



SAT

Southern African AIDS Trust

Supporting community responses to HIV and AIDS in southern Africa

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FAMILY RE-INTEGRATION FOR CHILDREN LIVING ON THE STREET



Community Responses

The Issues

- The growing number of orphans and other vulnerable children is one of the major impacts of HIV and AIDS in southern Africa
- Across the region, most care and support for orphans is still provided by families, neighbours, and communities (rather than government services and institutions)
- In most cases, these community care and support structures enable orphaned children to stay in their homes or at least in their home area
- For many different reasons, there is a growing number of children that end up 'living on the street' in towns and cities
- Once they begin to live on the street, it is often difficult for children to successfully return to their family and re-integrate with their community
- However, with care and time, it is possible to help children to leave the street and build a future that involves meaningful family and community membership.
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You cannot force them out of the streets but you can help them change their lives

Case Study: Faraja Trust Fund

Faraja Trust Fund is an NGO that was established in Morogoro, Tanzania, in 1991 to provide integrated HIV and AIDS prevention, and supportive care and coping services. Back then, Morogoro had been experiencing a growing burden from the impact of HIV and AIDS, first on the adult population and then on children. The lives of many children were being affected, for example by having to leave school at an early age in order to work to contribute to the household income (as more adults became sick or died). There was also a growing number of children who for different reasons had left their families and moved to a life on the street. These children faced multiple challenges, including financial hardship and hunger, the risk of physical and sexual exploitation, a lack of access to public services, and stigma and discrimination from the wider community. Children living on the street became increasingly cut off from mainstream community life. Faraja's challenge was to find ways to re-integrate them. So far, Faraja's Street Children Rehabilitation Project has assisted more than 150 children in re-building their futures, re-connecting with their extended families and communities, and gaining access to schooling (some have even reached university).

Faraja Trust Fund acknowledges with thanks the support it is receiving from the Social Trust Fund, Ford Foundation, Morogoro Region Education Officer, Morogoro Local Government Authority and CIDA through SAT.

The community's responses

The Faraja Street Children Rehabilitation Project was established in 1997. Its aim was to provide vulnerable children with the opportunity to leave the streets, and re-establish contact with, and hopefully also return to, their family. It was also designed to help children return to school and access survival skills training. The project's strategy involved:

- Making contact with children on the streets or through local community structures
- Conducting home visits to assess the economic situation and the living conditions of the child's guardians
- Initiating contact between the child and their family in the hope of rebuilding relationships
- For children without relatives to look after them, negotiating foster care and providing financial support for the foster family
- Placing children in government and privately-owned schools, and assisting them with school fees, uniforms, transport costs, and medical support where necessary
- Working with the family and other community members to monitor the child's progress, ensuring ongoing counselling and remedial support if required
- Providing free medical treatment to the guardians as a reward for ensuring their child stays in school
- Facilitating school loans or grants to establish income-generating activities. (These were available to low-income families with children still in school)
- Providing survival skills training for children who were too old to enrol in formal schools and ensuring that they find employment upon completing their training.

Key lessons

- Children cannot be forced to leave the streets
- It is important to establish a rapport with children living on the streets. To build a good relationship, it is important to listen to them and understand their problems as they see them
- Once a relationship of trust is built, it is possible to begin to explore how the child feels about re-connecting with their family. Project staff and volunteers need to be patient and non-judgmental and present the children with options, not imposed solutions. These children need to feel that they are resolving their problems with assistance, not force, from others
- For family re-integration to last, the family and surrounding community need to provide a supportive social environment. This will help children stay in the family and community, stay in school, and overcome any negative situations they experience
- Addressing the financial needs of the family/guardians of affected children is an essential part of the package necessary for family re-integration
- All school staff need to help reduce the stigma experienced by children who are orphaned and/or those who have left a life on the street. They must also keep an eye on the special health and psychological problems and needs of these children
- Some guardians may not have had any formal education themselves. These adults need a lot of sensitisation to help them appreciate the need for children to attend school
- Assisting children in re-joining their families/communities can only be successful through collaborative efforts that ensure adequate support is given to both the children and their guardians over time.

Produced by the Southern African AIDS Trust (SAT)

This **publication** was supported through a partnership with the Canadian Public Health Association and the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canadian International Development Agency

