

Para-Social Worker Training Program Kicks Off in Nigeria, Focuses on Improving OVC Care

“Nigeria is home to nearly 1.7 million orphans and vulnerable children — innocent ones who find themselves in this position through no fault of their own,” Barrister Grace O. Ezezika, Deputy Director for OVC at the Federal Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Social Development told a group of some 70 community caregivers who work with vulnerable children in and around the nation’s capital of Abuja.

“This is a topic of grave concern to everyone, and I charge you to not to leave this training the same as you came. Return to your work with a new determination to change things for the better,” Ezezika challenged.

Participants in this pilot training — which was titled “Developing Skills to Assist Vulnerable Children and Their Households” — took this challenge to heart, spending five days learning critical social work and child development skills that will help them identify vulnerable children and families, assess their needs and strengths, improve and expand delivery of key psycho-social services, and better engage communities to provide a network of care, support, and protection.

“I gained a great deal of knowledge about how to better interact with orphans and vulnerable children ... how to put myself in their position and not impose my own personal beliefs and decisions on them,” says Obianuju B. Nwana, who works for the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria. “Now that I better understand the impact of culture and values and beliefs, I am better able to satisfy the needs of the children I work with.”

Held August 17-21, this training was conducted with support from PEPFAR through CDC/Nigeria by HIV/AIDS Twinning Center partners at the Federal School of Social Work in Enugu and the Department of Social Work at the University of Nigeria in Nsukka and their US counterparts from Hunter College School of Social Work, Howard University School of Social Work, the Nigerian Social Workers Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the National Association of Black Social Workers.

Another similar workshop was conducted August 10-14 in Enugu, marking the launch of the new training program in Nigeria.

Participants at both trainings included PEPFAR implementing partners, local Kids Club workers, child welfare officers, social work educators, and other caregivers who work with vulnerable children and families at the grassroots level.

“This training was really focused on building our capacity,” Nwana stresses, noting, “We are all determined to apply what we have learned to our work helping Nigeria’s vulnerable children and families.”



Grace O. Ezezika challenges participants at the Para-Social Worker training in Abuja to change things for the better for Nigeria’s 1.7 million orphans and vulnerable children.

Dr. Adeola Oguntayo, program manager at the Network on Ethics of Human Rights for HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care, and Support (NELA), agrees.



Community-based caregivers take part in a small group activity designed to illustrate that the terms “family” and “community” mean different things to different people based on their own unique experiences.

“This program is very unique in Nigeria. I learned that empathy is critical to improving the lives of orphans and vulnerable children. I now have a better way of reaching out to these children,” Oguntayo says.

“I also understand that caring for them is everyone’s concern, so I have begun donating money and material support when I can. I am helping a child by making arrangements to pay for schooling and some other issues. So, I would say this training opened my eyes not only to what I should be

doing in my work, but also what I should be doing on a personal level.”

*This article was originally published in the Summer 2009 edition of “Field Notes,”
the quarterly newsletter of the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center.*