of HIV, and they had nowhere to go and learn," says Eliud. "That moved me to give my piece of land to KORDP, so that the community can come and learn so that we fight this enemy."

- "My brother died of AIDS, and left very many children behind for me to care... it made me not to allow the same mistake to happen to our children again."

- With support from REPSSI’s partner, the Kenyan Orphans Rural Development Programme (KORDP), Eliud’s community shares information on child wellbeing, HIV prevention, the effects of discrimination, and the actions they can take to make a difference.

- "The number of death caused by AIDS, it has really decreased," continues Eliud. "People now can care for themselves. When you could use the word condom, people would run away. But nowadays, they do use it."

- "Discrimination and abuse, that was a normal thing that children experienced, children who were orphans in the community. Even things like you don’t have them eat with the rest of the family. But today it’s different. There is an awareness that orphaned children are children like the others... We strongly make sure that any child we find along the way, whether well-dressed or naked, whether sick or not, is ours."
All across Africa, dedicated (and usually unpaid) community workers provide care and support to millions of vulnerable children. No relevant, accredited training existed for them, to professionalise this work.

In response, REPSSI and UNICEF developed an innovative new Certificate Course in Community-Based Work with Children and Youth, accredited through the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Certificate is now being delivered by situated, supported distance learning in more than ten countries in East and Southern Africa, and there are already over 1,500 graduates across the region.
Children at St. Lucia are now being reunited with their families, who are trained and supported by St. Lucia to provide the treatment their children need. Together with local government, St. Lucia also set up Most Vulnerable Children Committees. Comprised of volunteers elected by the community, St. Lucia has trained in psychosocial support. The committees visit vulnerable families and help establish support groups for people living with HIV. One father of 7 children explained how his support group has been vital: “I now have hope, I am not alone.”

“When we are caring for our patient we need to do it comprehensively,” concludes Winfrida. “When you are doing all physical care and not doing psychological care, you are still losing this person... some of the patients, they say they were nearly to die, they thought this was the end of their life. But having people who were encouraging them and giving them in a group, it has made them start thinking of their children, start thinking of their dreams.”

A lot of things have changed in my life since attending the Certificate Programme. The most significant being that of realising and respecting children’s rights. I now understand that children are fragile beings who can be easily harmed by difficult times. They need utmost care as well as being involved in decisions that affect their lives. The Certificate Programme has really brought a new sense of respect for children.”

- Certificate graduate, Zimbabwe

SUPPORTING PEOPLE WITH HIV

Until 2009, St Lucia Hospice and Orphanage in Arusha, Tanzania, was a residential care home for HIV positive children who had been abandoned due to stigma. The home could only take up to 30 children at once. But the Executive Director, Winfrida Mwashala, and her team have since radically changed the way St. Lucia operates.

“Now,” says Winfrida with a smile, “we have reached more than 8000 children at community level.” This new approach has helped reduce stigma and discrimination, and children are now being cared for within their own families.

The changes were triggered by Winfrida’s participation in the Certificate Course in Community-Based Work with Children and Youth, created by REPSSI and UNICEF.

“The Certificate Course has supported me to understand how to develop the community,” Winfrida says. “This helps us to not concentrate on a few children in institutional care, but focus more at community level with more children.”
Sergeant Zama spent five years working with the Domestic Violence Unit of the Royal Swaziland Police Force. Last year, as a result of the Certificate, she was promoted to a training position at the Police Training College. There, she passes on her knowledge about child protection and sexual offences to 200 recruits a year.

“The Certificate really empowered me to share what I learned and transfer it to others,” she says. “We learned about human rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and about the best interests of the child. We also learned that children need to participate... they need to be part of reaching a consensus... children are not just to be seen, they are to be heard also.”

As a result of the course, Sergeant Zama now ensures that children are consulted in any policing decisions made about their welfare.

“As police officers we deal with the community, and children they are part of the community,” she concludes. “I would recommend that other law enforcement agencies take up this course.”

Kisumu Children’s Remand Home is a government institution, intended as a centre for children in conflict with the law. Due to a lack of space in children’s centres they are now being sent large numbers of children needing homes because of being abandoned, orphaned, or abused.

