

## Para-Social Work Training Program Helps Tanzania Improve Care for Vulnerable Children, Families

With five children and no job, Asma Yusuf's life has been difficult. A resident of Dar es Salaam's Temeke municipality, the 30-year-old widow had little money and couldn't afford to send her children to school. "I found it difficult to cope and didn't know who to turn to," she recalls.



Alfreda George (right) offers widow Asma Yusuf advice during a home visit. George's training as a para-social worker has helped her to better assist children and families in need.

The help Yusuf desperately needed arrived on her doorstep when Alfreda George came calling. An agricultural field officer with the Temeke Municipal Council, George is part of a team that provides support to people in need—particularly children like Yusuf's who have been identified as most vulnerable.

George has been trained as a para-social worker through an HIV/AIDS Twinning Center partnership linking Tanzania's Institute of Social Work (ISW) with the University of Illinois-Chicago's Jane Addams College of Social Work and Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center.

In July 2007, partners piloted a curriculum for training community-based NGO, CBO, and local government workers in Temeke and Iringa municipalities. Alfreda George was one of 120 participants who learned how to help children better cope with illness and the loss of family members, as well as provide support to meet children's physical, emotional, and developmental needs.

"The para-social worker training program focuses on developing vital skills in identifying, assessing, and supporting orphans, vulnerable children, and families," explains US partner Dr. Nathan L. Linsk, a professor at Jane Addams College of Social Work. According to Linsk, the targeted training includes interactive small group sessions during which participants practice their newly learned skills and apply them to different situations using a case study approach.

The para-social worker training is part of the partnership's efforts to equip social workers and other caregivers with the knowledge and skills necessary to develop comprehensive services to the country's 2.5 million children orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. With funding from USAID, the Twinning Center is supporting their work to expand in-service and pre-service social work training.

The front-line care properly trained social welfare officers can provide is more critical than ever as the number of vulnerable children climbs each month. In Temeke municipality where Yusuf and her family live, there are some 9,500 children classified as most vulnerable—a 10 percent increase in less than a year.

"There is a constant battle to meet the demand for social workers," says AIHA Country Director for Tanzania Hazel Plunkett. "Of the 70 or 80 people who qualify as social workers each year, few are employed by the government as social welfare officers," she points out, noting that's why training para-social workers is so important.

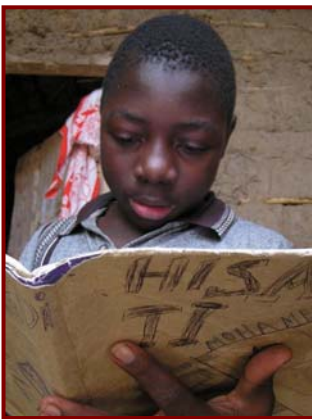
According to ISW reports, Tanzania needs a minimum of 8,000 more social workers to meet the country's growing demands.

"There are many professionals working at the community level who frequently come into contact with our most vulnerable children," says ISW's Judith Bagachwa. "We can give these people social work skills so they can provide support to individuals who would otherwise not receive any services." People like Asma Yusuf and her five children.

"I have received a lot of care and support. I have been given books and a school uniform for my son, who is now able to go to secondary school for the first time. Perhaps what has been most useful is the advice I have been given about how to look after my children without the help of an extended family," Yusuf admits.



Yusuf and her family have benefited from George's tutelage on life skills, child care, managing her small income, family planning, and HIV prevention.



Yusuf's son Haji is able to attend school for the first time thanks to the assistance his family has received from para-social worker Alfreda George and Temeke Municipal Council.

Alfreda George agrees. "We are able to make a real difference for people like Yusuf and her children by providing a small amount of material help, but also by suggesting ways that individuals can turn their lives around," she stresses.

And that is just what Yusuf's 14-year-old son Haji plans to do now that he is attending school. "I have the chance to study now," he says, "and one day I hope to get a job that will help me support my family."

For the time being, Yusuf and her family are among the lucky few whose lives have been improved thanks to the support of a para-social worker.

While only a third of all districts in the country have a social welfare officer, Temeke has three. In cooperation with Tanzania's Department of Social Welfare, partners hope to change that by scaling up the training program throughout the country.