



U.S. Agency for
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Global Health

SUCCESS STORIES

HIV/AIDS

Mobilizing Communities in the Fight Against AIDS

SOUTH AFRICA'S BIGGEST CHALLENGE is the AIDS epidemic; last year, 40 percent of all deaths among the country's 15- to 49-year-olds were attributed to AIDS. Community support systems to assist victims of the epidemic have never been strong in South Africa, and this is especially evident in the remote Kwampisi community, along the border of KwaZulu Natal and Eastern Cape Province.

Almost 40 percent of Kwampisi's residents are unemployed, and most families have little money for food and clothing. In the past year, 30 percent of households have had a family member fall chronically ill. One of Kwampisi's most recent victims is Ziketile Sonjica, age 30, who was a sugarcane worker and the only employed member of his family when he became ill a year ago. With active tuberculosis, and all the symptoms of full-blown AIDS, Ziketile sits up, and through tears brought on by feelings of guilt coupled with physical pain, he confesses to a visitor, "I don't want to die."

A year ago, few resources were available to Ziketile and similar victims of terminal illness in this poverty-stricken community. But now, thanks to the innovative Bambisanani Project, this is no longer the case.

Implemented by Management Sciences for Health with support from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Bambisanani is serving as a successful community-mobilization model for all of South Africa. Bambisanani teaches community members, all nominated by local chiefs, to provide home care to the terminally ill. Today, these home care workers form a wide-reaching referral network. They work with a local hospice, health centers, and hospitals to identify terminally ill patients and families who need home care, and they supply families with home care kits. They also teach families how to manage simple health problems and to make their dying loved ones more comfortable.

Busi is a home care supporter. She relieves Ziketile's mother from the 24-hour job of caring for her son, she offers advice about massaging Ziketile to alleviate some of his pain and uses items in the project-provided home care kits. Busi dispenses aspirin to relieve Ziketile's pain, and disinfectant to keep his bed on the floor of a mud hut as clean as possible. In addition to helping patients and the families of those with AIDS and other terminal illnesses, case workers like Busi are helping to overcome the stigma of AIDS by enlisting the help of neighbors and friends.

The Bambisanani Project is making a real difference in the lives of people in South Africa. Despite what seems to be a depressing situation, one need only remember that before home care, families had no one to turn to as their loved ones died in pain—and without dignity. Most importantly, AIDS victims no longer feel alone as they face death. In Ziketile's own words, "It is so good to have warmth in the house."

Busi, a home care supporter, trains families in her community of 5,000 to care for terminally ill patients. For a small stipend, these home care supporters are helping thousands to deal with the burden of AIDS.



Photo courtesy of Management Sciences for Health

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