“Many children come here with different problems,” explains Kenneth Maito Nusa, Director of the Home. “They really need to be assisted so that they can cope with these situations.” According to Kenneth, an 18-month accredited Certificate Course is helping his staff do just that.

George Owino is one of three staff at the Home currently taking REPSSI’s distance-learning Certificate Course.

“This Certificate helped me a great deal,” George explains, “because it has given me a lot of skills in handling these children. I meet children who have passed through many challenges... so, when they end up in my hands now, they are already afraid, shaken, they cannot talk... I have to talk to them like children. I have to accommodate them, I have to find a way of making them comfortable and making them understand that actually they are in safe hands.

George has also applied skills from the course in addressing wider issues. One day, a nine-year old boy, who was physically disabled, was brought into the remand home. His parents had already died... and he was now wandering here and there, trying to find anybody to take care of him.

“After listening to the child, I felt that maybe I could use the networks that I already knew... So I approached one of our partners and they actually took up the case and now this boy is in school.”

It was the Certificate that helped George start to network with other organisations. “As a Development Facilitator, maybe I don’t have all the solutions,” George laughs, “Sometimes I need to get these solutions from somewhere else.”

Listening to Children

“My colleagues and I used to think that the proper rehabilitation of children with socially unacceptable behaviour was by force. Through the course I learnt that children need to be listened to and given a chance to talk. By applying this I realised that the children whom I work with have started really opening up to me, telling me their problems. If it wasn’t for the project I would still be thinking wrongly. Thank you so much REPSSI for the opportunity to learn.”

-Certificate graduate, Zimbabwe
REPSSI partners with governments in 13 countries across East and Southern Africa, to assist them in shaping national action for vulnerable children.

REPSSI is also a technical partner to the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and has supported the development of key regional frameworks to guide work with vulnerable children and youth in all member states.
In 2005, the Government of Botswana responded to alarmingly high HIV statistics by implementing a plan of action focused on food parcels and material support for orphaned and vulnerable children. An evaluation two years later showed that psychosocial support was missing from the response, and the government set about addressing this gap. It was a REPSSI community-mobilisation tool, the Journey of Life, that they turned to.

Kefiwe Malebe, who coordinates psychosocial support for the Government of Botswana, explains that the Journey of Life was selected “because it offers a simple practical approach that can be used regardless of literacy level, and the participatory nature allows communities to conceive their own solutions and develop plans to carry them out.”

With their development partner Project Concern International (PCI) Botswana, the government embarked on a national roll-out to mobilize communities with the use of the Journey of Life tool.

“This experience has demonstrated that governments can be leaders in providing effective PSS. As shown by the Government of Botswana, governments can provide critical national vision, direction and motivation, and can coordinate national plans of action that take effect at community level, and can empower and mobilise communities, in a cost-effective way.”

The national roll-out, through established district child protection committees, has already reached 2144 children and 1104 caregivers. The government of Botswana and PCI Botswana are committed to reaching 18,922 children and their families in the next five years through the Journey of Life tool.

Results in Botswana

REPSSI’s partner, Project Concern International Botswana, has been working with the government of Botswana, with funding from PEPFAR, to roll-out the Journey of Life nationally, in order to involve communities in supporting the high numbers of orphans and vulnerable children in the country.

Through the Journey of Life Awareness workshops, adults and children identified the most pressing needs of vulnerable children. Together, young people and adults brainstorm available resources in the village to tackle these needs. At the end of the workshop, participants develop a Community Action Plan.

Their monitoring shows that a year on, the Journey of Life in Botswana has facilitated:

- Personal transformation through reflection and increased awareness
- Improved adult-child communication and relationships
- Improved referral systems for vulnerable children and families
- Income generating activities to alleviate poverty
- Less corporal punishment in schools
- Support groups in schools and in communities

"Governments can be leaders in providing effective PSS... They can coordinate national plans of action that take effect at community level, and empower and mobilise communities."

— Kefiwe Malebe, Government of Botswana

“REPSSI has been instrumental in assisting the Ministry of Gender, Equality and Child Welfare to build our knowledge in psychosocial support,” says Ms. Joyce Nakuta, the Deputy Director of the Child Care Division for the Government of Namibia.

