

Social Work Training Emerges as Effective Model of Providing Care to Vulnerable Children, Families

A successful model of training community-based caregivers in key social work and child development skills first piloted in Tanzania in 2007 is now being adapted and replicated in other countries across Africa.

Twinning Center partners at the Institute of Social Work and Jane Addams College of Social Work and the Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center at the University of Illinois-Chicago have already trained 1,200 community caregivers, 75 District Social Work trainees, 122 Para-Social Worker Supervisors, and 45 Trainers thanks to the support of the American people through PEPFAR and USAID/Tanzania.

These Para-Social Workers are trained community members whose role is to assess a vulnerable child's needs and strengths then create a care plan that helps ensure his or her physical, emotional, and developmental needs are met by linking the child to existing services and support. In 2009, partners began working with the Capacity Project to scale up Para-Social Worker training throughout Tanzania.

The Twinning Center conducted a three-day workshop in Dar es Salaam August 5-7, 2009 for partners whose focus is improving care and support for orphans and other vulnerable populations in Botswana, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tanzania.

In addition to African partners and their US counterparts, representatives from Tanzania's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, NGOs involved in Para-Social Worker training efforts, HRSA, USAID/Tanzania, CDC/Tanzania, and the Twinning Center also participated. Key objectives of the event included sharing ideas and best practices on Para-Social Work program implementation; developing a common understanding of related terminology, principles, and challenges — including workforce development, recruitment and retention, qualifications, compensation, and quality assurance; and charting a plan of action that will effectively guide future program development and expansion.

"In Tanzania, we view the Para-Social Worker Training Program as a work in progress. We are constantly adjusting our curriculum based on participant feedback and trainer observation," explained Theresa Kaijage, senior lecturer at the Institute of Social Work.

Noting that the courses are often the first formal training many community-based volunteers and NGO staff receive, Kaijage continued, "When most of these individuals first come to the trainings, they view orphans and vulnerable children as victims who can be helped simply by material support. We teach them from the beginning to invest in looking for strengths — strengths in the community, strengths in the family, and strengths in the children themselves. By the end of the course, all of the trainees have changed their mindset."

Giving participants insight on the US government's perspective as donor, Dr. Ellen Caldeira of HRSA's Global AIDS Program said, "Instead of the donor-recipient model primarily used during PEPFAR's first five years, the paradigm is shifting toward equal partnerships under PEPFAR II. This means national HIV/AIDS strategies will be the driving factor. OVC care and support services are a priority for PEPFAR, and we're looking to increase the numbers of healthcare providers at all levels of the system. It is a new way of doing business for us and, if Para-Social Worker training is a priority for your countries, it's likely to be a priority for us."

Caldeira also stressed the importance of leveraging US government support with funding from other international donors, including the European Union and the Global Fund.

Hoping to replicate this success, Twinning Center partners in Ethiopia and Nigeria piloted similar training programs designed to arm community-based professionals and volunteer

caregivers with key social work skills that can aid in their efforts to help children cope with illness and the loss of family members on August 10.

Other countries receiving PEPFAR support — including Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia — have also expressed interest in the model.

“When we heard about this model, my colleagues and I became very excited,” said Kgomo Tse N. Sejoe from the Department of Social Work at Botswana’s Ministry of Health. Stating that Parliament passed the Children’s Act in April 2009, which establishes a social welfare framework for orphans and vulnerable children, she explains, “We need a program like this one to help staff the new system.”



Participants at the August strategic planning workshop devoted significant time to small group discussions. By the end of the three-day event, each group had compiled a detailed framework for advancing social work training for para-professionals as a way to improve care and support for orphans and vulnerable children and families.

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