

Armed with Para-Social Worker Training, Community Caregiver Assists Family in Need

Zenebech Asfaw is a community worker from Hiwot HIV Care and Support Association, an NGO that provides care and support services to 10,000 orphans and vulnerable children and 8,500 people living with HIV or AIDS in Addis Ababa.

In early 2010, Zenebech attended a 12-day Psycho-social Care Worker training conducted with the support of PEPFAR and CDC/Ethiopia by Twinning Center partners at the Addis Ababa University School of Social Work and the University of Illinois-Chicago's Jane Addams College of Social Work and Midwest AIDS Training and Education Center.

"I have been able to apply most of the knowledge and skills I learned to my home-based care work. I also shared this information with my co-workers, so they too are benefiting from the course. It has changed the way we interact with vulnerable children and families."

Children such as Sisay and Mesay Adane, who lost both parents to AIDS and now live with their aunt in Addis Ababa.



Zenebech visits Mesay and Sisay at their aunt's home in Addis Ababa.

Sisay and Mesay, like other children of people who died from HIV-related causes, often face the unbearable burden of stigma and discrimination compounded by extreme poverty. Many are forced to drop out of school and are highly vulnerable to violence, abuse, and disease.

Educating the community about HIV/AIDS stigma and discrimination, Zenebech works to raise awareness about the virus. "I try to mobilize the community to help support people affected by HIV... I teach them how it is transmitted and how it can be treated and prevented," she says.

So far, Zenebech has helped 24 children orphaned by AIDS return to the classroom.

"These children have been able to cope with stigma and discrimination by forming their own support group and have even helped others by doing advocacy and sensitization work," she explains.

"I learned how to teach them to create a memory book, which really helps them cope with the loss of their parents. I visit their homes frequently and have even helped tutor some of the children after I realized they were having difficulties in school because of the time they missed or other challenges they face," she admits, noting that offering children compassion and support is just as important as linking them to nearby health and social service providers.

"Thanks to Zenebech's help, we feel like we are getting our smiles back," Sisay says, looking at Mesay. Both girls nod in agreement before breaking into smiles that reinforce Sisay's hopeful comment.

"What I learned during the training course has made it much easier for me to network with other organizations and manage referrals when my clients are in need of services we do not provide at Hiwot," Zenebach concludes. "Really, it has caused me to adopt new methods of working within the community."