Through trainings, conferences, sharing of our training materials, and ongoing meetings with the government and stakeholders, REPSSI has been building an awareness of the role of psychosocial support in national planning for orphans and vulnerable children.

As a result, the Ministry has identified the importance of including psychosocial support in its programs. This is most clearly illustrated by the Ministry’s recent commitment to allocate resources towards this purpose.

“In 2010, the Ministry and key partners developed a Joint Psychosocial Support Plan,” Joyce explained. “This national plan sets the stage for the mainstreaming of psychosocial support and the capacity strengthening of the social welfare workforce of the Ministry.”

Psychosocial support has also been incorporated in the national Namibian standards for Orphans and Vulnerable Children, which is a critical step in ensuring that good quality care is provided for children across the country.

Social workers, community staff and caregivers have subsequently been trained in psychosocial support, using REPSSI tools.

“This will help with improving service delivery by social workers and community child-care workers; for children in need of care,” affirms Joyce.
Jeanne Ndyetambura is the Assistant Commissioner for Social Welfare, Government of Tanzania. Her Ministry’s mandate is to address issues concerning all vulnerable groups.

“We thought about the vulnerable groups and what they need, and psychosocial support was found to be one of the primary services that was necessary to adopt,” says Jeanne. “We went into partnership with REPSSI and ever since we have been working with REPSSI in terms of capacity development of the government, to be able to mainstream psychosocial support in our services.”

The government in the process of developing national guidelines for psychosocial support and, with REPSSI’s assistance has conducted trainings for staff at the national level, and for caregivers at community level.

“In most cases,” Jeanne explains, “the kind of caregivers we are dealing with are largely very elderly caregivers who are caring for orphans, or children who are taking care of other children... So you see these are the two categories of caregivers who are very vulnerable because they lack care parenting skills.”

In Tanzania, 53% of all vulnerable children are cared for by very elderly grandparents, and 12% are cared for by their siblings. The government’s programmes work with children through children’s clubs where they address emotional issues affecting them, and provide them with coping strategies and advice.

“We have been getting feedback that it is really making an impact,” concludes Jeanne proudly. “Children who have thought they can never make it in life, they are starting to dream again.”

In 2001, a study in Malawi found that “while children were being given material support, their emotional and psychological needs were being neglected.” The government responded with a national plan of action for orphans and other vulnerable children, which included psychosocial support as one of the main interventions.

“We started consultations with REPSSI,” Willard Manjolo, Acting Director of Social Welfare Services for the Government of Malawi explains.

REPSSI assisted by providing guidance in developing policy and training a pool of psychosocial support experts, known as ‘Master Trainers’. The government is now adapting REPSSI training manuals to local conditions.

“Since we started providing psychosocial support to orphans and vulnerable children, there’s been tremendous change in positive thinking, both for the children themselves, as well as the caregivers. Because we are dealing with a situation of despair... What [psychosocial support] does, basically, is to restore confidence and hope for the future. You are actually dialing with children, caregivers, communities, to realise that when you experience problems, it’s not the end of everything.”

“Instead of children wandering about, instead of caregivers not paying attention, that has changed. Children realise the need to go to school, caregivers are providing that support and communities are coming together to support those children that experience, emotional and psychological problems.”

“I think this is a tremendous achievement because children now have a future, they see a future, with hope. I think that’s a major benefit we are seeing in Malawi.”

“Children now have a future, with hope. I think that’s a major benefit we are seeing in Malawi.”
- Willard Manjolo, Government of Malawi

“It is really making an impact. Children who have thought they can never make it in life, they are starting to dream again.”
- Jeanne Ndyetambura, Government of Tanzania

In most cases,” Jeanne explains, “the kind of caregivers we are dealing with are largely very elderly caregivers who are caring for orphans, or children who are taking care of other children... So you see these are the two categories of caregivers who are very vulnerable because they lack care parenting skills.”

In Tanzania, 53% of all vulnerable children are cared for by very elderly grandparents, and 12% are cared for by their siblings. The government’s programmes work with children through children’s clubs where they address emotional issues affecting them, and provide them with coping strategies and advice.

“We have been getting feedback that it is really making an impact,” concludes Jeanne proudly. “Children who have thought they can never make it in life, they are starting to dream again.”

