



U.S. Agency for  
International  
Development

Bureau for  
Global Health

# SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

## AIDS Hotline Counsels Concerned South Africans

AN AIDS HOTLINE NOW OPERATING 24/7 in South Africa connects concerned callers to up-to-date information and counseling on AIDS prevention, treatment, and services. As the nation struggles to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, a centralized and streamlined system now greatly improves the public's access to personalized information with the safety of anonymity.

Hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic, South Africa has an estimated 4.7 million people infected with HIV and has more people living with AIDS than any other country in the world. The nation desperately needed to update and expand the ability of an existing telephone hotline to meet the growing demand for accurate AIDS information. Now, thanks to support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, South Africa has one of the world's most modern telephone hotline systems operating with a team of 68 specially trained counselors who provide information and counseling at no cost in the country's 11 different languages.

The toll-free AIDS Helpline is handling an average of 80,000 calls a month and has the technical capacity to receive up to 200,000 a month. According to Helpline's manager, most callers are young adults, who are most at risk of contracting the AIDS virus. They are seeking information about HIV/AIDS testing, disease transmission, and condoms. Almost 40 percent of callers are aged 15–19, and 45 percent are 20–29 years old. Men appear more likely to contact the Helpline than women; 60 percent of callers are male.

The successful development and introduction of a comprehensive, centralized system were in large part due to successful partnering. The South African government, the local nongovernmental organization LifeLine, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs, and the Academy for Educational Development worked together to plan and upgrade technical systems and to build the capacity of LifeLine to operate and manage the AIDS Helpline.

From the outset, partners understood the central role of the counselor to the success of the hotline. To ensure quality service, all counselors participated in a two-week training course that focused on accurate and uniform HIV/AIDS information, along with telephone counseling skills. In anticipation of rapid growth in the number of callers, a training-of-trainers curriculum was also developed and conducted, building LifeLine's expertise to provide its own training for future counselors.

**“Not only do hotlines provide the most current information on AIDS prevention and treatment, they also provide a caring voice that offers emotional support to someone infected with the AIDS virus.”**

—Dr. Phyllis Piotrow,  
former director,  
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg  
School of Public Health/  
Center for Communication  
Programs



Photo courtesy of Antje Becker-Bentoni/Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs

A poster for an HIV/AIDS hotline hangs at a school in rural South Africa.

South Africa, May 2003

1300 Pennsylvania  
Avenue NW  
Washington, DC  
20523-3600

www.usaid.gov