



Nearly 15 million children under the age of 18 have already lost at least one parent to AIDS. Every minute of every day four more join their ranks.

By 2010, UNICEF predicts that some 25 million children orphaned or made vulnerable by AIDS will find themselves alone, impoverished, and with little hope for the safe and healthy future that is every child's birthright.

Building Capacity to Provide Comprehensive Care and Support to Orphans and Vulnerable Children

Poverty and disease are like tinder and dry wood for the raging fire of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. When families are too poor to educate their children, those children will most likely live out their lives in poverty and give birth to a new generation condemned to the same fate. This poverty leaves individuals vulnerable to malnutrition, exploitation, and diseases—like HIV and other STIs—that are largely preventable if a person is armed with the knowledge necessary to avoid high-risk behaviors. When children are not educated, empowered, or given the tools they need to protect their health and that of their families, they are condemned to an endless cycle of poverty and disease.

The vast majority of children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS live in Sub-Saharan Africa where the virus thus far has exacted the greatest toll. According to UNAIDS, some 11.6 million orphans and vulnerable children currently live in this region. Because it takes approximately 10 years from the time a person becomes infected with HIV for the disease to progress to the AIDS stage, which often results in death, it is today's levels of prevalence that foreshadow the number of children who will be orphaned by AIDS over the course of the next decade.

In countries with limited resources, the public health and welfare systems are severely overstretched, so orphans and vulnerable children all too often receive little if any external support.

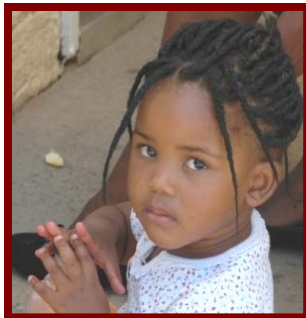
In Tanzania, for example, nearly 2.5 million children have lost at least one parent to AIDS. Many are cared for by a grandparent or older sibling and fewer than 6 percent receive any sort of public or private assistance. Social workers can be instrumental in efforts to fill these gaps, yet the existing welfare system is severely overstretched, with trained social workers assigned to only one-third of the country's 126 districts. Most other countries in the region are facing the same dilemma and must find a sustainable, cost-effective way of meeting both the immediate and long-term needs of these children.

Training Community Caregivers: A Rational, Replicable Approach to OVC Care and Support

With support from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the HIV/AIDS Twinning Center and its partners at the Tanzanian Institute of Social Work and the University of Illinois at Chicago's Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center launched in 2007 a Para-Social Worker Training Program designed to arm community-based caregivers with critical skills needed to help improve the lives of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC).

Through the program, district social welfare officers, NGO representatives, and other community and home-based caregivers learn practical skills that prepare

them to properly assess the condition of orphans, vulnerable children, and families within their communities. These para-professionals are an untapped resource for addressing OVC care and can link children with support services and other forms of assistance they so desperately need.



Competency-based Training Builds Human Resource Capacity for Today ... and for Tomorrow

Together, partners developed an 8-day curriculum that introduces community caregivers to key social work concepts and teaches hands-on practical skills in:

- Outreach and identification;
- Needs assessment;
- Case management;
- Resource linkages;
- Counseling and family support;
- Ongoing service coordination; and
- Avoiding professional burnout.

In addition, the training program includes six months of supervised field work and mentoring, a follow-up course, and additional support as needed to ensure acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills among trainees, as well as the quality of OVC services they offer.



To date, partners have trained 516 Para-Social Workers, 40 district social workers, and 55 master trainers in Tanzania. This additional workforce greatly extends and enhances the capacity of programs that serve orphans and vulner-

able children on a daily basis. More importantly, the newly trained Para-Social Workers are identifying new children and families in need and connecting them with critical support and assistance.

According to surveys of trainees, the program has helped them more effectively assess client needs and address crisis, trauma, and attachment issues. They have also begun to work more closely with other stakeholders, sharing much needed resources and materials.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity to Build a Sustainable Network of Care and Support

A critical element of the Twinning Center's approach to strengthening OVC care in Tanzania and other countries receiving PEPFAR support is to build long-term capacity at partner institutions.

Making the training program part of the course offerings of an established, respected, and accredited educational institution fosters credibility and sustainability.



In Tanzania, the Twinning Center and its partners are working to develop an infrastructure that supports Para-Social Workers who provide services to orphans and vulnerable children. This includes establishing certification, supervisor training, and continuous quality improvement programs.

Key steps to institutionalizing the training program are:

- Mentoring faculty;
- Peer-to-peer problem solving;
- Establishing systems;
- Strengthening professional values; and
- Ensuring ongoing follow-up with trainees to identify problems, constraints, and topics that require additional training and support.

This approach to technical assistance supports long-term and sustainable development by strengthening existing institutions and working in concert with the local health system infrastructure.

Implementing an in-service training program within an academic setting also provides opportunities to strengthen pre-service education and training.

The Para-Social Worker Training Program implemented by Twinning Center partners in Tanzania is serving as a model for other partnerships working to provide OVC care and support in Ethiopia and Nigeria.



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