Willard Manjolo, Acting Director of Social Welfare Services for the Government of Malawi explains.

REPSSI assisted by providing guidance in developing policy and training a pool of psychosocial support experts, known as ‘Master Trainers’. The government is now adapting REPSSI training manuals to local conditions.
Memory Work techniques, such as memory books and memory boxes, are designed to help families cope with death and grief. Children develop their identity and emotional capacity, understand the past and become less afraid of the future.

"My father passed away a long time ago, but I found that the Memory Work helped me... Accepting that life goes on when you've lost someone you love can be hard. But realising that there are ways to remember and deal with the loss is a good thing." 20-year-old, Limpopo

The Tracing Book guides a person living with HIV to develop a patient-held journal that tracks ongoing health. An evaluation found that “the tracing book gives people living with HIV a simple adaptable tool for monitoring their health... [It] gives people living with HIV a sense of power over the virus.”

"When you see the tracing book you are able to see what problem the client had each day. I wish all the clients had one." - Doctor, South Africa

A psychosocial tool that uses tree parts as a metaphor for different aspects of our lives. It helps children talk about loss and bereavement in a way that helps them share stories of hope, and connections to those who have died.

"Out of everything I learned the Tree of Life has really helped me. I made me realise that I have an inner strength that I wasn’t even aware of. That helps me to overcome any obstacle in my life." - 17-year-old, survivor of forced early marriage, Zambia

A tool which mobilises communities to support both caregivers and children in need, by encouraging reflection and discussion, and providing the information and skills to be able to plan a course of action. It is comprised of Awareness Workshops, Action Workshops and Picture Codes.

"We know that people need help in difficult circumstances. When I saw the boulders on the road [Picture Code], I knew that the street kids and orphans would not be able to climb over on their own. I know I must be one of the people to help them climb over; and I encourage other people to contribute in whatever way they can." - Community member, Northern Uganda.

A series of autobiographical storytelling and art exercises, designed to support each child to identify one significant psychosocial obstacle, and to support them to gain more power over this obstacle.

"Hero Book released the hero that was within me. I’ve become a more confident, determined and outspoken person. I’ve learned to recognise the talents and abilities that I possess. Yes problems will come. But problems are only there to sharpen us as people... Now, I’m a child mobilizer, a community mobilizer, a counsellor, and a peer educator." - 21-year-old survivor of rape, supported by Child Fund Zambia.

A training guide for Kids Club leaders, designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills that they will need to start up and run kids clubs which provide day-to-day care and support for children.

"I am no longer scared. I am no longer angry, now I feel loved. I still have a lot of problems in my life. School is very challenging and I do not know if I will be able to continue with my education after I finish high school. Still, I am happy now. I have many friends and I have responsibilities in the community. I think that my future will be good." - Boy trained by Touch Roots Africa, Maseru, Lesotho
REPSSI PARTNERS ACROSS THE REGION

Country | Government / Academic | Civil Society
--- | --- | ---
Angola | Ministry for Children | Malawi Girl Guides Association
Botswana | Department of Social Services | World Vision
Croatia | Ministry of Health and Social Welfare | Transcultural Psychosocial Organization
Malawi | Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Development | National OVC Committee
Mozambique | Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Development | Child Fund
Namibia | Ministry of Gender Equality & Child Development | National Institute for Children
Tanzania | Ministry of Health and Social Welfare | Volunteers-in-Pepcids
Uganda | Ministry of Gender, Children & Social Welfare | African Child Research Network
Zambia | Ministry of Health and Social Welfare | ChildFund

Regional & Strategic Partners:
- Southern African Development Community (SADC)
- South African National Department of Health and Social Development
- United Nations Children's Fund - East and Southern Africa Regional Office (UNICEF-ESARO)

REPSSI would like to thank our international cooperating partners for their continued support:
- Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- The Novartis Foundation for Sustainable Development (NFSD)
- The Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD)

COPYRIGHT & FUNDING

© REPSSI: The copyright owner of all material contained in this publication.

The publication must be attributed with the words: REPSSI (2012), Voices of Hope and Change. Johannesburg: REPSSI. www.repssi.org
Working across 13 countries in East and Southern Africa